

Gender Equality in Sport Pilot Program

Community Leaders United By Sport (CLUBS)

Why did we run this program?

We know that women and girls participate in club sport at lower rates than men and boys – as players and in leadership roles. In fact, nearly half of all Victorian women feel sports clubs are intimidating.¹

We also know clubs in Monash are keen to change this, because increased female participation is good for women and girls, and good for clubs.²

In 2019 and 2020, Monash Council was funded by Sport and Recreation Victoria to run a gender equality in sport pilot program. We took part in this program because we wanted to help clubs:

- challenge gender stereotypes; and
- increase women's participation at clubs (including in decision-making).

What we did

We worked with individuals from 18 clubs across two years to try to understand what the barriers were for women and girls taking part in club sport, and what changes could be made to create more inclusive and welcoming club environments.

We started out by undertaking focus groups with the clubs – including with men and women, and leaders and players – to understand the issues, and then worked with those individuals through leadership training sessions on a range of topics. We offered opportunities for people to work together and learn from each other across different sports, and one-on-one sessions as needed, to support clubs to make change.

What we learned

From the focus groups, we learned that there are many positive things about our clubs:

- Both men and women value the social side of sport that their club offers;
- People like the community or 'family friendly' nature of their clubs;
- Some committees are very dedicated to making change;
- Clubs that offer discounted memberships for women saw memberships increase;
- Female coaches or leaders have helped grow female participation more generally; and
- Clubs that have a targeted strategy to increasing participation are more likely to achieve their goals.

¹ Vic Health

² Change Our Game

However, we also learned that:

- There is a lack of understanding of the issues. Male participants tended to believe physical infrastructure (like change rooms and toilets) was the barrier, and did not realise that female participants felt that club culture was a far bigger issue for them.
- Women do not get access to the same level of staff resources as men. We heard a number of examples of clubs that paid a masseuse/sports scientist/trainer/doctor that was available to men's teams, but not the women's teams. In addition, women's sides may have coaches with little or no experience or qualifications.
- Women do not get access to the same level of equipment or physical resources as men. We heard that many clubs give out new balls to the men's sides each training session, whereas women always had to use old, second-hand ones (often the men's 'leftovers'), and women often train on 'secondary' grounds or sometimes on a small section of the ground where men are training on the rest of the oval.
- While social events can create a good club culture, if they are not managed well they can actually cause damage. For example, social events where committee does not put a stop to poor behaviour (including abuse of alcohol, bad language or unsavoury 'jokes') can make women feel very uncomfortable and cause them not to attend again in future.
- Expectations are different for men and women at the club. For example, women are often expected to turn up and support the men's sides when they play, but no one from the club is there to support or cheer on the women. Often the canteen is not even open when women's sides are the only ones playing.
- Often women's teams are seen as being 'subsidised' by the club, and therefore not valued for the other benefits they bring— and in reality, many women are paying full fees while male players might get paid to play in some sports.
- Clubs often state that 'everyone is welcome', but do not have formal strategies for engaging with different groups (including our culturally diverse communities).

Ideas to make change

Not all changes have to be big to be effective. There are often simple ways to show the girls and women in your club that they are valued and welcome. Examples of successful things some clubs are doing include:

- Female only training sessions, or access to quality training spaces that are equal to the men's
- Keeping female participation on the agenda at committee meetings
- Offering lots of social events that everyone is invited to, and that are safe
- Pre-season fitness sessions designed so that everyone trains together but no one feels singled out

Other things that might help include:

- Getting along to support the women's sides when they are playing (and open the canteen). Women said this would be a big morale boost.
- Call out bad behaviour/offensive 'jokes' or 'banter'. Council periodically offers Active Bystander Training to help you.

- Ensure flexibility around attendance at training and committee meetings, especially as women are more likely to have caring and other responsibilities. Think about whether you can offer meetings online, or at more convenient times of the day for people with small children or other responsibilities. This will also help men in your club.
- Support the development of female coaches through training and mentoring.
- Develop a specific policy around inclusion and diversity or participation.
- Ensure your club has a set of values that everyone knows and upholds, no matter their position in the club.

Perhaps most importantly, **listen to women's voices**. Ask your female members what they need and want (and consider a way to enable them to provide honest feedback, perhaps anonymously), and then deliver on it as best you can.

Resources and further help

Council Resources

- Active Monash Sports Club Framework
- Monash Sports Clubs CALD Engagement
- Monash Sports Clubs LGBTIQ Engagement
- Monash Sports Clubs Inclusive and Welcoming Physical Environments

Other Resources

- Change Our Game:
 - [Recruitment and Retention: Guidelines for Women in Sport and Recreation](#)
 - [Women in Sport and Recreation Communication and Marketing Strategies](#)
- [Good Sports](#)
- [Play By The Rules](#)
- Vic Health, [Quick Wins Checklist for Sports Clubs](#)