

the place to live

# LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD: THE BALL IS IN HER COURT

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Over the next five years, and beyond, Council has a specific focus on increasing participation in sport and recreation for women and girls. This is part of Council's work to support the right of women to engage and participate fully and equally in all aspects of life.

In Victoria, around 9 per cent of females choose to take part in organised sport (Australian Sports Commission, 2010). Council aims to increase the availability of formal and informal participation opportunities, with a focus on providing free and low-cost sport and physical activity options.

Within Darebin it is estimated that the resident female population is around 50 per cent of the total population (Women's Health in the North, 2013). Council aims to achieve greater equity for women and girls in sport, focusing on club membership and participation in organised sport.

The Leisure Strategy 2015–2020 Action Plan provides Council with a strategic document to guide this work through the planning, provision, promotion and advocacy of sport and physical activity within Darebin.

Levelling the Playing Field aims to highlight the benefits of involving women and girls in sport and recreation, and to showcase what they can bring to sports clubs and community recreation programs.

### PASSION. DEDICATION AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT

I grew up in a small town outside Wangaratta called Markwood and picked up a footy as soon as I was coordinated enough. I started playing Auskick in 1999 as a prep student. My older brother was the main reason behind this decision, as I wanted to be better than him at absolutely everything, whereas my younger brother only joined Auskick for the sausage sizzles.

By grade 6, I began playing for the Whorouly Lions in U14s junior league in the WDFL (Wangaratta and District Football League). I moved to the Myrtleford Saints in Year 8 (my final year playing with the boys) and was lucky enough to play in a Premiership team! As a girl in a male-dominated sport, I knew I was different but felt that my experience was as seamless as possible due to the support of my teammates, family, coaching staff and the club as a whole. I remember feeling a bit timid as I entered the Myrtleford Saints team as I had played with Whorouly my whole footy career (Auskick started there too). I felt under the pump and that I needed to show the coach that I was actually okay at footy and not just a 'novelty' as many might have assumed. In my debut game I kicked seven goals; that seemed to help.

I knew that 2007 would be my last year playing footy with the boys and was so thrilled to have finished on a high with a Premiership. I was disappointed to have to stop playing, but was

unaware of the opportunities that lay ahead. Luckily I played other sports, including basketball and netball, so the loss of footy didn't have a huge impact on me at the time.

Fast forward five years and I arrived in Melbourne ready for university life. A friend from Wangaratta had a relative who played for Darebin so I got in contact with the coach, went down to training two weeks out from the first match of the season and didn't look back. The club was very welcoming and I loved meeting so many new people.

Women's footy is certainly an exciting and quickly developing space, and I'm really proud to be a part of it. Darebin is an amazing club due to the passion, dedication and community spirit of all our members. As a club, I think we are constantly on the move, looking to improve our on-field performance and this is reflected in our success in the VWFL Premier Division. Women's footy is developing quickly as we gain access to better facilities and coaching. There are opportunities to play at a higher level through state games and AFL exhibition matches but I know I am given every opportunity to improve each week at a club level and that the coaches make this a priority.

I don't know what my footballing future holds but I am certain that I'll be donning the red, white and black for as long as possible!

### FOSTERING A LIFELONG LOVE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

I grew up in country Victoria and come from
a 'sporting family' of intergenerational sports
administrators, players, volunteers and coaches.
Attending or participating in sport was just
part of the family norm – for men, women, boys
and girls. Sporting and leisure infrastructure
was equally available to everyone and so that
was certainly my expectation when raising four
children in Melbourne (two boys and two girls).
I was shocked to learn of the lack of infrastructure,
especially for high participation sports such as
netball and basketball, in my area.

One of the surprising things I learned in adulthood was that my 'childhood' club had in fact played a significant role in my developing sense of self. I was deeply connected to the people in my club and knew there was always support available when needed. I especially loved that it was inclusive for all, regardless of age, gender or background. Ultimately, the sporting field – wins and losses – was a small part of a much bigger picture.

Early in 2014, a group of parents from the southern part of Darebin (Rucker Ward) looking for netball opportunities for their daughters, combined forces to create Parkside Netball Club. After observing the many and varied opportunities and immediate infrastructure available for predominantly male-dominated sports, such as Aussie Rules, cricket and soccer, there was certainly a 'gap' in what was available to girls in this location. The goal was to provide low cost, locally accessible, training and playing spaces and foster a lifelong love of physical activity and connection to the community.

Friday afternoons are the busiest of all. With a group of around 100 NetSetGO participants and several other competition teams preparing for training. It is all hands on deck for the ready band of volunteer parent (and teen) coaches. A hubbub of activity at Fairfield Primary and St Anthony's; the girls eagerly wait for the training session to begin. The willing teen volunteers have also been instrumental in developing cross-age connection within the immediate community. Our younger girls certainly look up to the 'big girls' and indeed love the opportunity to connect with them in this way – all while acquiring new skills.

In addition to the primary-aged teams, the high school girls, too, have enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and new to create new teams. A new local training space at Pitcher Park also means the girls can independently make their way to training and further develop their sense of belonging to the local community.

Our Parkside Netball Club Committee is made up of parents whom have had quite varied club and community experiences. I think that 'healthy' clubs have the ability to create many protective factors and positive experiences for young people to take into adulthood.

The Parkside Sports Club has since been established and amalgamates senior and junior Aussie Rules, junior and senior cricket and netball – establishing one of the biggest sporting clubs in Darebin. Our hope is that it fosters the development of lifelong practices to further improve general health and wellbeing for all involved.

## RANSON CREATINGA SENSE OF FAMILY

As a youngster, my mother enrolled me in dancing lessons. After 18 months, I gave them up to go play footy. Perhaps they should have realised then what was to come.

My love of sport has endured since I started watching football as a three-year-old. By seven, I was a cricket convert and spent my summers playing with my best friend every weekend at the local cricket club – a place where we grew up, and still often meet these days. Over the past 23 years, I have had the pleasure of being involved with netball, cricket and football as a player, administrator and volunteer within the S Darebin Community.

At 11, I became a volunteer at the Cameron Cricket Club, where my nana made the afternoon teas for 35 years, and my dad has played for over 46 years. In 2015, I was delighted become a Cricket Victoria Outstanding Volunteer Award Recipient as it was also an honour bestowed upon my nana in 2008, and the first time two women from the same family had received the award.

Over the journey, opportunities to take on leadership roles and gain valuable life and work skills have presented themselves as I have volunteered as President of Cameron Cricket Club, President, Secretary, Coach and Life Member of Lakeside Netball Club, a Board Member with the North Metro Cricket Association, a Director with the Victorian Women's Football League, Chairperson of the Senior Steering Committee for the Northern Cricket League Initiative and Member of the Darebin Women in Sport Network.

These skills and this broad range of involvement have allowed me to instigate the affiliation between the West Preston Lakeside Football Club and Lakeside Netball Club in 2009. After a very prosperous seven year arrangement, this relationship has now developed into an amalgamation and the formation of the West Preston Lakeside Sporting Club, a space that encourages male and female participation across a wide range of sports.

The local sporting landscape provides a plethora of opportunities for individuals and groups to support and drive the development of junior teams, women's teams, projects and events that raise social awareness and increase social inclusion.

Most recently, North Metro Cricket Association introduced a Women's Cricket Competition within our existing structure. This has allowed women and girls of all skill levels to begin to participate in a game we all love, within structured club environments, while also allowing our predominantly male clubs to continue to evolve and become inclusive sporting environments for all.

There is an incredible sense of family within a sporting club environment. These places are more than just clubrooms and facilities; they are spaces that become communities when people with a common interest congregate within them, joining together to celebrate triumphs, challenges and life in all of its often muddy, sweaty and euphoric glory. They are a tenement of the Australian cultural landscape, and I for one, wouldn't be who I am without them.

# AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE SPORT FOR ALL

I have been involved as a player and committee member with the Keon Park Tennis Club for more than 20 years. The Club is located in Reservoir, an area with a high degree of cultural diversity; while the club already had members from culturally diverse communities, five years ago we implemented programs to encourage boys and girls from migrant and refugee backgrounds to try tennis with professional coaches.

There are so many sports available in the area, and people who are newly arrived to Australia from yeither not be aware that tennis is available or else face barriers to accessing tennis such as transport, fees and costs. So Keon Park Tennis Club implemented a range of strategies, including utilising community noticeboards and attending multicultural events, to communicate with newly arrived communities and encourage people from diverse backgrounds to participate in tennis, with a particular focus on schools.

The club works hard to provide opportunities that are affordable and accessible for the community. We run a free after-school program where boys and girls can see what tennis is all about and learn from professional coaches. After the club sent flyers to local schools there was an inquiry from the Islamic School in Preston. I was very excited when we had the inquiry. We had four people join in the free after-school program and they enjoyed it so much they were planning to come again. We have found that once one person from a refugee or migrant background attends, they will tell their friends who then come along to the club and have a hit.

When someone is ready to join the junior competition the club offers free 12-month memberships, with the schools offering students a scholarship to reduce financial barriers, with assistance from Council and Tennis Victoria. Family members are encouraged to come along to club events, watch their children play in the after-school coaching is program or attend competition days. Some of the parents have even started umpiring.

The free after-school program has been running for five years, and has strong community interest, with many boys and girls going on to play competition level. One school that has a strong connection to this program is the Reservoir East Primary School. I am passionate about recognising everyone involved in getting programs like this off the ground, it truly is a team effort to keep this program running. Marcus Johnson, Sports Coordinator from Reservoir East Primary School, is dedicated to ensuring the students have the opportunity to play tennis and he is an inspiring mentor for the children. Also a valuable assistant on this program is my fellow club and committee member, Jacqui Mackertich. Jacqui is the key contact for the students, an important role as some students have taken the step from the after-school program to becoming club members and playing in the North East Junior Tennis Association, an association where Jacqui is a valuable leader.

> I see huge benefits coming from this program – boys and girls from diverse backgrounds having a great time playing tennis and being healthy and active from a young age.

### FINDING A FRESH PERSPECTIVE AND FEELING GOOD

I was never really into competitive sport growing up, so it wasn't until I discovered yoga when I was around 18 and studying art that I realised how fun and beneficial physical activity could be.

I found that yoga helped me find a fresh perspective mentally, freed me up creatively and allowed me to feel good in my body. It's not about beating someone else, or striving for an external goal, but instead, accepting who you are, and making the most of each moment – on the yoga mat, but also in life.

I feel honoured that I get to share this with other people. One of my long-term clients has used yoga and pilates to help with their everyday experience of living with multiple sclerosis. It's been amazing to see their progress, now having a range of comfortable movements, with their quality of life improving. Even on a bad day, there is always something they can do, even if it is gentle stretching or relaxation. It feels really good to be able to help someone make a positive difference in their life.

I now teach pilates, yoga and aerial yoga full time. I live in Northcote, and have a little home studio, Garden of Yoga. I also teach at gyms, schools and offices, and one of my favourite classes is part of Council's free outdoor exercise program, Get Active in Darebin.

Many women attend this class and I love that it is open to the whole community and brings a diverse range of people of all ages and backgrounds together. There is a relaxed, happy vibe to the class – being outside in nature always lifts the spirits.

A couple of years ago I discovered hula hooping, which I absolutely love! It's been a great way to tap into the creative and sparkly side of myself. I mainly practice just for fun, but sometimes perform at events and parties, where I make my own costumes and choreograph my own routines.

I've also put on parties where I've encouraged friends to get up on stage, and share their hidden talents. It's fun and silly, but also really important to have this space to express yourself creatively and physically. It's often something that kids do naturally but adults just stop doing as life gets in the way.

Part of what I try to share in my teaching is tapping back into movements that make us feel good, and that exercise can be a really enjoyable part of life, rather than a chore.

# ACHIEVING GREATER EQUITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT AND RECREATION

Are you a member of a sports club in Darebin?

Are you part of a community organisation that provides physical activity opportunities for residents of Darebin?

If so, here are a few things you can do to achieve greater equity for women and girls in sport and recreation in Darebin:

### **POSITIVE LANGUAGE**

Encouraging positive language towards everyone involved in sport and physical activity will ensure that everyone feels welcome and valued.

### **FAMILY FRIENDLY**

Fostering an environment where opportunities are provided for girls and boys and women and men will ensure you create a culture that is nurturing and enjoyable for everyone in your community.

### **RESPECT AND EQUITY**

Fostering respectful and equitable relationships between women and men will create a community that is safer, healthier, and more diverse.

### **GET INVOLVED**

Women play an integral role within all sports clubs and community programs. If you are a sports club or community organisation looking at ways to engage women and girls, or if you are female and interested in getting involved in sport or physical activity, there are a number of ways you can get involved:



COACHI







BOARD MEMBER

### **CONTACT**

For more information on how to get involved in sport and recreation in Darebin, you can get in touch with Leisure Services on 8470 8305 or leisure@darebin.vic.gov.au.

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This resource was created in partnership with the Darebin Women in Sport Network.