

COACHING UNLIMITED NETBALL COACHING WORKSHOPS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN

Social Change

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Coaching Unlimited is an innovative, strengths-based coach education and health promotion program that aims to improve educational, social and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our netball workshops empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with recognised coaching accreditations and health promotion skills to build individual and community capacity. Coaching Unlimited workshops commenced in 2017 and were designed in collaboration with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Netball Australia and Netball NSW - the national and state peak bodies for netball. To ensure the success of the workshops, and to inform learnings for future workshops, a mixed method study was conducted to evaluate the workshop and its impact on the coaches who attended.

What is the purpose of the project?

Coaching Unlimited is a national coach education programme that provides research-led educational workshops to develop knowledge and skills in meaningful areas such as nutrition, leadership, mentoring, health promotion, and

cultural connectedness. The specific objectives of Coaching Unlimited are to:

- Provide educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander coaches to support their capacity as future leaders within and beyond their communities
- Deliver formal coaching qualifications to broaden career opportunities.
- Equip coaches with health promotion skills that will be reinvested within their communities.
- Bring people together to develop coaching and broader support networks for mentorship, career progression and community connectedness.
- Showcase the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who present at the workshop.

What were the enablers that proved successful in your project?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander coaches can contribute significantly towards athletes' cultural wellbeing by developing strong ties between sport and culture. However, there is a marked absence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in formalised sport coaching roles at all levels of Australian sport. Nowhere is this more evident than the high performance context and for women in coaching. Female sporting role models like coaches are known to increase women's participation in sport, while also enhancing self-respect and a sense of belonging. Yet, few opportunities to gain coaching accreditation in culturally safe contexts means that Indigenous women continue to miss out. There is a need for more dedicated female-led, culturally safe, and community-based sporting opportunities for Indigenous women.

The Coaching Unlimited program was designed to address this gap, with the aim of specifically creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to gain coaching accreditation and progress up the coaching pathway in a culturally safe, inclusive, and enjoyable learning environment. We do this through the following approach:

- First, we establish formal relationships with Indigenous-led sport clubs (e.g., Airids Lyrebirds Netball), sporting organisations (Netball NSW), local Aboriginal health agencies (South West Sydney Aboriginal Health), and highly credentialed Indigenous and non-Indigenous workshop presenters to successfully design and deliver CU workshops.
- We begin each workshop with a Welcome To Country delivered by an Elder - an important welcoming ceremony in Australia's First Peoples' culture - set the tone for a positive and safe environment.
- Next, we engage an Aboriginal netball player/coach to complete the first presentation of the day before commencing the formal coach education process
- Finally, we include presentations from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or organisations throughout the day

What impact did your project have?

Using Ngaa-bi-nya (Williams, 2018) - an Aboriginal health and social programme evaluation framework - Coaching Unlimited were able to confirm the importance of co-creating and delivering the netball coaching workshops in culturally safe and inclusive environment. Data collected from the post-workshop survey and follow up interview (one month after the workshop) indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women perceived the Coaching Unlimited workshops to be enjoyable and well delivered; included useful information, skills, and resources; and provided coaches with practical ideas for future coaching and leadership roles within their communities. In sum, the female coaches either agreed or strongly agreed that Coaching Unlimited workshops:

- Included useful resources
- Increased their interest in, and understanding of, the workshop topics
- Enhanced their ability to implement strategies relating to the workshop
- Were delivered in a culturally safe manner

As such, the Coaching Unlimited program provides sports administrators and organisations with a successful template for delivering coaching accreditation for First Nations women. Our work has since been replicated into other Indigenous sport coaching programs, such as the National Rugby League's Indigenous Coaching Conference.

What were the outcomes for women?

- Hosting the workshops in and with community was central to the programme's accessibility and success, and encouraged intergenerational connections between mothers and their daughters.
- Since 2017, we have accredited more than 70 coaches at a variety of levels, of which more than 50 are women, thereby increasing leadership depth and diversity in sport
- We have also provided a platform to share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories of success with the broader community, while also positively influencing the policies and practices of clubs/associations, making them more inclusive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander umpires, athletes, and their parents.
- We have initiated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's coaching and mentoring networks, encouraging idea sharing and support to minimise feelings of isolation.
- Although hampered recently by COVID, we have empowered women through sport coaching accreditation to continue to shape their communities in positive ways, by creating opportunities and developing coaching skills for the benefit of local communities.

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