



Equality is the Game

Our Codes, Our Clubs: Changing the Story to
Promote Gender Equality Together

Project Report
June 2017



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report highlights the key findings of Our Codes, Our Clubs: Changing the Story to Promote Gender Equality Together, a research project undertaken in 2017 with 9 local sporting clubs in the municipalities of Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges, located in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) of Victoria.

The purpose of the project was to identify the practical actions sporting clubs can undertake to promote and normalise gender equality within their clubs, and help change the story of violence against women.

A key outcome of the project was the development of a Gender Equity Audit tool, which was distributed to all sporting clubs in Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges, and the production of a film, and resource for sporting club committees entitled *Equality is the Game!*

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Monbulk Rangers Soccer Club-Lisa Doolan

Mt Evelyn Junior Football Club-Mal Darke

Ringwood Bowls Club Inc-John Hamilton

Ringwood City Soccer Club-Kate Foley and Claudia Schipano

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

Our Codes, Our Clubs: Changing the Story to Promote Gender Equality Together, was a 9 month project funded by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), from funds provided by the Department of Premier and Cabinet for the prevention violence against women.

The project was located in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) of Victoria and delivered in partnership with Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges Council's, Inspiro Community Health Service, Together For Equity and Respect (TFER) Evaluation Working Group and, the Outer East Children and Youth Area Partnership (OECYAP).

The project aimed to build upon the EMR's existing achievements in the prevention of violence against women which include *Preventing Violence Against Women in Our Community Cluster* project, the *Gender Lens for Leisure* initiative and, Inspiro and Eastern Health - Yarra Valley Health's *You & I Sport* initiative.

1.2 Project Purpose

The purpose of the project was to identify the practical actions sporting clubs can undertake to promote and normalise gender equality within their clubs, and help change the story of violence against women.

This was achieved by interviewing 9 sporting clubs from different codes, to hear their stories and examples of how they had created a more gender equitable environment within their clubs.

As a result a film and resource entitled Equality is the Game! were produced, to educate and initiate discussion within sporting clubs regarding the "*essential actions to reduce the gendered drivers of violence against women*", as outlined in the Change the Story Framework.

1.3 Project Methodology

A steering group was established to help oversee the project which included representatives from partner organisations and Maroondah City Council, the lead organisation for the project.

A Project Worker was appointed to assist with all aspects of the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of the project, which included; interviewing and recording the stories of the 9 sporting clubs who were "champions of change" in creating gender equality within their clubs and, identifying and reporting on the key findings of the project.

The interviews were conducted with representatives from 9 sporting clubs located within the municipalities of Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges, including cricket, soccer, football, basketball, gridiron, tennis and bowls, and they were all asked the following

- A brief history of the club and its historical attitudes towards gender equality.
- Examples of strategies their club had undertaken to build a gender equitable environment, and the impact this may have had on the club.
- Who their champions of change were
- To share what they had learnt and what their future plans were for continuing to promote and normalise gender equality within their clubs.

Each of the club's stories were recorded and then analysed to identify the common themes, messages and practical actions they had undertaken to create a more equitable environment, and, could be shared with other sporting clubs and codes. As a result, 2 resources were developed entitled "Equality is the Game!" a short film and sporting club committees resource

2. PROJECT OUTCOMES

One of the key outcomes of the project was the production of a short film entitled "Equality is the Game!" which features 5 of the 9 sporting clubs who participated in "Our Codes, Our Clubs: Changing the Story to Promote Gender Equality Together."

In the film, club representatives share their experiences of participating in sporting clubs that promote gender equality, highlight what the benefits have been for their clubs and codes, and provide key messages for creating family friendly, inclusive and welcoming environments.

The film also provides an insight into how sporting clubs can help to prevent violence against women by challenging the attitudes, beliefs, roles and environments that support gender inequalities.

To complement the film, a resource also entitled "Equality is the Game!" has been developed specifically for sporting club committees. The resource highlights how sporting clubs can contribute to the prevention of violence against women, and outlines the key steps and actions committees can undertake to create more gender equitable cultures within their clubs.

Both resources can be accessed via links on each Council's websites including an advertorial version of the film, which is suitable for use on social media, the web and electronic scoreboards.

In addition, the project Steering Group contributed to the development of a Gender Equity Audit tool, which was distributed to all sporting clubs located within the municipalities of Maroondah, Knox and Yarra Ranges.

The audit, which was initiated by Yarra Ranges Council as an outcome of the *Gender Lens for Leisure Project*, was designed to assess sporting clubs understanding and implementation of gender equitable practices within their clubs, and how it relates to the prevention of violence against women.

The Steering Group decided to include the audit as part of the project and distribute it prior to the release of Equality is the Game! resources, as it would act as a valuable baseline measurement tool in evaluating the long term outcomes of the project.

The audit was completed by 99 sporting clubs across the three municipalities who represented a large cross section of sporting codes and recreational groups.

The clubs who completed the self assessment responded positively to their awareness of, and commitment to ensuring a gender equitable club culture, with 96% of respondents stating that their club leadership demonstrated respectful relationships between women and men. Of the 99 sporting clubs that completed the audit it was noted that there was a total of 585 male committee members and 444 female committee members.

3. PROJECT FINDINGS

As a result of undertaking Our Codes, Our Clubs: Changing the Story to Promote Gender Equality Together, a number of key factors were identified as being essential for sporting clubs in creating a gender equitable environment. This included:

3.1 Champions of Change

"1 or 2 people can be the catalyst for change, which benefits the whole club and creates the potential for more members".

**Toni Rennie, Community and Business Development Manager, Knox
Basketball Inc**

All nine sporting clubs interviewed, acknowledged that "champions of change" played a key role in helping to build an equitable club culture which was inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

Champions of change can be any club member, they don't have to be in a leadership position to initiate change, they can be parents, coaches, committee members, players or community members. However, they need to be committed to change and prepared to spend the time and effort required to ensure change occurs.

The clubs also identified various drivers for change which included:

- The desire to meet local community needs and create a more family friendly environment.
- The desire to increase club membership.
- Inspiration from other clubs or members to be more inclusive of women and girls.
- Witnessing discrimination against females in sport and;
- Survival, particularly in the case of bowls clubs.

Case Study: Launching Place United Cricket Club, President Stuart Parker and Secretary Leah Parker

Both Stuart and Leah experienced firsthand discrimination against women in sport several years ago. Their eldest daughter, faced a number of barriers as she participated in higher levels of cricket, which included not being picked in a representative team because she was female. Also, a female friend now 22 was trying out for a reps team, facing a male bowler who had been instructed by their coach to bowl the ball at her as hard and fast as he could, even if it wasn't a good ball. This girl is still scared of batting today, which is 10 yrs later.

Today both Stuart and Leah believe that being personally faced with this discrimination was a major catalyst in inspiring them, particularly Stuart to be inclusive of females in the Launching Place United Cricket Club.

3.2 Embrace Change

"Over the last 10 years the most valuable lesson I have learnt is that sporting clubs must keep pace with society and embrace the modern day culture, by implementing new ideas and being open to change, as the Rowville Football Club has done with the inclusion of girl's football and netball at the club".

Paul Mynott, President Rowville Football Club

Change is vital for sporting clubs to meet local community needs and remain viable. Embracing change means sporting clubs need to:

- Grow and adapt to changes in their environment to be successful.
- Look for new opportunities and not be afraid to try new things.
- Have a go and learn as they go, which takes time but it's important and can make a difference in many ways.
- Be consistent and don't give up, even when things get challenging.
- Keep evolving and changing with time, because if you don't, you won't have a club.

Case Study: Mt Evelyn Junior Football Club, President Mal Darke

The girl's teams usually train on the secondary oval, which is a supplementary oval to the main oval, and generally is not a good standard. However, the Treasurer of the club, who was also the under 18's girls coach mentioned to Mal that the girls were being disadvantaged as they were always required to train on the supplementary oval. Mal brought this issue to the attention of the coaches and team managers who's teams had always trained on the main oval and they agreed that for the club to be equitable they also needed to train on the supplementary oval. This is a perfect example of how much the culture at the club has changed.

Case Study: John Hamilton, Chairperson, Ringwood Bowls Club Inc

Ringwood Bowls Club has achieved a lot in very few years, and realised that ongoing change is vital in retaining members both now and in the future. They have implemented a number of strategies, to not only encourage females to play bowls but to be inclusive of the broader community, especially families and young people e.g. schools program, discounts for juniors, monthly family nights, barefoot bowls, various membership categories, social teams and events.

3.3 Good Governance and Strong Leadership

"Every decision made is for everyone"

Kate Foley, President Ringwood City FC

Good governance and strong leadership are crucial in building a gender equitable club. Club committees are responsible for defining the club's vision and values, and can influence the clubs culture and future. There are a number of practical actions sporting club committees can undertake to build a club that promotes gender equality and an inclusive club culture where everyone feels welcome and respected.

Examples of good governance that promotes gender equality are:

- A club vision that aims to increase the female/male gender balance in all aspects of the club.
- A good mix of club representatives on your committee including women and young people, *as everyone is important*, and schedule committee meetings at times that suit all members, so that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.
- Having policies that support gender equality. For example, a Code of Conduct or Social Media Policy, and be prepared to act should anyone breach a policy by behaving inappropriately such as, using sexist language, derogatory comments or unfair treatment related to gender.
- Having a transparent complaints process.
- Ensuring club leaders role model equitable and respectful behaviours, particularly between women and men.
- Ensuring the club operates within the rules and spirit of the game and teaches players to do the same.
- Encouraging the use of gender neutral language. For example, referring to members as players.
- Actively encouraging women and girls to be involved in all club activities whether as players, coaches, umpires, spectators, members or on the committee, and ensure that volunteer positions don't reinforce gender stereotypes. For example, women are only in the canteen.

- Encouraging all club members to participate in training and development opportunities, particularly females. For example, providing mentoring and free coaching courses.
- Ensuring there is equitable sharing of resources on and off the field. For example, access to the field/court, equipment, kits and coaching.
- Ensuring scheduling of play is shared between teams.
- Providing facilities which are safe, accessible and clean and where possible, having dedicated female friendly change rooms with toilet and shower facilities for players, umpires and coaches.
- Providing equal sponsorship opportunities for all teams, women and men.
- Encouraging the general public to support the male and female teams equally.

"At the end of the day we just want to play tennis, we really don't care about the gender of the person on the other side of the net"

Craig Douglas President. Scoresbv Wantirna South Tennis Club

Case Study: Ringwood City Soccer Club, President Kate Foley

"The most significant change at Ringwood City Soccer Club came when the Board, who at the time were predominately males, adopted a new club motto "one club, one future". This marked the beginning of a significant change in the culture at the club, with all players benefiting, particularly females".

"The clubs key focus is equality, it drives the club, it's not in the clubs sub conscience to not be equitable, and it will continue to be equitable, as long as the club and the board provide the required tools, resources and support for females to be equal to males".

"The board currently includes 4 females, who are all in executive positions i.e. President, Secretary, Treasurer and Registrar, which was not intentional, they are simply the best people for the job at the moment".

Case Study: Launching Place United Cricket Club, President Stuart Parker and Secretary Leah Parker

"In 2016, all members of the leadership group participated in a leadership course".

"The club has also implemented a leadership team which consists of a representative from each of the clubs team's. They have recently been responsible for the development of the club's new Code of Conduct which applies to all club members. And while a Code of Conduct has always been enforced at the club, this is the first year that it has been written as a formal document, and presented to club members, at last season's launch night. Anyone breaching the code will be required to address the leadership team.

3.4 An Inclusive Club Culture

Sporting clubs can build a strong club culture, where the environment is family friendly and everyone feels welcome and supported. There are a number of actions sporting clubs can undertake to enable this occur:

- Actively engaging the local community by promoting your club as welcoming and inclusive for all members, regardless of people's gender, age, culture or ability;
- Avoid serving alcohol at any under 18's games, as it helps to protect the clubs brand.
- Provide opportunities for all club members, including women and children, and the local community to participate in social activities. For example combined jumper presentations and awards nights, shopping tours, and trivia nights.
- Host an event to raise funds for a cause where everyone is involved will help raise your clubs profile within the local community. For example Pink Stumps Day.
- Engage with the local community and drawing upon them for support. For example, Police, CFA, local churches and community organisations.
- Provide access to sporting grounds where possible, pre-season for players to practice and socialise, and maintain contact with the club outside the regular season.

"A club is a family and some clubs make the mistake of making the women's team a daughter, not a sister team to the men's senior teams".

Cat Bouwhuis, Vice President and player, Croydon Rangers Gridiron Club

Case Study: Mt Evelyn Junior Football Club, President Mal Darke

"Mt Evelyn Junior Football Club's culture has evolved and improved dramatically over the last 2-3 years. This was achieved with the support of the 2016 Seniors Captain, who wanted to change club culture by introducing a Code of Conduct, which was developed with the support of the players and the clubs committee. The adoption of the Code of Conduct by both the Senior and Junior Clubs resulted in the club moving forward in leaps and bounds around positive culture, respect and behaviour".

"The club has a very family friendly environment, and all the players, their families and friends participate in the clubs social activities and events, for example last year the juniors had their jumper presentation with many of the senior players attending and presenting jumpers".

"After the girls under 12's & 18's won the premiership, everyone celebrated together at the club rooms, with the under 12s and 18's girls leading everyone in singing the club song. There were players, parents and supporters at the club from the juniors, seniors and veterans. It was an electric and emotional atmosphere, and very symbolic of the close bonds between the junior and senior clubs".

Case Study: Croydon Rangers Gridiron Club, Vice President & player Cat Bouwhuis

"The male and female seasons run at different times of the year, with the men's seniors' season starting in June, and the colts and women's seasons running from late February and ending in May. The seasons run alternately so as resources and officials are available to all 3 divisions, and it's an opportunity for the club to run all year round".

"The clubs culture has really benefited from having the alternate seasons, as the 3 divisions can support each other and attend each other's games. Club resources are universally shared between all 3 divisions e.g. tackle bags and cones for training, and shoulder pads".

"The women's and colts end of season awards night is combined with the men's jersey presentation night prior to the start of their season".

"The whole club has embraced the women's team and male members have assisted with coaching, chain crew, water boys, stats and filming. The women's team returns the favour by being ball girls, chain crew and helping in the canteen during the men's season".

"There are a variety of ways people of all ages can participate in the club, anyone, of any ability can play here, you will get a game here"

Lisa Doolan President, Monbulk Rangers Soccer Club

3.5 Strategies for Engaging Women and Girls

In undertaking the research, various strategies were identified for engaging women and girls in sport, particularly in traditionally male dominated sports such as basketball, football and soccer.

In 2016, Knox Basketball started running programs specifically for girls to encourage them to become more involved in basketball. In 2017 they initiated community rounds, a monthly program of activities aimed at strengthening the local community and supporting young girls in their teens, to help keep them engaged in sport.

Female role models, such as high profile players or coaches are also important in engaging and inspiring young girls. For example:

- Knox Basketballs Bec's Boomers program, which is run by Bec Ott who originally played basketball for the domestic team Wantirna Jetbacks, then Knox Raiders and now Melbourne Boomers. The program runs weekly specifically for primary aged girls to learn basic basketball skills in a fun and engaging environment. Each girl also receives a t-shirt that has Bec's Boomers on the front and Knox Raiders on the back.

- Knox Basketball also works with an Australian Basketball Coach who runs coaching sessions for the clubs female coaches which includes; the challenges of coaching boys and strategies to be a successful coach in a male dominated sport and;
- Lauren Tesoriero who now plays for Collingwood in the AWFL is a regular visitor at Mt Evelyn Junior Football Club and presented the girls teams with their jumpers at the season launch with fellow player and local Sarah D’Arcy.

Knowing and understanding what members want is also important, for example Bec’s Boomers was originally called "Pink Ball" however there wasn't much interest and after some research Knox Basketball realised that the target group didn't resonate with the colour pink and in fact, it was stereotyping girls basketball. Once the name was changed the program went from strength to strength.

Show juniors, especially girls that they don't have to be an elite player to be involved in sport, and that there are many career pathways in sport such as coaching, refereeing, administration and management.

Provide a range of opportunities for women and girls to get involved by catering for social and/or competitive needs. For example, Monbulk Rangers Soccer Club have started a new junior girls skills training program on Saturday mornings to encourage more junior girls to play soccer, by developing their skills and confidence in a friendly, fun and non competitive environment. It is hoped that some of the girls will eventually move into the junior teams. The program is run by one of the club's female coaches and her daughter, who also plays for the club and is gaining in popularity with numbers starting to increase.

Embrace a range of marketing and promotional opportunities. For example, create a web and activated Facebook page, promote success and get out into the community, and talk to schools and community groups about what the club has to offer.

4. CONCLUSION

All members of the community can contribute towards achieving gender equality and take action to prevent violence against women.

Sporting clubs can positively influence the health and social environment of people of all ages, particularly young people, and play a leadership role within their local communities.

They also have the opportunity to challenge the factors that support gender inequality, and promote and role model core values of fairness and respect, between men and women.

However, before starting on any actions it's important that sporting clubs undertake a club audit to understand their club’s strengths, opportunities, willingness and capacity to embrace change, and identify who their “champions of change” are in driving change.

Females, like males can contribute to sporting clubs in many ways, as players, supporters, coaches, umpires, committee members and volunteers. However, females remain under-

represented in most sports, both on and off the field in, participation, media coverage and leadership positions.

Creating environments where everyone feels equal and respected, builds a club culture that is strong, united, diverse, family friendly, supportive and representative of the local community, can lead to benefits for both the club and local community:

- **An increase in club membership** due to the club's ability to attract and cater for a broader cross section of the community, both on and off the field.
- **An increase in club revenue** due to the club's ability to attract a diverse membership base, and appeal to a broader range of sponsors and grants.
- **Access to a larger pool of volunteers** due to the club's ability to access a more diverse range of skills and abilities, both on and off the field.
- **An increase in community engagement and connectedness** due to a more holistic and inclusive club culture that welcomes and celebrates diversity.

As Toni Rennie Community and Business Development Manager, Knox Basketball Inc. stated,

"We are our members, the more we do for our members the stronger our clubs get".