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Swedish Basketball Federation welcomes refugees through sport

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In an ever changing environment in Sweden, and throughout Europe, it is projects like the Swedish Basketball Federation's 'Välkommen hit' (Welcome Here) that are paving the way for a more inclusive society.



The Swedish Basketball Federation's programme 'Välkommen hit', aimed at unaccompanied refugee children from war torn countries such as Syria, is providing refugees a pathway into Swedish society. The programme works closely with local basketball clubs to build capacity and knowledge on how best to use basketball and other sports to welcome refugee children and provide them with positive, meaningful activities.

Launched in the spring of 2015, the programme supports 22 basketball clubs to deliver regular education and sport activities, reaching hundreds of children, as well as parents and adults. The programme continues to grow with some clubs providing after school homework support, while others arrange 3 vs 3 'pick-up' games as a way for people with different backgrounds and cultures to meet and engage with one another in a safe, fun environment.

The programme has received nationwide media coverage and is seen as a leading example of how sport can be used to welcome refugees and new arrivals to Sweden, exposing people to different cultures and beliefs, improving language skills and breaking down barriers to an inclusive society. Lena Wallin-Kantzy, secretary general of the Swedish Basketball Federation, is proud to be leading the way in welcoming refugees through sport:

"The Swedish Basketball Federation has a long history of being actively engaged with integration and thanks to 'Välkommen hit' we are able to strengthen the work of our local clubs and expand our reach throughout the country. Sport speaks a universal language and makes it easier to see the person behind the language, skin colour & culture. It makes it easier to see the similarities instead of the differences."

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The project is supported by The Swedish Postcode Lottery Sport Foundation, a grant-making foundation promoting positive social impact through sport within the fields of sustainable development, peace, health and human rights. Martin Kihlström, general manager of the Postcode Lottery Sport Foundation, believes the programme transcends sport and tackles a vital issue within society:

"Although primarily aimed at supporting refugees, the programme has a secondary, and equally important aim of building greater understanding within society for refugees and the horrific experiences they, in particular unaccompanied children, have gone through. Through the network of clubs participating in the programme, the Basketball Federation is tackling xenophobia head on by spreading information and building tolerance and respect." Visit the 'Välkommen hit' website (in Swedish) for more information about the programme

[This article has been edited by the Operating Team]

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