

Respect and Equity Sporting Club Policy – Case Study

Background

Sporting clubs have often been described as the ‘heart and soul’ of rural communities, and can play a key role in shaping positive community attitudes and behaviour. By promoting equality and removing gendered practices, clubs can address the underlying drivers of violence against women and challenge the attitudes and cultures that support violence against women.

Creating an inclusive and respectful culture on and off the playing field will help increase the participation and satisfaction of club members, as well as;

- Ensure both men and women can fully participate in all aspects of the club
- Increase retention of club members
- Promote a family friendly environment which will attract new members
- Improve the morale and club culture
- Ensure all members feel respected and valued
- Promote the safety of club members

Recognising the critical role sporting clubs play within the municipality, and the immense benefit a safe, equitable and respectful club culture can bring to its members, the partnership sought to engage sporting clubs within the Wangaratta and district community in a conversation and action regarding gender equity.

The Partnership/Project History

Women’s Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE), Rural City of Wangaratta (RCoW) and Sport North East worked together to address gender inequity in sporting clubs in the municipality of Wangaratta.

The partnership began in November 2016, when the group collaboratively developed and launched the Respect and Equity Sporting Club Policy. The partnership also participated in a joint Women in Sport Forum in 2017, led by Sport North East.

The partnership gained a lot of valuable insights during the development of the policy, and the delivery of the Women in Sport Forum in 2017. These learnings have been taken on board and embedded into the design and delivery of this project.

The Funding

The partnership was successful in receiving funding from the CHPCP under the Local Partnerships project funding. The purpose of Local Partnership project funding is to:

- meet local community needs,
- enable partnership development at the local level
- encourage innovation: new or re-designed models of care; social research to inform planning and service development

The funding was provided to the partnership to deliver the following activities:

Stage 1 – Host a community Forum exploring gender equity within sporting clubs and associations. The forum targeted leaders of leagues, associations and clubs, with the aim to enhance engagement in gender equity activity and raise awareness of the benefits to club/association adopting practices that promote gender equity.

Stage 2 – Targeted training sessions as a follow on from the forum, designed to build capacity of club champions to implement and drive actions within their club.

Stage 3 – Rollout of the Respect and Equity Policy to clubs within the RCoW, with Sport North east providing one on one support to clubs who adopt the policy, and support them in implementing initiatives that promote gender equity.

The Forum

The Sports Forum was held on the 6th of June in Wangaratta at the Performing Arts Centre.

The Forum was attended by 66 participants from a range of sporting codes, including cricket, AFL, netball, basketball, lawn bowls, soccer, clay target shooting, golf, swimming, tennis, canoeing, athletics and Windsport as well as representatives from the State Government, Central Hume Primary Care Partnership and the partnering organisations (Women’s Health Goulburn North East, Rural City of Wangaratta, Sport North East and Gateway Health).

There were three presenters on the evening, discussing inequality in sport, and specifically exploring inequality in different sporting codes.

Harry Moffit, discussed and shared his findings from his study into equality in Cricket and *Gender Integration in Community Sports Clubs*. Harry provided practical and real life examples of current inequality in the men’s and women’s game of cricket, and offered solutions of how to address these inequalities.

Monique Handley, Change Our Game Ambassador, shared her experiences from cycling at an elite level, and also her involvement of participating on the Board for Cycling Victoria. Monique offered examples of the success they have had at Cycling Victoria, as well as recommendations to build upon this success.

Caitlyn Hoggan, from WHGNE shared examples of current inequality in sport as portrayed by the media, and provided some context into the gendered expectations of men and women in sport, and the correlation with violence.

Feedback from participants indicated...

- 93% of survey participants rated the forum 7/10 or above in terms of value.
- 65% of those rated the forum 8/10 or above.

What did you hope to gain from attending this forum?

“Increasing the women leadership roles and encouraging more girls to our club”

“Meeting passionate women and men. Seeing what challenges/opportunities are in the region”

“Better understanding of barriers to increasing women’s participation”

What are the key messages you will take away from the Forum?

“Change is hard but worthwhile”

“Inclusion and equality in sports are important for the health of the organisation”

“Many sports are having similar challenges. Women must keep up the pressure now more than ever”

“Looking where inequality is at our club”

“Better understanding of what a club can do to be more inclusive”

What actions could your club take to be more inclusive and equal?

“Encourage netballers to have a greater say and increase their contribution. Encourage male members to participate in forums like this. Encourage Executive to split time between football and netball”

“I think our club is very inclusive but could be more equal as far as what responsibilities footballers/netballers have”

“Increase female membership and participation numbers. Allow women the opportunity to take up leadership roles and promote female competitions as much as mens”

Challenges/Lessons learned

- The partnership had difficulty identifying appropriate guest speakers for the Forum. The partnership was conflicted by the need to balance sourcing a well known sporting personality that would attract an audience, with a spokesperson that had a thorough understanding of the issue. Whilst many sporting personalities may be a drawcard to attend such an event, we required a speaker who was credible and could readily engage the audience on the issue. This proved challenging as many sporting stars with a larger profile, may not necessarily be credible sources on the topic, and were also not within the scope of the budget. Locally sporting clubs have had limited engagement and interest within this topic, and are still exploring the role in this space, and therefore may require outside inspiration and support. This issue points to a broader picture of the lack of key role models and figures in this space, and the need to further engage sporting ambassadors in this context.
- The Forum was marketed as an opportunity for clubs to learn how to attract new players and grow their club membership. This marketing lens was employed as it was a topic that was highly relevant and motivating for clubs, and would attract their attendance. Whilst this marketing tactic was effective, and resulted in a high attendance rate, it was met with some dissatisfaction as the audience had a perception they would leave the Forum with practical tools of how to increase their membership, as opposed to exploring the issue of gender inequality in sport more broadly. Future work with sporting clubs needs to be conscious of methods of engaging sporting clubs in work regarding social issues, and ensure that activities will match expected outcomes. Majority of club members are volunteers with limited time and capacity, therefore if the did not

perceive a benefit from participating in such events, they are not likely to re-engage in future. Whilst gender inequality is a topic not at the forefront of clubs attention, there are a few local champions who will engage with this topic and can be used as examples to help demonstrate the value to other clubs.

The Workshop

Evaluation from the Sports Forum provided an opportunity for clubs who were interested in learning more about this topic, and implementing actions within their club, to identify themselves, and receive further information regarding a tailored workshop. Those who expressed interest were then contacted following the workshop, and were sent an invitation to participate in the workshop. This invitation was also sent out more broadly to sporting networks with the region.

Michelle Redfern from Advancing Women facilitated a 2-hour workshop on the 29th of August. There were 12 attendees from 3 different sporting codes (football and netball were the predominant participants). Michelle discussed the following topics:

- Current state for women in sport in Australia
- Current barriers that women face in sport with other members of the community
- Practical wisdom, tools and techniques to return to clubs to initiate conversation that leads to positive change

Feedback from participants included...

- 66% (n=6) rated the session as an 8/10 in terms of value
- 33% (n=3) rated the session as a 10/10 in terms of value

What are the key messages you will take away from the Workshop?

"Inclusion of women and diverse groups promote success"

"Building a pathway for females to take on more leadership and committee roles on the committee"

"How privilege can be taken for granted"

What are some of the potential strategies you would like to implement in your club?

"Inclusivity officer. Junior Pathways. Sponsorship - is it just targeted at males? What's our value proposition? Season launch for entire club. Look at the business - what's it worth? How can we tap into volunteer registers? Don't need to be an expert in the sport to help"

"Setting up a more inclusive club by approaching different culturally diverse groups in the community and inviting them to come along"

"Designated female events. More female orientated social functions. Stop and chat sessions".

Challenges/Lessons learned

- Feedback from participants during the workshop indicated there still is reluctance for change at the club committee level, and further engagement with club senior leaders needs to occur to obtain true cultural shift within the club
- Clubs are still largely run by males, and still largely celebrate the success of males
- Clubs are run on volunteers basis and have challenges in dedicating time and resources to anything above and beyond general club activities
- Sometimes you need to tap people on the shoulder to encourage them to participate. People in the community sporting sector are generally all volunteers. Their time is valuable so broad invitations don't always work
- People will indicate that they are going to attend (i.e. RSVP 'attending' via Eventbrite), however when the event is free there is no guarantee of their attendance
- Participants were more engaged during the intimate workshop than the large style forum.

Supporting Clubs

Following the workshop a total of 6 clubs raised adopting the policy at their committee meeting.

Sport North East is currently working with the following clubs to develop and implement their respect and equity policies:

- Beechworth Football Netball Club
- North Wangaratta Football Netball Club
- Wangaratta Rovers Football Netball Club
- Tarrawingee Football Netball Club
- Wangaratta City Football (Soccer) Club
- Wangaratta Clay Target Club

Currently, Sport North East has discussed, to varying levels, ideas and policy implementation with all clubs who attended the workshop. One club has completed and implemented its policy. All other clubs are either developing potential policy actions, or introducing their committees to their gender and equity policy. Sport North East will continue to work with the clubs to implement their policies.

Opportunity – to implement initiatives across the leagues. There was much interest and buy in regarding a shared action called 'give me 15' allowing greater opportunity for football players to be able to support the netball players (and vice-versa) within their club. There was also strong interest to continue to work together on shared ideas. There is opportunity to Sport North East to identify shared and consistent actions and bring clubs together to work collaboratively on such actions.

Challenges/Lessons learned

- The workshop was held at the end of August, just before, or at the beginning of, finals for most attending clubs. It was challenging to engage clubs during one of their busiest and most important times. Holding the workshop away from football finals would give clubs more time to engage with policy development and implementation.
- The club that seemed most prepared to make changes to their club felt they had all the knowledge they needed and largely refused assistance from Sport North East.

- The club members who attended the workshop could be broadly grouped into three categories: motivated and able to make changes; able but not prioritising changes; or, motivated but facing challenges to make changes.
 - Motivated and able to make changes – These participants had ideas at the workshop about changes they could make and are club members who have enough influence to enact change, for example, long term committee members.
 - Able but not prioritising changes – These participants are in positions at their club to make changes, and can see the benefit of making changes but don't see it as a priority or a real need for the club.
 - Motivated but facing challenges to make changes – These participants had ideas at the workshop and have followed up with discussions with SNE about changes to make, but have been met with resistance at the club due to ingrained practices or not being in a position of influence at the club.
 - To get the best outcome from the process, ideally the person that represented the club at the workshop needed to be motivated and able to make changes, or, the club sends two representatives: one who has a passion for the topic and an influential person who is their advocate at committee level.