



**WOMEN & GIRLS IN FOOTBALL:  
CLUB CASE STUDIES**



**CLUB CHANGER**  
Club Development Program



## **CLUB CASE STUDIES**

There are clubs in Australia who have already begun their journey to providing ideal environments for their female participants utilising different methods. Look through these case studies to gain inspiration and guidance on how your club may reach their objectives.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- 3** Strategic planning for success
- 5** Create a girls-only MiniRoos team
- 6** Flexible program for new and returning women
- 7** Holistic approach to attract and retain players
- 8** Recruiting and retaining coaches to grow participation numbers
- 9** Player retention through improved coaching
- 10** Starting a club from scratch
- 11** Creating a joint female-only entity
- 13** Merging male and female clubs for shared facilities
- 14** MiniRoos Kick-Off as catalyst for participation growth
- 15** Converting school players to club football players
- 16** Go Girls program launching girls football at the club
- 18** Female mentors to link juniors with seniors to improve player retention
- 19** Mentoring program to address mental health
- 21** Recruiting and retaining young referees
- 22** Extra training opportunities for late starters
- 23** Providing skill development opportunities
- 24** Goalkeeper training for girls
- 25** Injury prevention and sports trainer assistance

### UWA-NEDLANDS FC (FOOTBALL WEST)

UWAN FC has seen a steady growth of their women and girls' numbers in recent year and decided to create a formal strategy to consolidate the work previously done to date in 2021, which would provide the club with a sustainable direction in 2022 and beyond. The decided on 'player centric approach which builds on 6 principles - positive culture, providing opportunities and pathways to be the best they can be, equitable access to equipment and facilities, opportunities to connect girls across all age groups, credentialed coaches, and access to technical and tactical learning at every age group.

In 2022, the club began their mentoring program connecting First Team players with Academy girls' teams from U10 to U16. Each player was connected with 3-4 girls in a younger team and would check-in with the players at least twice a month at training or games, providing encouragement, tips and advice. Having a senior player know their name and, in their corner, (and vice versa, with the girls regularly watching the First Team games) grew their connection with the club and feeling of belonging in the sport.

The club's media channels operate on a principle of equal exposure across grades. UWAN FC know that media coverage of female sport is typically much lower than that of men's sport - 'you can't be what you can't see'. Around the grounds we have experienced stronger inter-team engagement, including with men's players actively asking about how the women's teams are going and seeing female football not as an exception, but the norm. UWAN FC have found that engagement on social media posts about women's teams often outperform men's posts (despite having a lower proportion of female followers), which also provides great opportunities for sponsors.



The club has also focussed on having properly fitting kit to make players feel more comfortable and confident, as well as demonstrates a commitment from the club that women and girls are a valued part of the club. UWANFC has actively identified and invested in female coaches (and not limiting them to coaching girls' teams). They encourage (and where needed, financially support them) to achieve their Football Australia C-Licence and provide ongoing mentoring with their Technical Director. Having women in coaching positions not only gives our girls team's a leader who has had similar experiences in the sport, but also shows boys that women are just as knowledgeable in football and changes the perceptions of roles of females in sport.



To address the known skill gap in girls compared to boys, UWAN FC ran a number of girls only programs that cater to a range of ages and experience levels. They run a girls-only round of our K-Y3 Joey Soccer program, as well as an introductory training program to girls that are approaching MiniRoos age. Key to the success of these programs is reducing the barriers to participation, by encouraging them to bring friends, minimising costs, allowing a 'try-before-you-buy' system (especially with young kids). They utilise their female players and leaders wherever possible to help with these programs – including running a preseason camp for junior girls, or in assisting with a pre-season girls' tournament.

Since launching their Female Football Plan, UWAN FC saw a 100% growth in MiniRoos and Junior Girls team, going from 4 teams to 8. The challenge for them now is to continue to embed that success into sustainable growth and ensure that the player experience continues to be positive, and everyone feels they belong at their club.

To see their Girls and Women's Football Plan, go to: <https://www.uwanfc.com.au/ffp>



## **CREATE A GIRLS-ONLY MINIROOS TEAM**

### **BARGARA FC (FOOTBALL QUEENSLAND)**

Several years ago, Bargara FC attempted to form an all-girls MiniRoos team but had no success in sustaining it during that time. Last season, Bargara FC had an enthusiastic father who expressed his interest for his daughter to play in a girls-only team, who currently played in a mixed U6 team at the club. The club decided that this was a worthy venture and spoke directly to the

parents of the girls who played in the U6 mixed teams as well as members within the club who were connected to the local school. An EOI was sent out on club social media at the end of last season to gather more interest as well as hosting a free Come and Try Day. Bargara FC also held a “Bring a Friend from School” program at the start of the year to recruit the last few players to make up the team.

The club appointed the father as the teams coach and put him through a MiniRoos certificate. A sponsor was acquired who purchase pink footballs for the team. This year the club proudly has their first ever girls only MiniRoos team in its history. They now play in the U7 MiniRoos local mixed competition against other clubs, some of which also have girls-only sides. Now they are looking ahead and have identified another age group where they can create another girls only MiniRoos team for next season.



#### **ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:**

Identify early and target a group at a time. Speak to individual parents about the opportunity to build a team and gather interested internally and externally using your club’s social media channels as well as connections within the community such as schools. Find a keen parent/coach volunteer to lead the team and provide the coach support to hit the ground running. Confirming your team prior to finding a sponsor to assist with equipment is key to securing sponsorship.

## **FLEXIBLE PROGRAM FOR NEW AND RETURNING WOMEN**

### **ANU WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CLUB (CAPITAL FOOTBALL)**

The Australian National University Women's Football Club (ANU WFC) has a very young and transient player base with approx. 50% of players being university students at ANU. All their teams play in the Canberra Women's State League competition throughout every division. They have found it difficult to keep experienced players and volunteers at the club due to the nature of people moving interstate after graduating and players leaving the sport once their family status changes.

In 2019, they started "Strollers", a new team registered in the middle level women's competition for women who you have left the sport and want to come back/at danger of leaving the sport due to change in commitments (family, children etc). Differently from the rest of the club that trains twice a week, the team don't have a set training schedule however there is an open invitation for any player within the team to train with any other team in the club they want to suit their schedule. All the club coaches know and are supportive with this arrangement. The only commitment the players make is to play their game on the Sunday.

This season, they have a team of 17 players that have returned to the sport (mostly after having children) or never left because of the flexibility of the new team. The team is a mix of players from the lower division and higher divisions. The bonus of having this team has been the added experience added to the club where these players are mentoring younger players, some are doing referee and coaching courses and being part of the volunteer base.

#### **ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:**

For the Strollers, keep them involved in the club's social activities and provide as much incentives as you can. For everyone else, make sure to bring everyone along the journey (coaches, committee and the other members), so they understand why it is positive for the club to have flexible rules for the "mums" in the club. This was strongly linked to the club's vision at being a truly inclusive environment, fostering women participation in sport, and the club's future ambition to increase the number of female coaches and to field a women's Masters team.



### ADELAIDE JAGUARS WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CLUB (FOOTBALL SOUTH AUSTRALIA)

Adelaide Jaguars is a female only club that has experienced tremendous growth since the commencement of the COVID pandemic. Recognising that sports clubs play an important role in the social, physical and mental development of teenagers, and acknowledging that there is a high drop-out rate for girls in this age group, the club searched for additional ways to support their younger players.

The club engaged their members and redefined what success for this age group looked like, deciding on 'player retention' as their definition. The change resulted in the development of "Thrive Thru Football" – a program which highlighted different needs depending on the age group. The MiniRoos age groups focussed on physical literacy and core skills. Games were created and provided to coaches to deliver, with the overall outcome of improving motor competencies necessary to keep girls in sport. The junior girl's teams were involved in leadership programs that aimed to empower and provide opportunity by developing different skill sets. This included U13's being offered a babysitter First-Aid course, U15's completing the Level 4 Referee course and U17's obtaining their MiniRoos Coaching Certificate. The club believes that offering these upskilling courses will help improve the player's decision-making, leadership and communication off the field as well as provide them with skills to add to their resumes.

Adelaide Jaguars have reached 220 player members and become the largest female only club in the state, also nominating the 2nd most number of female teams from any club in the Football SA competition. Their holistic approach to providing a supportive and healthy environment for women and girls has resulted in over 50% of their coaching group being female. Even the mothers of the players (some of whom have never played before) are joining in with the clubs' pickup games program, "Social 5s Twilight league", open to any female who wants to play on the night.

#### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Engage with your current members and work together to decide on the way forward. Have an open club meeting and gather ideas. Working with your Member Federation to reduce cost for coaching and referee courses can help with budget. Keeping the players engaged in club activities such as connecting with the local A-League Women's side can develop the excitement around the game and make players want to be more involved.



# RECRUITING AND RETAINING COACHES TO GROW PARTICIPATION NUMBERS

## BURWOOD FC (CDSFA - FOOTBALL NSW)

In 2015, Burwood FC started a MiniRoos Kick-Off program to get more girls into their club from the younger age groups. For the club to start and maintain this program, they realised they needed positive and energetic female role models for the players, so they recruited their current female players to run their program.

The club paid for the coaches to complete their MiniRoos Certificate course to prepare them for the upcoming program. The MiniRoos Kick-Off program allowed the club to provide these young coaches a chance to hone their coaching skills, with session plans provided. The coaches went to high school close to the training field, so the club made it easy for them to go training with the equipment setup ready to be used by the teams right after school. As an incentive, these coaches were provided payment for their work in this program as well as glowing references to put on their resume. A Junior Coaching Coordinator helped and mentored these young coaches throughout the season.

This program allowed the club to create U6's and U7's MiniRoos Girls teams and the new coaches progressed to coaching in the winter season. The first set of these coaches have progressed through the club and are now coaching the U16's and U17's teams whilst studying at university. During this time, the club have paid for the coaches to go through their Skill Training and Game Training Certificate courses to ensure they are qualified and upskilled as they progressed through the age groups. The club have found that this program for young coaches has helped keep young players retained at the club and upskilling these coaches has helped them want to stay with the club in the long term.



### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Identify potential new coaches for MiniRoos girls' teams from your existing youth female teams. Starting a MiniRoos Kick-Off program will give your coaches the time and space to learn and practice their coaching skills. Clubs should also encourage their youth female players to referee as well as to become Game Leaders, so they learn the rules of the game and gain leadership skills to be more confident.

## PLAYER RETENTION THROUGH IMPROVED COACHING



### LINDFIELD FC (NSFA - FOOTBALL NSW)

Lindfield FC (LFC) saw a steady decline in female players from 2015 to 2018 so they sought to stop the turnover of players to improve their retention rate. They developed a 5-year plan to coincide with the 2023 FIFA Womens World Cup which focused on the development of talented players, retention to support the enjoyment of football by social teams and growth of the players playing in the younger age groups.

The main driver to achieve their goal was to improve coaching within the club. They ensured they had a strong and united coaching team where they had collaboration across all teams, use of young assistant coaches to be mentored and regular coach meetings. Coaches understood and worked towards a consistent playing style, delivered coaching reports and assessments and used match footage for video analysis. The club expanded their coaching programs to include skills sessions for all MiniRoos age groups and development programs from U6 to U12 girls. Younger coaches had a place to hone their skills and progressed through programs from their in-house skills program which was at the heart of their coach development program. Coaches has a coaching pathway, exposed to workshops and mentoring and put onto scholarships to get them through coaching courses. The players played in more games than other clubs in the area as the club entered them into numerous competitions (pre-season and during the season) which gave coaches more experience in running the teams in different environments (i.e., on tour).

The result on improving the coaches at the club can be found with the results on the pitch. In 2022, the club have reached 435 players from 260 in 2018. There has been a huge uplift in the U6-U12 age group and an increase in the retention in the U12-U16 age groups from 129 in 2018 to 163 in 2022. Lindfield FC are the only club to have 2 teams in the U12, U14, U16, U18 in the NSFA Diamond League (Division 1). The club found that they were able to offer coaches 3 years of experience while they were still in high school and about another 3 years while they were at university. Now they can boast 37 female coaches (23 are 15-16-year-old assistants). 80% of all girls' teams are coached by females. LFC are also attracting additional sponsors due to their focus on success on the female side and consistently engaging of the members through social media.



#### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Have an active support from the committee, ensure the effort is sustained to follow the plan and that you have one to two people with the passion to drive the program. Have enough coaches to cover the programs and enough programs for the coaches to coach in. The club have 8 roles on the committee focussed on women's football and women's football is fundamentally embedded in the committee. LFC believe that that coaching program is the key to enjoyment and performance of their players on the pitch which helps retain their players through the age groups.



### SOUTH CANBERRA FC (CAPITAL FOOTBALL)

South Canberra FC is a brand-new football club for women started in the 2021 season. The idea to start a new football club was cultivated over several years due to the shared frustrations of women in mixed-gender clubs where male teams (both state league and NPL) took the focus of club officials and received the bulk of the resources. Players felt that major decisions were made without considering the women's teams, that there was a lack of community and a positive culture around them. The 2020 covid lockdowns provided the time and space to make it happen.

A working group of women from within the football community around Canberra got together to piece their core values and a plan to start their club. They wanted to create a community where women can feel safe, supported and can share experiences while playing sport. They developed hype around the new club for the upcoming winter season during the summer football season where they spoke to other teams and promoted their plans through word of mouth, which built a foundation of interest within the Canberra Women's football community.

That first year (2021), South Canberra FC entered 5 women's teams in the Capital Football Women's competition which included 86 players and reached 6 teams with 102 players in the 2022 season. The positive vibe and culture around the club has been built on its core values which includes providing a positive safe culture for all women, empowering kit and merchandise for women, providing sustainable equipment that supports local businesses.

#### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Create a set of values that tie in with your potential members and work with like-minded people to achieve your outcome. Your values set the tone for everything you do. Set out a plan for how, who, and where to recruit your players. Build hype around the new club through socials and word of mouth.



## CREATING A JOINT FEMALE-ONLY ENTITY



### NORTHERN GALAXY FOOTBALL (NSFA - FOOTBALL NSW)

Berowra FC (BFC) and Mt Colah FC (MCFC), around 6kms apart, both had female teams in the past however there were constantly gaps in the teams throughout the clubs. The talent of the players was not the issue. They regularly contributed to the players progressing to the associations NPL club, Northern Tigers. One issue was that the talented players would go to surrounding clubs who could provide stronger teams which played in the higher division. The clubs had found that they were competing for the same players who lived in their area and didn't want to continue doing so. Both clubs decided that they would join and create a new entity specific for female players which would allow them to fill in the gaps and merge the female teams of the home clubs to have an A and B team in each age group and allow them to grade players appropriately. They knew that they would have enough girls to create a full team in every age group.

In 2020, BFC and MCFC developed working groups from different stakeholder groups such as senior players, club committees and coaches. During the Covid lockdowns, video sessions were held with the groups to gather ideas. Both clubs kept all groups highly involved in the decision making, especially the players, to develop buy-in to create a new entity. In the 2021 season, Northern Galaxy Football (NGF) was born. The Entity was created with the players in mind and a sense of ownership as they decided on the name, playing colours and playing strips. NGF has pooled the volunteers and coaching staff from both home clubs as well as the players. The partnership agreement between the two clubs allows each club to continue to register the players with their home club and play under the banner of NGF. NGF commemorated the first season with a foundation medal for the players and volunteers and held a big launch to create excitement around the club.



NGF has focused on creating a better football experience for the players and in 2022 have 19 teams from U6 Girls to Over 35's (2 more since 2021, without taking girls from the mixed MiniRoos teams). With the growth in numbers, NGF has introduced development squads for the U8-U16 age groups. NGF has seen large retention rates in the U6-U11 age groups with most teams now playing their home game every 2nd Sunday at the same venue. BFC and MCFC have now developed a strong working relationship and are working towards shared goals in the boy's side of the club, putting aside their local "rivalry".

### ADVICE FROM BFC & MCFC:

Having the girls train together in a safe and comfortable environment is important for them. Leave your rivalries at the door and focus on the player experience. Having a diverse working group will help you develop well-informed decisions. Effective communication with your stakeholders and getting them involved with the process gives them a sense of ownership and belonging. Plan, plan, plan from financials to on field to branding to every aspect involved. Try new things and figure out what works and what doesn't.



## **MERGING MALE AND FEMALE CLUBS FOR SHARED FACILITIES**

### **PERTH REDSTAR FC (FOOTBALL WEST)**

Perth RedStar FC (PRFC) was formed this year following the merger of an NPL Men's club (ECU Joondalup SC) with an NPL Women's club (Northern Redbacks WSC). Both clubs had issues with facilities. In the short term, the women's club did not have an NPL-compliant venue and needed access to the higher quality facility for competition matches. Additionally, the women's club did not have the financial resources to continue to offer the best development pathway. Longer term, both clubs required a permanent home, and the two clubs are in a better position as one larger club with men's, women's, and junior teams to push for this facility to be built.

PRFC host NPL Men's and Women's matches back-to-back wherever possible, as an important cultural step to show the equality of the two teams and the unity of one club. Every player at the club from MiniRoos to NPL seniors wears an identical kit. Challenges have been the merging of the cultures and volunteer bases of two previously separate clubs. Clubs rely on volunteers working together and, in the two clubs respectively, these groups of volunteers have relied on a small group working very closely for many years. The merging of these two groups was challenging and is currently in a transitional process.

The positives have been the immediate access to improved facilities for the NPL Women's teams and the improved resources available to the Women's side of the club through access to employed staff at the club. This has reduced the administrative burden on volunteers and allowed club volunteers to focus on areas in which they add the most value (i.e., on the field developing players, relationships, and culture). Intra-club matches between boys' and girls' teams allow for development opportunities for female players, who now have the option of choosing to play in girls or boys teams while staying within their club.



#### **ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:**

The management personnel of the two clubs should meet extensively for months prior to the merger to confirm the move was in the best interests of both clubs. Conversations like these are hugely important as they shaped the constitution and practices of the new club, which continues because mergers do not occur fully overnight.

DAREBIN WOMEN'S SPORTS CLUB



EST. 1990

### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Start with what you have, find yourself a champion for the program and provide them support as a committee. Welcoming all skill levels will give you more opportunities to capture those who have never played the game before. And they have found that you don't necessarily need to have female coaches at the start unless you have players for them to coach first. Most important thing is to start!

## DAREBIN FALCONS (FOOTBALL VICTORIA)

In 2010, Darebin Falcons had no junior girls and 19 senior female players, so they wanted to include younger players into the club. They set about creating a MiniRoos clinics for 5–9-year-old players during each term in 2011 which had 10 girls register at the start of the year and ended with 30 by the end. That following year, the club were able to field an U11 Girls team.

In this MiniRoos Kick-Off program for girls, the club ensured that the girls were made to feel welcome and included and that their skills aren't important when they first arrive. They welcomed parents who wanted to assist in the club in anyway which created a community where people want to help run the club. The club also introduced the program to engage young females into coaching where they were able to practice their coaching in a safe environment prior to moving into the winter football season. They found that it was very important to provide a role model for the younger girls. The club tapped into the Duke of Edinburgh program and advertised to kids in year 9-11 to cover their service hours within their MiniRoos Kick-Off program.

The club now (2022) have 27 junior girl's teams and another 85 girls in their current MiniRoos Kick-Off program. The club now have a full pathway from MiniRoos to Senior football. Players in the U14-U16 age groups now coach in their MiniRoos Kick-Off program (14 of them now coaching). The club has found that MiniRoos Kick-Off program was the foundation for their growth in participation and continue to run them to allow them to gain more players year on year.



# CONVERTING SCHOOL PLAYERS TO CLUB FOOTBALL PLAYERS

## **SOUTHERN DISTRICTS SOCCER FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION (FOOTBALL NSW)**

SDSFA is the association for the Southern Districts of metropolitan Sydney. They identified that there were a lot of females playing football at school that weren't playing for local clubs. They set about trying to convert those players to sign up for local clubs to get more females playing the game.

SDSFA has good working relationships with their member clubs as well as the representative club, SD Raiders. They have built a connection with the local primary schools in the region and have advertised directly with the schools on behalf of the local clubs. The main messaging has been around the fun of the game. Once clubs had players, SDSFA have encouraged clubs to lock players in as soon as the season finished and try to keep teams together in the offseason through summer soccer and futsal.

For the past 4 years, U6 players receive a rebate of \$400 while the U8 players receive \$600 to cover the cost of registration at their club. In conjunction with SD Raiders, the Mini Raiders program for (U6 & U8) players has been created to engage new players in skills sessions to develop a greater love of the game under the guidance of experienced SD Raiders coaches and senior players. A new school-based tournament is being introduced this year in term 4 for years 3 to 6.

The result of this effort from the association and clubs has seen the U12 Girls competition now having 16 teams over 2 divisions and the U10 Girls age group has 15 teams where the association couldn't have a full division of girls-only teams back in 2018.



### **ADVICE FROM THE ASSOCIATION:**

Clubs should network with other clubs around them, their local schools, and the Association themselves to achieve a shared goal. Appoint coaches with an engaging and warm personality, as well as provide fun activities (not just football such as social events).



# GO GIRLS PROGRAM LAUNCHING GIRLS FOOTBALL AT THE CLUB



## SORRENTO FC (FOOTBALL WEST)

Sorrento FC (SFC) is an NPL club who did not have junior girl's teams. Girls play in the MiniRoos U5/6/7 teams but were mostly unsuccessful in being offered places after grading for the U8 teams as competing against the boys and consequently SFC only had a few junior girls playing in the U8 – U16 teams. The club wanted to create an opportunity to enable more junior female players to have the experience of playing the game and to eventually participate in teams.

In January 2021 SFC started a Go Girls Football Program for 8 to 17-year-old girls who had predominantly had never play before. It commenced with a 4 half-day holiday program which was free for those that signed up for the 1st 6-week program at a cost of \$60, (included a free Go Girls T shirt) and held on Saturday mornings (during school terms) with the focus on playing, health and wellbeing.

Subsequent 6-week programs were held each term during 2021, with further holiday programs offered at a minimal cost. The Dept of Sport & Rec helped by providing a \$2500 grant which subsidised the initial costs and Football West provided insurance at a reduced cost. SFC recruited 2 young female players from their women's team to lead the program and be mentors to the young girls. The program was advertised as a social, non-competitive football program for beginners or those wanting to get back into the game. Schools, Facebook (club page and community group pages) were used to advertise to good effect. The players received a certificate as a recognition of their efforts at the conclusion of each program.



In the first term, SFC had 39 registered players and achieved 131 registrations by the end of the year, of which, 87% had never played football before. This proved that SFC could provide a meaningful non-comp social program for beginners. The Go Girls players were canvassed, and expressions of interest advertised with the result that junior girls' teams were formed in the U10, U12, U14 and U16 groups for the 2022 season with players on waiting lists in younger teams. SFC is anticipating an additional 2 teams in place for the 2023 season. Early in 2022 SFC appointed a Head of Female Football (a former Perth Glory Women's player) to not only develop pathways for girls, but also increase the coaching standards and drive higher quality experiences for the players and junior girls' football is now in the clubs DNA.



#### **ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:**

Clubs should offer players something to bring in initially, such as having a cheap entry point into the program being key to removing the cost barrier for most. Ensure the participants enjoy their experience by having good coaches. Target those who haven't played the game before and take it slow with new players to give them confidence in their own ability. Younger female coaches can relate to the new players easier, and the success of the program may take a while so be patient and persistent. As an added extra, try to work with A-League Women's clubs to provide merchandise, giveaways, tickets to matches and have your players become mascots at home games.

# FEMALE MENTORS TO LINK JUNIORS WITH SENIORS TO IMPROVE PLAYER RETENTION

## UQFC FC (FOOTBALL QUEENSLAND)



UQFC found that a lot of young girls don't have athletic female role models in their lives and the club was losing female players as they get into the older age groups with a drop off going into the senior teams.

In 2018, UQFC started their mentorship program where 17 of premier women's team, and members around that team, came to team training sessions once (or more) per month. These mentors help run the sessions alongside the coach to help provide guidance to the younger players. Volunteer mentors are assigned to a specific team to work with for the whole season. The program targets players in the U13 to U16 age groups. The girls are supported by having women role models around the club and within their own team environment allowing them to connect with fellow female footballers.

The club have been very fortunate that they have had a lot of volunteers over the years become mentors (25 women have volunteered this year). The girls have loved having the mentors around to learn from, hearing different voices at training which can be effective for different learning styles. The exposure to the senior players has assisted the club with retention rates from the U16 to the senior teams. UQFC now caters for 321 junior girls and 120 senior female players. The club are further developing female coaches in the youth space by putting 5 women through the C Licence later this year.

### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Back your women and girls. Create a culture that uplifts the girls from the get-go as it is important for the player's experience to ensure they feel supported at your club.



### FREMANTLE CITY FC (FOOTBALL WEST)

In 2020, Fremantle City FC found that there were large mental health issues within the club. Coaches, players, committee members shared personal stories of what they experienced. A group of 10 women from Fremantle City (including those who played, coach and studied sports science) formed “Game Changers” and developed a 25-page digital toolkit of exercises to create and improve healthy communication between players and coaches.

In 2021, the group also started a mentorship program for 10-to-14-year girls (10 teams) at Fremantle City, which included 44 players aged between 16 to late-20s supporting the youth female players for the whole season. The mentors would attend training regularly and collaborate with the coach during the session. The younger players could turn to the mentors to share stories or lean on for advice about something they might not be comfortable sharing with the coach which might be a dad or father to one of the players. The mentors would also attend matches to support the girls. Wellbeing workshops from sports psychology to building emotional intelligence and talking about menstrual cycles are run once per month with well-known community experts. The program also included Yoga and meditation once monthly throughout the season after training. In 2022, “Game Changers” changed to “Gaining Ground” which is now a separate entity to Fremantle City building on the successful pilot program at the club.



Photo Credit: Rebecca Mansell

The young players now have someone these can speak and relate to, they are more open and ask questions freely and are given confidence. The program has been teaching healthier communication and role modelling. The mentors get exposed naturally to their leadership abilities. Three mentors have now taken up coaching women's teams at Fremantle City (a first for the club) and two players joined the Women's and Girls' committee increasing young female representation and participation. The program has helped created a cycle of change from the players to the mentors which has positively impacted the club and can continue from generation to generation.

**ADVICE FROM THE CLUB/GAINING GROUND:**

If we don't have healthy communication and sense of joy, connection and belonging among players and coaches, there's a likelihood that players may drop out or consider another club. If clubs get this programming in place for the new season, it will be a way to keep supporting players long term and keep them in game. Look within the existing teams for natural leaders with empathetic skills, good communication and those who have a positive nature. Start to see if they want to connect with the younger teams and start small.

If your club is interested in a formalised program, you can find out more by visiting: [www.gainingground.com.au](http://www.gainingground.com.au)



Photo Credit: Gaining Ground



Photo Credit: Rebecca Mansell



## **RECRUITING AND RETAINING YOUNG REFEREES**

### **DAREBIN FALCONS (FOOTBALL VICTORIA)**

As with most clubs, Darebin Falcons had a shortage of referees and so in 2020, the club decided they wanted to get some of the older players interested in refereeing. They offered a referee program to girls from the U13 age group and above, with 15 female players taking part in the first year. The program received a grant from Bendigo Bank to cover the cost of the training & uniforms and a local law firm, Nest Legal, sponsored the club, helping with referee payments.

With lockdowns, the program was put on hold during the winter season until the summer where the club was able to host a Go Fives tournament (for U9-U17) to reengage members for a 5-week mini comp. The club used this opportunity to provide refereeing experience to the young referees, where they were able to develop their skills. They then were able to continue in the 2021 season and participated again in the next summer's Go Fives tournament. The club now have 20 female players who are game leaders (12 of whom are very active) who referee the clubs' MiniRoos games as well as being able to cover in the U12 and U13 matches as required.



#### **ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:**

Provide referees payment (and programs to referee in) as an incentive and through sponsorship and grants, you can supplement the costs. Appointing a mentor to train the game leaders at the start of the season and help them at points during the season will continue to develop them. Most important thing is to start!



## **EXTRA TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LATE STARTERS**



### **ABBOTSFORD JUNIORS FOOTBALL CLUB (CDSFA - FOOTBALL NSW)**

Through its success in promoting female football, Abbotsford Juniors Football Club (AJFC) found that it was seeing more and more girls trying out and starting football in older age groups. This was a hugely positive development, driven through friendship groups, school sport or exposure to the Matilda's success on TV with a common element being a desire to play with an existing friend or two. Often these girls had friends had been playing with the Club for some years with corresponding levels of football skill. This presented a significant challenge for the girls who were often seeking to join established teams with higher levels of football skill. Additionally, coaches were finding it challenging to conduct training drills for their teams where the majority of whom were at one level, with a new player or two trying to learn basic football skills.

In response AJFC decided to try and create the concept of a set of "Intro to Football" sessions designed for girls of all ages who were new to football to gain familiarity with the basic skills of football and the types of training involved. Early on the club realized that on its own, it didn't have enough girls of similar ages in its ranks to make the training concept work. By working with their Association (CSDFA,) the sessions were opened to all clubs and their players which provided sufficient scale across age groups for the training sessions to be effective.

Despite weather disruption and reschedules in 2022, the sessions have proved very popular, and attendance has been strong. Feedback from coaches and players has been positive in that girls who have joined existing teams have some skills that they can practice both at home and during training. Girls who attend the sessions also had a better understanding of what is involved with regular team training before the start of the season.



#### **ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:**

Be prepared to try something new, not everything will be a first-time success but it's important to learn through the process. Leverage and work with other clubs and your association/zone and try to pool resources for everyone to gain a benefit.



### ABBOTSFORD JUNIORS FOOTBALL CLUB (CDSFA - FOOTBALL NSW)

Abbotsford Juniors FC (AJFC) recognised that it was losing many of its skilled girls as they moved into competitive age groups to other Clubs, SAP programs and in many cases, other sports. In discussion with parents and players it emerged that while there were significant opportunities available to boys to access additional skill development training in external academies while playing with the club, this was not available to the same extent for girls. The club had already established a successful boy's academy program focused on football skill development but had previously struggled to gain traction with girls.

Abbotsford Juniors invested in and established a girls-only program with the goal of providing additional training opportunities for girls aged 8 to 13 years of age to further improve and develop their football skills. The program was implemented to run alongside and complement the boy's program under the same academy system with the same benefits. Importantly, it was also able to secure a qualified female coach to run the program.

Though the program is in its early days, it has already shown benefits in female player retention and additionally in the performance of AJFC Girls' teams on the field. AJFC female player retention in non-competitive (8-11) football through to Youth age groups has improved significantly, delivering a significant increase in female football participation for ages 8 to 18 years to a new high of 42%. In a sign that female playing depth continues to improve, the club was able to field two Under 11 girl's academy teams in 2022, the first time that this has occurred across the club's academy program for a male or female playing age group.



#### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Having an appointed club committee/management level person act as the voice and advocate for female football is critical. Look at what programs your club provides and see if they inclusive for females. Be prepared to try something new, not everything will be a first-time success but it's important to learn through the process.



## GOALKEEPER TRAINING FOR GIRLS



### ABBOTSFORD JUNIORS FOOTBALL CLUB (CDSFA - FOOTBALL NSW)

Abbotsford Juniors FC (AJFC) found that a significant challenge at their club was the introduction of young players to the goalkeeper position. The specialised football position has many basic skills required to play however there was no training provided to player who had to play there. Often the players' first experience is being pushed into goal without instruction and having balls kicked at them without knowing what to do which can be a very negative experience for a young female player.

AJFC decided to try and create an intro to goalkeeping session designed for girls of all ages and expose them to a set of basic goalkeeping skills and training exercises aimed at giving them an understanding of what goalkeeping was all about.

Started back in 2020, these sessions have proved to be some of the most popular girls training sessions that the club has run. Feedback from coaches and players has been positive in that girls have some very basic goalkeeper skills that they can practice both at home and during training. Girls who attend the sessions had a better understanding and some additional confidence in what they needed to do when they were placed in goal during a game. Finally, the training also identified a number of girls who were interested in becoming a regular goalkeeper for their team.

#### ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:

Be prepared to try something new, not everything will be a first-time success but it's important to learn through the process. Leverage and work with other clubs and your association/zone and try to pool resources for everyone to gain a benefit.



### **ANU WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CLUB (CAPITAL FOOTBALL)**

ANU found that their players were getting a lot of injuries throughout the season and decided to develop a sports trainer program where they found a volunteer to be the clubs sports trainer. The volunteer was identified from the university and already held a sports trainer qualification, achieved as part of their degree. The sports trainer worked with all the coaches to develop warm-up techniques and attend matches on Sunday where they provide consultation to players and strapping services.

Now players at the club are consistently receiving professional service and even being taught how to strap themselves when the sports trainer is not available.

#### **ADVICE FROM THE CLUB:**

Advertise to your current members and the community around you to find the right person. Providing them with a stipend and covering costs for materials will make the role more attractive. When you have the person appointed, create a schedule and advertise the service to your players and explain what the sports trainer can do for them (for free).



# OUR GAME

Thanks to all the clubs who have contributed to the creation of this document and to your work within women and girls football.

If you want to share your story about how you have improved women and girls participation and experience at your club, get in touch with your Program Manager - Club Development and your club could be included in the next edition of our club case studies.



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