

Afghani refugee finds a path to university through football

Husna Nabi is a young Afghani woman who migrated to Australia as a teenager due to the regional insecurity in Pakistan.

But thanks to her involvement in the Kicking Goals Together (KGT) program at the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Brisbane Campus, Husna is now a student studying a Bachelor of Accounting and Finance at ACU.

KGT is a “sport for development” program that engages youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds through weekly soccer and educational opportunities, creating a space for social exchange between people from diverse backgrounds.

The program was recently nominated in the Australian Financial Review (AFR) Higher Education Awards category for Community Engagement.

Husna attributes much of her success to her involvement in KGT.

“I had a passion for learning, as soon as I knew KGT was offering classes for preparing me for workplace, the next class I was there to learn. It was a wonderful experience, I had enjoyed a lot. I got to learn things which were outside of my boundaries that I was afraid of but not anymore,” Husna said.

“KGT absolutely benefited me in many ways, for example, I made good connections, I got a job out of it, and now that I am studying at ACU, I am feeling very comfortable and welcomed because I know ACU before I start my course.”

Founded in 2016, KGT involves a soccer tournament running for eight weeks that includes teams from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and ACU international students. KGT integrates the Skill Up program in partnership with Multicultural Development Australia (MDA) which trains youth in areas of personal brand and identity, job seeking, job keeping, and networking skills.

Research Fellow in Community Engagement Dr Matthew Pink said KGT created regular sporting and education opportunities to help young refugee and migrants overcome the barriers they experienced while developing skills and contacts that would support them into adult life.

“Kicking Goals Together works to serve the common good by creating an environment that celebrates diversity and supports a ‘bigger world’ for participating youth, staff, and students alike,” Dr Pink said.

“The program began when youth from the Rohingya community in Brisbane contacted us with a desire to play football. Through conversation and some casual matches, we invited the ‘Rohingya Young Stars’ to play here at ACU.”

“The momentum grew and the program developed into the eight-team competition we have today which includes youth from backgrounds such as Rohingya, Iraqi, and several African nations. The competition also comprises ACU staff and student teams creating a unique environment for culturally diverse relationship building, and exposure to the higher education environment.”

The KGT model has been successfully replicated within the University to involve touch football and to include culturally and linguistically diverse high school students on Brisbane’s bayside. Since 2017, more than 200 young people have participated in KGT tournaments, with many returning to the program several times. The educational component has seen 79 people graduate from the Skill Up program. Many have since gone on to gain their first casual employment, or to transition to higher education.

Since the beginning of the KGT/Skill Up partnership 79 youth from refugee and migrant backgrounds that have received their Skill-up Certificate. Of these graduates, 22 have already gained some form of employment while 44 participants are recent Skill up graduates and have begun seeking employment, aided by the knowledge of the Skill Up program. MDA is continuing to monitor the outcomes for these youth.

KGT partners with Multicultural Development Australia, ACU Sport, ACU International, and importantly, local communities from refugee and migrant backgrounds in delivering this program. Recent funding support from Brisbane City Council has provided a valuable boost for the program.

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