

MEDIA RELEASE

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SENATORS SCORE NEW GOALS TO CLAIM STREET SOCCER TITLE

The Federal Government may be throwing their full support behind Australia's bid to host the 2018 World Cup but this morning they braved an early start to show their support for a football program of another kind... supporting homeless and marginalised Australians.

The Big Issue's Community Street Soccer Program in Canberra celebrated its first anniversary at Parliament House this morning with a series of round-robin soccer matches, played between participants of the program, Australia's top Federal politicians and newest A-League recruit Kamal Ibrahim.

Four teams made up of members of the Senate, House of Representatives and Parliamentary staff attended the milestone for the Community Street Soccer Program, which uses the power of sport as a catalyst to transform the lives of homeless and marginalised people across Australia.

The Community Street Soccer Program team beat the House of Representatives team in the third place play-off, while Senate team defeated the mixed Parliamentary team for first place, taking out the major trophy. The highlight of competition was the presentation of the Fair Play Award, presented by the Minister for Housing, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, to the Street Soccer player that showed true commitment to their team mates and to improving their lives through their actions on the pitch.

Minister Plibersek said it was an honour to take part in the event and praised The Big Issue for their Community Street Soccer Program that works to change the lives of homeless people and people at risk of homelessness.

"Street Soccer engages people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness and provides a unique way for them to connect to support services, helping them to move out of homelessness and back into the community," Minister Plibersek said.

"Today was a great opportunity to pay special tribute to these men and women who everyday commit to positively changing their lives through their involvement with the Community Street Soccer Program."

Minister for Finance and Deregulation, The Hon Lindsay Tanner MP, played in this morning's competition on the House of Representatives team and honoured The Big Issue for organising the special occasion.

"Australia loves its sport, but today's event was more than just another sporting event.

"As a Federal member of Parliament it was a great honour to get the opportunity to have a kick with a group of men and women that are not only passionate about their sport but also passionate about turning their lives around."

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The Big Issue CEO Steven Persson said this morning's event was an absolute success and showcased both the life changing work of these incredible men and women, as well as the overwhelming support the program enjoys from all levels of the Australian community.

"Following the Federal Government's agreement with The Big Issue in 2008 to support Phase 1 of the Community Street Soccer Program by providing \$3 million over three years, it has made us so very proud to see the expansion of Street Soccer across Australia, changing lives and building healthy communities.

"The support of the Federal Government is instrumental in ensuring the Community Street Soccer Program can reach into the most disadvantaged and under-privileged areas of Australia, delivering lasting legacies of support for homeless and marginalised people.

"I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this wonderful celebration, and I look forward to seeing this event continue for years to come".

In 2007, The Big Issue Australia launched the Community Street Soccer Program, which uses the power of sport as a catalyst to transform the lives of homeless and marginalised people across the country

The Federal Government, under Minister Kate Ellis, entered an agreement with The Big Issue in 2008 to support Phase 1 of the Community Street Soccer Program by providing \$3 million over three years which in turn has seen the program roll out across the country to 30 sites, engaging approximately 3000 participants every week.

The program uses sport as a catalyst for transforming lives by re-connecting people with the community and providing them with a real sense of purpose and belonging. Most critically, it gives them a great boost in self-esteem and a vision for a brighter future.

The heart of the Community Street Soccer Program is weekly training sessions at permanent pitches located in underprivileged communities across Australia, where males and females, of all ages and varying ability and fitness levels, get together – train and play matches.

Participants also get fit, make new friends and seek support and advice. Support staff work closely with players, linking them to services that address their homelessness, substance abuse, family breakdown, grief and loss and mental illness.

It puts the person at the centre of the solution and provides them with the support and tools necessary to help themselves make positive changes.

As the program continues to expand, providing tangible benefits to society and proving to be a highly effective and low cost initiative with extremely high social impact, a submission to fund the ongoing legacy of the Community Street Soccer Program is currently lodged with the Federal Government.

Phase 2 of The Community Street Soccer Program will see the adoption of key learnings from Phase 1 and the introduction of additional sites, catering for up to 4,800 participants, four additional multi-purpose pitches and more specialist programs for women, Indigenous Australians, refugees and in Corrections Facilities.

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Images taken by Saville Coble.



Melbourne Heart recruit Kamal Ibrahim plays alongside politicians at today's event.



The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP presented Street Soccer player Yuseff with the Fair Play Award - recognising those who show commitment to their team mates and to improving their lives both on and off the field.



Members of the Senate, House of Representatives and Parliamentary Staff all braved an early morning to help the Community Street Soccer Program celebrate its one year anniversary in Canberra.