



Leading the Change

A partnership to promote respect, gender equality and wellbeing in the Outer East Football Netball League.

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Introduction

Creating inclusive and welcoming environments for all participants is a key driver for the Outer East Football Netball League. This program has seen significant improvement in the accessibility of sport for women in the region and has driven real change in the conversations, actions and behaviors of our clubs.

The program is a dynamic example of collaboration between a sporting body, health provider and local business that provides outstanding social and wellbeing outcomes for communities that extend well past the sporting field.



The Leading the Change initiative has provided us an opportunity to be involved in community wellbeing in such a meaningful way. Promoting respectful relationships and the supports Yarra Valley Water have for customers is an important way to strengthen our relationships with the community.

-Grace Rose-Miller, Divisional Manager of Community Inclusion at Yarra Valley Water.

Since 2017, the *Leading the Change* Partnership has been a successful partnership to promote great mental health and wellbeing, challenge violence against women, support female inclusion and enable respectful club culture in Melbourne's Outer East. From 2017 - 2020 the partnership was led by a steering group which included four key organisations: Outer East Football Netball League (Outer East), Eastern Health - Health Promotion, Yarra Valley Water and SALT (Sport and Life Training). In 2020 additional organisations were invited to the steering group, including Women's Health in the South East and Inspiro Community Health Service.

The partners of *Leading the Change* agreed to five main objectives for the *Leading the Change* Project:

- To increase the capacity of Outer East Football and Netball clubs to include women and promote respectful relationships at all times in club culture and decision making.
- To increase the awareness of Outer East club members of community health services that are accessible to men, women and children, including family violence services and the Watercare support provided by Yarra Valley Water (<https://www.yvw.com.au/help-advice/help-my-account/financial-help>).
- To encourage help-seeking behaviour and acknowledgement of the priority mental health and wellbeing concerns of the community including family violence, suicide prevention and harm from alcohol and other drug use.
- To engage with both men and women in separate events with existing teams, that will promote safe disclosure and prompt discussion of relationships and gender based issues within club culture.



Rob Morgan, Sameera Abdeen & Samantha Leong (Yarra Valley Water), Michelle Fleming (Eastern Health), Aaron Bailey (Outer East), David Mitton (SALT), Carissa Rash (SALT), Aladdin Jones & Josette O'Donnell (Eastern Health).

Why *Leading the Change*?

Sporting settings are complex environments which, although essential places to support physical activity, are also sites within the community where stigma and harmful social norms around mental health and gender inequality can be reinforced. At the time of the partnership higher rates of family violence were observed in the Yarra Ranges relative to other Local Government areas in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. The sporting community of the Outer East is one of the largest sporting communities in this region with 35 football and netball clubs.

The *Our Watch Guide to Putting Prevention of Violence Against Women into practice* (2017) identifies the major reasons why Health Promotion should continue to work with sporting settings to prevent violence against women (p.85):

- *Sport and leisure spaces bring people together across the community and have the opportunity to involve a diverse range of individuals, groups and communities across Australia. They are important spaces for socialising and have a powerful influence on gender norms and relations.*
- *Gender segregation and gender stereotyping occurs in many sporting and recreation environments. This may indirectly contribute to sexist attitudes and disrespect towards women. Addressing this segregation and promoting collaboration between males and females is a good opportunity for partnership.*
- *Engaging men and boys in prevention initiatives can be a focus in this setting, however women’s participation is also crucial. This helps to ensure that the prevention strategy does not cause further harm or indirectly reinforce unequal gender norms.*
- *Addressing reinforcing factors, such as condoning of violence in general and harmful use of alcohol is also possible in a sports setting.*
- *It is important that sport, which has such a big influence on our society, uses this influence to advocate for respect, gender equality, inclusion and non-violence on and off the field.*
- *Positive elements and values within sport, such as participation and “fair play” have been extended to the promotion of respectful relationships, gender equality, inclusion and non-violence by various partnerships between sport and community organisations.*

What did *Leading the Change* involve?

The *Leading the Change* program was a multi-strategy initiative, focusing on face to face education, club support, clear health messaging from the leadership of the league and promotion of local and available support services. In the first year of the program, select clubs that were identified as priorities by the league, were offered a package of 4 sessions, provided by SALT on the topics of mental Health and wellbeing, healthy relationships (Crossing the Line) and gender equality (including challenging sexism and promoting bystander action). The first year trialled an approach whereby sessions were delivered to separate genders within the club (e.g. female and male sessions delivered separately) so that the messages could be tailored to both the sporting club culture (netball, vs. women’s football, vs. men’s football) and also enable meaningful conversations between players in existing teams to take place. Follow up evaluation interviews were undertaken with club representatives, as well as the collation of overall mobile quiz data to form a picture of the effectiveness of the sessions. The first evaluation report showed promising results with evidence of the program having instigated respectful and inclusive behaviours demonstrated in some of the participating clubs.

The second year of the program saw an expansion of the number of strategies implemented – including social marketing (#ExpectRespect campaign) an awards process (the #ExpectRespect awards) funded by the Bendigo

Bank and the delivery of *Getting Girls In* workshops to clubs to encourage and enable female participation. The *Leading the Change* program package (of 4 SALT sessions) was opened to any club within the league. The most progressive clubs in which wellbeing is at the forefront the committee's priorities quickly volunteered to participate in the program. The Health Promotion team also engaged with clubs at a one-on-one level with the support of the Outer East Female Participation Coordinator, to engage club presidents in preliminary conversations about their support for female football. Eastern Health supported the Outer East to develop a set of wellbeing links from their website across a number of different health topics.

2020 was a challenging year for all of our community during the COVID-19 pandemic with the eventual decision to postpone the 2020 season. Despite the fact that the competition could not be played the *Leading the Change* Partnership provided wellbeing check-ins via phone at two points during the year. SALT adapted their services to provide online Reconnect and Re-Emerge sessions to clubs and all clubs were encouraged to support and connect with each other during this time to maintain both physical activity and social cohesion. Emerging from the 2020 pandemic, the Outer East has continued a focus on mental health in 2021 with the introduction of Mental Health First Aid Training for representatives from all clubs in the league.



What's in a SALT session?

Sport and Life Training <http://www.sportandlifetraining.com.au>

SALT Sport and Life Training is a not-for-profit health promotion organisation. SALT's vision is to transform Australian culture through sport. In SALT's first five years, they have delivered over 1800 sessions and positively impacted 36000 people. There are remarkable strengths that sport's people display including courage, sacrifice, commitment, good decision making under pressure, strong communication and more. SALT aims to create positive, interactive education programs that will drive clubs to become as strong off the field as they are on it.

Mental Health and Wellbeing – Men's and Women's sessions

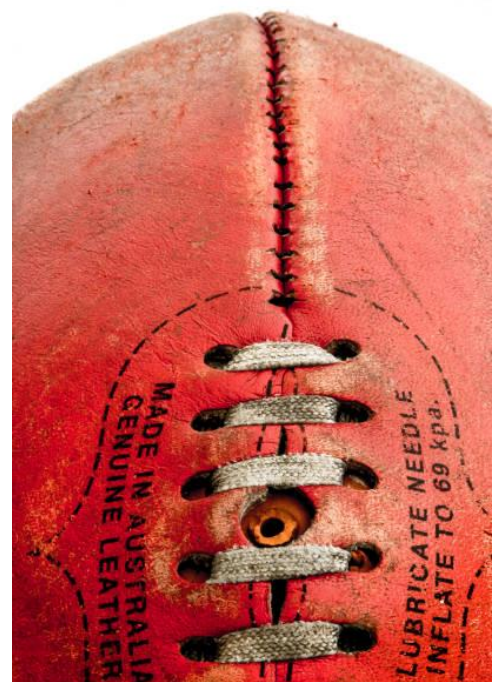
The Mental Health and Wellbeing session unpacks the stigma our community has around mental health by sharing its prevalence in our community and showcasing stories of elite athletes who have publically embraced and spoken about their challenges. The confidential mobile quiz enables the group to develop a shared understanding of the lived experience of mental health and wellbeing concerns in the room, inviting those that are comfortable to share their experiences. The group is invited to discuss and decide how they can collectively support each other's mental health and wellbeing, through checking in with each other, seeking support and ensuring that they will bring the best of themselves to the club "off the field" as well as "on the field". The sessions are delivered to separate teams in the club, e.g. the netballers and the footballers.

Crossing the Line – Women's session

SALT developed this session by request of Eastern Health to increase awareness of the features of healthy and unhealthy relationships, increase understanding of the prevalence of family violence and intimate partner abuse and to strengthen women in clubs through an awareness of the need for continued efforts for gender equality in our country and across the globe. The group is invited to share an experience of an unhealthy relationship, if they are comfortable and through the use of the confidential mobile quiz they are facilitated to recognise the prevalence of experience with abusive relationship amongst their playing group. The players also discuss what they would do, how to effectively offer support, what supports are available and to increase awareness of the times when the risk of family violence escalates, such as leaving a partner.

Equality is the Game – Men's session

The Equality is the Game session was designed to specifically challenge condoning of violence against women, inviting a deep reflection on whether or not condoning or permitting sexist attitudes and behaviours, was reflective of the kind of club culture male sporting teams want to have. The session increases awareness of the prevalence of violence against women, gender equality as the driver of violence against women and "unhealthy" or traditional masculinities as the vehicle by which this continues to be propagated in our community environments. The confidential mobile quiz invites disclosure of past use of one of the forms of violence (emotional, spiritual, sexual, financial and/or physical) or knowledge of others (e.g. friends, family) that have used this violence. This disclosure promotes with absolute clarity the reality of the issue in the room. The sessions can at times be uncomfortable as they challenge the social norms within a club, provocatively encouraging all male teams to be the best team they can be with a focus on supporting respect and equality with women.



Timeline

Time-point	Key development
2017 (July)	<i>Be the Change</i> Forum – This forum engaged over 180 club representatives across the Eastern Region from the Outer East and Eastern Football Netball League. The forum promoted respect, inclusion, gender equality and inclusive clubs. The forum was a finalist in the Vic Health awards for that year.
2017 (November)	Partners from the <i>Be the Change</i> Project – Eastern Health, Health Promotion, SALT and Outer East commenced discussions about building an initiative to support clubs at a one to one level (35 clubs) in the region.
2018	SALT developed two new packages for delivery to promote gender equality and the <i>Leading the Change</i> Project Steering Group was formed. Eastern Health and Yarra Valley Water come on board as major funders of the first year of the program.
2018 (May – August)	A project launch with key club representatives was held at Woori Yallock Football Netball Club at the start of the 2018 season... 26 sessions were rolled out in the Outer East, with a focus on the Yarra Valley area. Nine clubs participate. SALT collated mobile quiz data for the project evaluation. Eastern Health undertook qualitative interviews with each club to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The results are promising.
2018 – 16 days of activism	Three media articles on the outcomes of the project are published in the Mountain Views Mail newspaper, Lilydale Leader and Outer East website. Two radio interviews are broadcast about the project at Yarra Valley FM and Eastern FM.
2019	AFL Yarra Ranges becomes the AFL Outer East (35 clubs).
2019 (Jan)	The <i>Leading the Change</i> partners renew their commitment to the program. The model is promoted at the season launch. Attitudes towards gender equality are tested at the season launch with 300 club representatives using a mobile quiz. The second year of the program is launched.
2019 (March)	A new page of wellbeing links is set up on the AFL Outer East page to direct clubs to more support.
2019 (Feb – July)	The second year of <i>Leading the Change</i> is rolled out. 11 clubs participate in the sessions. 41 SALT sessions are rolled out in the AFL Outer East. Approximately 1000 participants experience the program.
2019 (June)	Eastern Health works with the Outer East Female Participation Coordinator to trial and deliver the first <i>Getting Girls In</i> workshop, to support clubs to drive female participation in football. 19 club representatives from 10 clubs attended the workshop. 100% of evaluation survey respondents reported an increase in awareness and confidence to create environments that encourage girls and women’s participation.
2019 (July – August)	Outer East communications pilot a new awards program and campaign on social media: #ExpectRespect. There were six posts during the #ExpectRespect social media campaign that promoted respectful relationships in the league with two videos of community members promoting respect and an average of 3500 views per post.
2019 (Nov – Dec)	Eastern Health Health Promotion evaluates the effectiveness of the program. SALT provides collated mobile quiz data. 6 clubs interviewed report an increase in understanding and awareness of family violence. 6 clubs report an increase in bystander action to address sexism or respect towards women at the club after the sessions. 6 clubs cite examples of bystander action to promote respectful relationships. 100 men

	participated in the <i>Equality is the Game</i> session across 9 clubs. 8 clubs reported an increased awareness of mental health. 7 clubs reported an incidence where players or club representatives had sought further professional help after the sessions.
2019 (Oct – Dec)	# <i>Our Shout</i> project developed in response to alcohol and other drug concerns raised by 4 clubs in the 2019 <i>Leading the Change</i> evaluation interviews. Project is focused on promoting low risk drinking environments in sporting clubs, using the Alcohol Cultures Framework (Vic Health) and the SALT model of authentic club discussion, in partnership with the Yarra Ranges Drug Action Team and Turning Point.
2019 (Oct – Nov)	Eastern Health support Outer East to apply for a <i>Change Our Game</i> Grant to support women’s participation across the league.
2020	<i>Leading the Change</i> Partners intend to roll out Year 3 of the program. New partners invited – Inspiro and Women’s Health East. Consultation with councils involved in the region. March 2020 – COVID-19 pandemic commences. Lock down introduced hence the 2020 season is postponed.
2020 (July and November)	Eastern Health coordinate 2 x Wellbeing check ins with every club (Junior and Senior) to encourage clubs to stay connected, promote individual training and ensure that clubs are aware of supports for mental health during this time.
2020 (October – November)	Outer East and Eastern Heath establish a new Women’s Advisory Group. Group delivers two online forums during the pandemic, to promote and encourage aspirational leadership and gender equality in the league. Special guest – Lisa Alexander. 58 women participate in the program.

The following clubs participated in the *Leading the Change* program between 2018 and 2019. Overall, 18 senior football and netball clubs and the Yarra Ranges Umpires have participated.

- Upwey Tecoma FNC
- Cockatoo –Gembrook FNC
- Yarra Junction FNC
- Warburton FNC
- Mt Evelyn FNC
- Yarra Glen FNC
- Healesville FNC
- Belgrave FNC
- Olinda Ferny Creek FNC
- Narre Warren FNC
- Yea FNC
- Pakenham FNC
- Emerald FNC
- Gembrook FNC
- Woori Yallock FNC
- Wandin FNC
- Seville FNC
- Powelltown FNC
- Yarra Ranges Umpires



Leading the Change Program Evaluation

Health Promotion coordinated the evaluation of the *Leading the Change* Program from 2018 – 2020. In 2018, a comprehensive online survey assessing pre and post program impacts, with a control and comparison group, was used to assess the impact. However limited survey responses revealed that this was not a suitable or acceptable measure for program evaluation. Evaluation interviews, approximately 3 – 6 months after the club had experienced the 4 sessions proved to be an effective means to assess the on-going impacts of the sessions on the club culture. The mobile quiz data collected by SALT was collated across the league. In 2019, over 1000 people participated in the sessions and mobile quiz results were obtained from 763 participants. The mobile quiz results are a subjective assessment (by participants) and there are limitations with the approach (including limitations of mobile phone service and accessibility in more remote locations). However the results did provide indicative figures, which could enable meaningful conversations both at the individual club level as well as across the league:

- Women’s Mental Health session (300 participant responses) - In summary, 32.30% reported that they are currently living with a mental health issue. 21% of respondents said they had experienced a mental health issue in the past, 34.4% know someone that has experienced a mental health issue and 11% said they suspected that they may be experiencing a mental health issue but they are unsure.
- Women’s Crossing the Line Session (122 participant responses). In summary, 31.4% of respondents had experienced an abusive relationship and 51.7% knew of someone who had experienced an abusive relationship.
- Men’s Mental Health and Wellbeing session (270 participant response). In summary, 8.9% reported that they are currently living with a mental health issue. 28% of respondents reported having a mental health issue in the past, 51% reported that they know someone who has experienced an issue and 10% reported that they suspect they currently may have a mental health issue but they are unsure.
- Men’s Equality is the Game Session (101 participant response). In summary, 47.5% of respondents said that they knew of someone who had been abusive towards a woman. 80% of respondents reported that they would feel confident to pull up a mate who makes a derogatory comment about a woman and a further 89% reported that they would feel confident to intervene if they saw a woman being harassed or abused. However only 45% reported that they had actually intervened before when they saw a woman being harassed or abused.

Qualitative feedback – Evaluation interviews and surveys with club committee representatives in 2019

Qualitative feedback was sought from all clubs that participated via a request for an evaluation interview. Interviews were conducted with small groups of program participants including a committee member, male and female players (that could be coach or supportive committee member) who had attended at least one SALT session. These interviews were undertaken between 3 – 6 months after the program delivery. Health Promotion sent a survey monkey with several questions to the remaining clubs who chose not to participate in an evaluation interview. Feedback via one of these two methods was received from 10 out of 11 clubs.

Health Promotion analysed the feedback from the clubs, by grouping quotes from the interviews according to the impact seen under the project themes. Table 1 below illustrates the category themes, the proportion of clubs that demonstrated this change through the interview and some example quotes.

Table 1: Evaluation results from interviews and online survey from 2019 – *Leading the Change* program.

Category	No. of clubs	% (out of 11)	Example quote from the interviews/ or email survey
Increased awareness/understanding of mental health issues	8	73%	<p><i>A few blokes admitted they were struggling, it's helped the group since hearing what they are going through" (male player).</i></p> <p><i>[What stood out for you?] The number of young ladies who suffer in silence at the club or have members in their family who suffer in silence (club secretary).</i></p>
Increased awareness/understanding of family violence	6	55%	<p><i>The message to keep reiterating is that it's not okay, we need to stand up (female player).</i></p>
Sharing/disclosure of mental health issue (not previously known)	9	82%	<p><i>A few girls started opening up and once they did it really brought the room closer (female coach).</i></p> <p><i>Some boys shared things - I had a tear in my eye (President).</i></p>
Sharing/disclosure of family violence issue (not previously known)	4	36%	<p><i>People shared their stories, it wasn't sugar coated (female player).</i></p>
Post session incidence of help seeking behaviour	7	64%	<p><i>I'd been begging my son to see a counsellor and [the SALT session] finally got him over the line.</i></p> <p><i>I'm aware that [the players] are keeping the conversation going. We tracked that about 1/3 of our [players] have [mental health] issues, it surprised me how many did have issues as they are such a happy bunch. After the session a couple of other guys got on their messenger group and shared what was actually going on.</i></p> <p><i>After the first SALT session, the coach supported a player to have a GP appointment to follow up on her mental health concern [interviewer note].</i></p>
Post session incidence of bystander action to promote respectful relationships, support female participation and/or female inclusion.	5	45%	<p><i>It instigated a conversation between men and women of different ages which led to exchange of ideas and opinions (Male president).</i></p>
Post session incidence of bystander action that challenges sexism or disrespect towards women.	5	45%	<p><i>Some of the blokes have been encouraged to make better choices (Male president)</i></p> <p><i>The club is going out of its way to ensure now that there are people of better character on board (Male president).</i></p>

Positive support shown for the need for respectful behaviours within the club – on and off the field.	6	55%	<i>The group did not identify any poor behaviours between men and women in their group. However, we had a discussion about the behaviour they see off the field, comparing how things have been in the past to how they are now. Their general consensus was that as you go down in divisions the behaviour tends to be worse. One team was identified as the “stand out” for enabling poor spectator behaviour in the competition [Interviewer notes].</i>
Positive support shown for more health and wellbeing education and/or support at the club.	9	82%	<i>We need to find ways to keep the discussion going, so that people know they can still reach out, it's got to become part of the club DNA, it would be good to have another SALT session, to keep this thing going, keep the momentum going (club committee member).</i> <i>We need more health and wellbeing information in more prominent places around the club - e.g. in toilets (club coach).</i>
Positive reflection on the existing strengths of the club.	7	64%	<i>We are a good group...on equality; it did reinforce that we are a [good] group in this space.</i> <i>For our team (The SALT sessions) opened our eyes up about what we wanted as a team, our values.</i>

Discussion – What have we learned from *Leading the Change*?

A comprehensive, multi-pronged approach

The delivery of *Leading the Change* in 2019, including the #Expect Respect campaign and support for *Getting Girls In*, reinforced the commitment the league has to ensure that clubs are welcoming and respectful places where wellbeing is a priority. This would not have been possible without the leadership, endorsement and enablement of the Outer East Region General Manager. The Outer East commission has also shown their commitment to gender equality, health and wellbeing and creating positive club environments through their participation and development of the new program #Our Shout (focused on increasing club and player responsibility for reducing harm from alcohol or other drugs in their club culture) and the recently established Women’s Advisory Group.

Overwhelmingly clubs that participated in *Leading the Change* reported long term changes (e.g. more than 3 months after the session delivery) in help seeking behaviour, players expressing feeling more supported or connected to each other and an increased orientation in the club towards wellbeing and wellbeing support. Participants who were interviewed were not always aware of local health and wellbeing supports, despite the promotion of these services during the program and on the Outer East website.

More support is needed for health and wellbeing at sporting clubs.

Many interviewees showed a deep reflection on the impact of the program on their sense of health and wellbeing at their club.

It's not just about football above all things; we play better when we're better connected (Female player).

Player wellbeing is not a one person job - we have (over 150) players .We need a pastoral care/ wellbeing role who knows who to contact. They might have a teaching or nursing back ground (Club committee member).

Our senior coach is a wellness champion, it would be good to have wellbeing cards and information and discreet resources available (President).

One girl - she is a different person now in the club since that day, she felt closer to everyone in the room- (Coach).

Engaging men in challenging the condoning of violence against women in sporting settings

The delivery of the *Equality is the Game* session in 2019 trialled a more intense approach to engagement with men on this topic with the use of an interactive quiz that specifically asked men about their past and current use of abusive behaviours. Health Promotion sought advice from Associate Professor Michael Flood about the use of the quiz and identifying the potential risks. Strategies were developed to respond in the case of a disclosure of the use of violence. The session did produce some resistance in at least two clubs. The learnings from delivering this work have since been incorporated into a new guide *Engaging Men: Reducing Resistance and Building Support* (https://www.easternhealth.org.au/images/Engaging_Men- Reducing_Resistance_and_Building_Support_final.pdf).

The *Our Watch - Men in Focus* (2019) evidence review, recommended utilising social and emotional “levers” to increase the acceptability and enable conversations that challenge men’s treatment of women to take place. *Leading the Change* effectively tested this approach through a 2 session model, whereby the initial session focused on mental health and challenging traditional forms of Australian masculinities as outlined in *The Man Box* research (The Men’s Project & Flood. M.,2018). The second session took this a step further, informing male participants of the reality of violence against women in Australia and bringing the participants on a journey to reflecting on how their club and the attitudes and practices within it could be reinforcing gender stereotypes and sexism. The *Crossing the Line* session provided to women, focused on increasing women’s understanding of healthy versus unhealthy relationships and increasing women’s understanding of the support services available. Several representatives interviewed shared the impact that this session had had on increasing awareness of behaviours that were in their existing relationships as constituting abuse.

The players are pretty good. We had to keep pushing the "old men" last year: that women are not different. We created a joint player page for all our men and women, every time we have a function. The buy-in for the women to help out has been amazing (for the club) (Coach).

Our club needs discipline, like children. In some clubs it's like "it's us against the world", in our club it's like "the men against the world, the girls are second" whereas it should be "all of us are against the world. [Instead] The number ones (senior male footballers) take all." (Female player).

Engaging men in sessions focused on promoting healthier masculinities and supporting respect generally requires more than one session to increase its effectiveness [Flood, M, personal communication, Shane Tas, personal communication]. The structure of two sessions to engage men in *Leading the Change* could therefore be seen as the bare minimum in our approach. However the interviews suggested that ongoing interventions are required. The mobile quiz did enable the reality of the use of violence to become present in the room: as the SALT quiz results show, just under half of all participants knew of someone who had used violence. The bystander quiz questions enabled a deeper reflection on men's willingness to act in the face of sexism or violence. Encouraging men to be active bystanders in all male peer contexts is a vital strategy to challenging condoning of violence (Our Watch, 2017).

The need for ongoing conversations about gender equality and respect is still paramount in the league. Some interviewees reported their acceptance and promotion of traditional gender stereotypes:

*The women do the canteen and the men do the barbecue. That's just how it is.
(Female committee member).*

*It needs to be a continuing thing, not just a token thing - that girls are here.
(Female player).*

*This club is made up of a lot of locals. Although there are mature people at the club, many of the men are in their late teens/early twenties (compared to other clubs). They have a lot of attitude.
(Female committee member).*

Challenging gender stereotypes more deeply can also be encouraged through the promotion and facilitation of male netball at the junior and the senior level. One participant from a female netball team, when asked about the respect and relationships between men and women at their club, reflected that:

*We as a club are very committed to ensuring our young boy players and our male coaches are supported –
(Female netball player and coach).*

Leading the Change – 2021 and beyond

At the time of writing, the Outer East continues to adopt a constructive approach to working with stakeholders that promote health and wellbeing within the three municipal areas covered in the football and netball competition. The Women's Advisory Group is drafting the first Gender Equality Policy for the league and a roll out of Mental Health First Aid Training representatives from every club is planned for 2021, in response to the heightened mental health concerns from the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the *Leading the Change* Program demonstrates the multi-component strategy that a sporting league can undertake to promote mental health and wellbeing, support seeking, promote respectful relationships, challenge violence against women and intensively promote the inclusion of females in previously male dominated sports such as football. An effective partnership for this work includes health services, league administration and management and skilful engagement by educators that can engage meaningful with our sporting community.

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