



Case Study

Manawatū Cricket Association's Success in Fostering Women and Girls' Participation

Background:

Manawatū Cricket Association (MCA) recognised the need to create more inclusive and accessible pathways for female participants in cricket. Historically, girls have been part of the cricket community, but they lacked dedicated programmes, teams, and clear pathways for participation. Addressing these gaps became a focal point for MCA, leading to the development of initiatives to empower women and girls in cricket.

Objectives and Initiatives:

- MCA Girls Club: A cornerstone initiative designed to provide a specific space for girls to play cricket together, offering a clear pathway from initial engagement to participation in hardball competitions. This initiative aimed to address the feeling of exclusion experienced by girls in mixed-gender teams.
- Collaboration with New Zealand Cricket (NZC): Partnering with NZC's Yeah! Girls Programme allowed MCA to introduce cricket in schools, providing opportunities for girls who traditionally didn't participate in the sport to give it a try.

Barriers Identified:

MCA identified several barriers that inhibit female participation in cricket, these barriers include the perception of cricket as a traditionally male-dominated sport, issues related to uniforms (such as the anxiety of wearing white pants during menstruation), financial constraints, and time commitments—Many of these barriers are shared with all community sports.

Successes and Recognition:

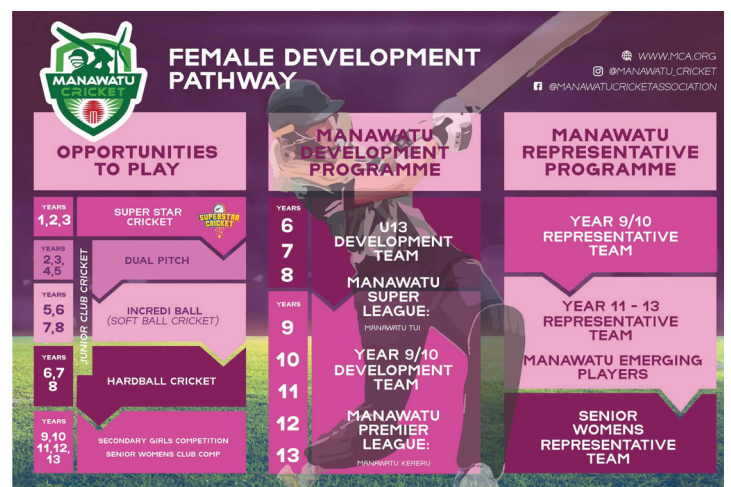
- Ministry of Women Funding: MCA successfully secured funding from the Ministry of Women to provide black/dark playing pants for junior cricketers, eliminating the anxiety and barriers associated with traditional white pants.
- NZC Award for Best Female Initiative: The MCA Girls Club received recognition from New Zealand Cricket for being the Best Female Initiative. The club, which started as an idea eight years ago, has evolved into a comprehensive platform for female cricketers, offering a safe and structured pathway for growth within the sport.

MCA shared insights and recommendations for other sports clubs and organisations that aim to increase female participation:

- Engage directly with athletes and parents to uncover and address barriers that might not be immediately evident.
- Consider separating genders during certain activities or programmes to provide a more comfortable and expressive environment for girls trying out new sports.
- Encourage a culture of experimentation, embracing the possibility of failures in new initiatives, and leveraging them as learning opportunities for growth and improvement.

Conclusion:

Manawatū Cricket Association's dedication to fostering inclusivity and providing a safe and engaging space for female cricketers has been met with well-deserved recognition and success. Their initiatives, proactive approach to dismantling barriers, and continuous evolution serve as an inspiration for other sports organisations striving to enhance women and girls' involvement in sports.



Interview with Manawatū Cricket Association on Fostering Women and Girls' Participation

Manawatū Cricket Association is a regional sport organisation leading the way in growing participation for women and girls by creating inclusive environments. Sport Manawatū sat down with the MCA team to understand how far they have come within this space.

Why did Manawatū Cricket decide to focus on the Women and Girls space?

We always had girls playing cricket in the region, but we didn't always have clear programmes, teams and pathways for them to participate. We were often met with questions such as "What schools have girls' teams?" or "What programmes do you have for girls?". These were all previously combined with boys. Our focus turned to explore ways in which we could provide safe and enjoyable environments for girls to thrive in our game. This led to the introduction of the MCA Girls Club and a full-time role as a Female Development Officer dedicated to the growing participation in the Female and Girls space

What initiatives have you started to support this space and what impact is this having?

MCA Girls Club is definitely the major one here. Girls Club created opportunities for girls to play with girls rather than being scattered around boys' teams which often left them feeling left out. It also created a clear pathway for them right from picking up a cricket bat through to participating in hard ball competitions. NZC also jumped on board with their Yeah! Girls Programme, which we run in schools to give girls who traditionally don't play cricket the chance to try it out.

What are some of the barriers that women and girls face to participate in Cricket?

Perception that it is a boy's sport, uniforms, cost, time and many other barriers we fight daily in community sport!

You were recently successful in receiving funding from the Ministry of Women as well as winning the best female initiative award at the NZC Awards. Tell us more on how you received both well-deserved recognition.

We applied for the Ministry of Women for funding for black/dark playing pants for all of our junior cricketers. One of the barriers in women and girls' cricket is the traditional white pants uniform worn. We had heard stories of girls within our cricketing community who wouldn't participate in parts of games due to the anxiety of their period leaking in white pants and even girls not turning up to games at all due to the same reason. So, applying for the fund was a no brainer for us and an easy barrier to tear down.

We also received an award from NZC for Best Female Initiative for our MCA Girls Club. This concept was born eight years ago and has grown into a one stop shop in girls' cricket in Manawatū. As previously mentioned, it creates a safe, engaging environment for our female cricketers with a clear pathway through the grades. Countless hours of volunteer work went into this by a range of passionate parents, coaches and administrators and it is a programme we are very proud of today.

Any advice you would provide other sports, clubs, activities, etc to get more women and girls active?

As previously mentioned, I think Manawatū codes are doing a great job of engaging female athletes but here are a few learnings from MCA:

- Engage with the athletes and parents. Sometimes barriers exist that we don't know about because we aren't asking the right questions.
- Don't be afraid to separate genders in school visits. We have found this a powerful tool to engage better with the girls as they express themselves more when the boys aren't around when they are trying something new.
- Try new things constantly! We've had some failures over the years in this space but have tweaked and tried again. New initiatives don't always land and that's fine as long as we take the learnings from them.

A big thank you to the team at Manawatū Cricket Association for the amazing work they do in our community!

