



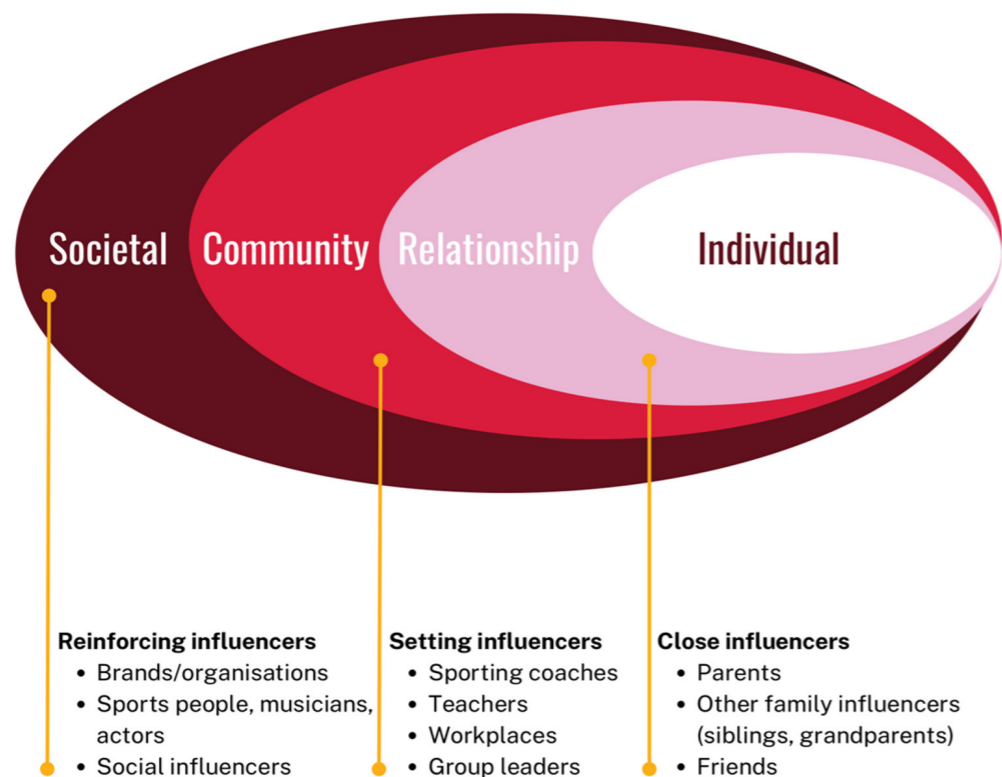
PLAY HER WAY YEAR 1 IN ACTION

Highlights Report 2025

INTRODUCTION



**She Belongs
She Plays
She Wins**



Socio-Ecological Model

It's been an incredible first year of the *Play Her Way* strategy. We've built upon the success and learnings of the four-year *Her Sport Her Way* strategy, reaching new heights by applying a contemporary lens and with a key focus on adolescent girls.

The sporting landscape is very different to where it was five years ago. Women's sport is now the biggest growth area in sport. We've got more women in leadership and more female coaches. Fans are filling the stands. At the centre of this movement are our female athletes who are the culture-shifting heavyweights of the modern era. They're connecting with audiences like never before.

Women's sport is charging ahead as a powerful force for cultural change. And *Play Her Way* is seizing this opportunity to have a positive impact on young women so they can see themselves not only playing, but leading and having a career in sport.

Play Her Way is centred around three key pillars: She Belongs, She Plays and She Wins. Our approach is to listen, to gather information and to engage our audiences in creative ways.

Guided by the Socio-Ecological Model, *Play Her Way* places women and girls at the centre of a system-wide approach, delivering projects across the entire sports ecosystem to drive meaningful, long-term change and expand opportunities for girls and women.

This year we launched the Teenage Advisory Council (TAC), appointing eight bold, smart young women who are providing honest feedback on the *Play Her Way* Strategy, co-designing new initiatives and sharing ideas to engage and retain girls in all aspects of sport – from participation to leadership. The TAC is flipping the script by letting young women control their destiny and determine how they play and stay involved in sport.

- We also held seven focus groups across Sydney and regional NSW, to hear from 38 women aged 16–33 about their career aspirations, opportunities and barriers facing young women in the sport sector.
- And 5,000 surveys have been completed about female runner safety, both online and at the Nike After Dark tour, Sydney Marathon and five other running events including regional events in Lovedale, Newcastle and Huskisson.

The insights gained are directly informing the *Play Her Way* strategy, amplifying female voices and tackling systemic barriers.

Through listening, rapid reviews and deep dives, we're staying ahead of the curve and creating impactful solutions to issues women are facing and designing initiatives that will resonate and allow women to thrive.

We're also changing the system with intention. By setting targets for gender equality in sport, we've increased gender diversity on State Sporting Organisation boards, with 63 of 96 funded boards meeting the target of at least 40% female representation as of December 2025.

And we're working smartly with our partners to create maximum impact. From the Safer Cities partnership with Transport for NSW to improve safety for female runners, to our partnership with the University of Newcastle to develop evidence-based approaches to increase teenage girls' engagement in sport.

Looking forward to 2026, we're launching, in partnership with Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport (DCITHS) agencies, *Stadia to Street* – a fashion-led movement designed to amplify the influence of women's sport beyond the field.

In year one of the *Play Her Way* strategy, we set out to place women and girls at the centre of a system-wide approach across the three pillars – and we've done just that! We've been laser-focused on asking the tough, important questions, listening to women and gathering evidence and data. We've broken down barriers by working with key influencers to make institutional change and launched creative initiatives which are already reaping results.

Play Her Way is creating the conditions for women and girls across NSW to participate, lead, and thrive in sport – ensuring the next generation can truly play their way. We can't wait for 2026!

To round out the work in 2025, the *Play Her Way* Strategy team was recognised in the 2025 Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Staff Excellence Awards. We are overjoyed that our creative and sometimes non-conventional approach has been recognised in the Staff Excellence Awards. We love helping the girls and women of NSW shine and this award is testament to the power of listening to female voices across the State.



Play Her Way Strategy team at the 2025 Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Staff Excellence Awards.

CORE INITIATIVES OF PLAY HER WAY IN 2025

YEAR 1 HIGHLIGHTS

TEENAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

To shape the future of sport for girls



TAC SELECTED IN-PERSON MEETINGS AND ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

TAC providing advice on careers, barriers and campaigns

CAREERS FOR GIRLS IN SPORT SUMMIT

To ignite ambition, create pathways and champion diverse careers

150 DELEGATES

Education, sport & tertiary sectors



RUN MY WAY

Transport for NSW Partnership \$1.3m over 3 yrs



5,000+ SURVEYS

On women runner safety including Nike After Dark tour

PARTNER PROJECTS

- Football NSW Evolve Academy Confidence, resilience positive body image program for 14-18 yrs
- Newcastle University developing evidence-based approaches to engage teen girls in sport



GENDER EQUITY ON BOARDS

Requirements introduced for SSOs for 1st time in NSW

TARGET >40%



69 / 96

Funded SSO boards meeting the target (December 2025)

Run My Way

Running should be about freedom, health and empowerment.

Yet for many women, girls and gender diverse people, this freedom is often constrained by fear, harassment and perceived safety risks. These concerns are most pronounced in public spaces and during early or late hours.

Run My Way is a multi-year Safer Cities program delivered in collaboration with Transport for NSW. The initiative aims to increase women's, girls' and gender diverse people's active and meaningful participation in running by creating safer, more inclusive environments across NSW.

Running is one of the most popular and accessible forms of physical activity and active transport. With the rise of running events and run clubs, there have never been more opportunities for people to connect through movement. But without equitable safety and access, these opportunities are not felt equally.

During the first phase of *Run My Way* in 2025, we undertook extensive engagement to understand the lived experiences of women and gender diverse runners and build a strong evidence base for future action including:

- 5,000 surveys completed on female runner safety, both online and in-person at running events across Sydney and regional NSW.
- Three online community feedback sessions with male and female runners, sports influencers and gender diverse runners.
- Co-design workshops for 52 participants including representatives from state and local government, sport and run providers, community members and people with lived experience to make running safer and more inclusive in NSW.
- Rapid review of current evidence and best practice to identify barriers, enablers and opportunities for system-level change.

Global research shows that:

- 92% of women worry about their safety when running (*Adidas, 2021*)
- 60% have experienced harassment (*Runners World, 2020*)
- An estimated 95% of harassment goes unreported (*Women.com, 2023*)

Findings from the *Run My Way* surveys include:

- 95% of women agree that a sense of safety influences their running habits.
- 70% of women surveyed have felt unsafe on a run, compared to 29% of men.
- 50% of women have experienced harassment on a run, compared to 14% of men.
- The top considerations for female and gender diverse runners when choosing where to run are:
 - ▶ good lighting and visibility
 - ▶ familiarity with the route
 - ▶ well-maintained path
 - ▶ presence of people
 - ▶ phone reception

These insights highlight the opportunity to improve the running experience for females.

What's next:

The solutions identified will help shape the next phase of the *Run My Way* program, which will test pilot initiatives aligned with *Safer Cities* and *Play Her Way*, to improve safety, participation and confidence for runners across NSW.

Teenage Advisory Committee

The Office of Sport established its first Teenage Advisory Committee (TAC) to ensure the voices of young women are at the heart of shaping policies, programs and opportunities for girls in sport. As a core part of *Play Her Way*, the committee is made up of eight young women aged 16–20 from across NSW, each offering diverse perspectives, experiences and a passion for creating positive change.

Through regular meetings and consultations, the TAC is influencing the Office of Sport's approach, helping ensure strategies are relevant, impactful and informed by the real experiences of adolescent girls and young women.



Teenage Advisory Committee (TAC)



Run My Way market research team

This initiative represents a strong commitment to authentic engagement and co-design, empowering the next generation to be active contributors to the future of sport in NSW.

Throughout 2025 the TAC has met together three times and maintained ongoing digital communication enabling continuous feedback, idea sharing and rapid iteration on emerging initiatives. Their honest insights and creative thinking are helping shape program directions across *Play Her Way* and the broader Office of Sport.

Key Areas of Influence

- Contributing to initiatives that inspire teenage girls and young women to pursue diverse careers in sport.
- Amplifying the *Run My Way* research through tapping into their networks.
- Developing a collaborative vision board to identify the influences shaping girls and young women.

The TAC is demonstrating the power of embedding young people's voices in shaping initiatives and has received recognition at Ministerial and NSW Government levels. TAC members have also been featured across local media. TAC member Matilda Webb articulates the enduring value of the TAC saying:

"To be heard, listened to, and have our voices genuinely valued has been an incredibly empowering experience. It's shown me what's possible when young people aren't just consulted, but trusted to lead. This experience has given me real hope that more young people will be able to shape meaningful change in the future."

In our first year, we've proven that when teenage girls are invited into the room where decisions are made and trusted with responsibility, we don't just participate, we actively help improve the future of sport for every girl who comes after them."

[Meet the TAC girls here.](#)

What's next?

The Teenage Advisory Committee will continue to help drive *Play Her Way* initiatives in 2026 through advice on designing positive sporting experiences for girls and activating a fashion-led movement *Stadia 2 Street* to amplify the influence of women's sport beyond the field.

Careers for Girls in Sport

One of the key initiatives of *Play Her Way* is to inspire adolescent girls to pursue diverse careers in sport, both on and off the field. With women's sport experiencing unprecedented growth, the demand for skilled, ambitious young women has never been higher. Building a strong talent pipeline is essential to ensuring women are represented across every area of the industry, including coaching, media, technology, analytics, design, governance and events.

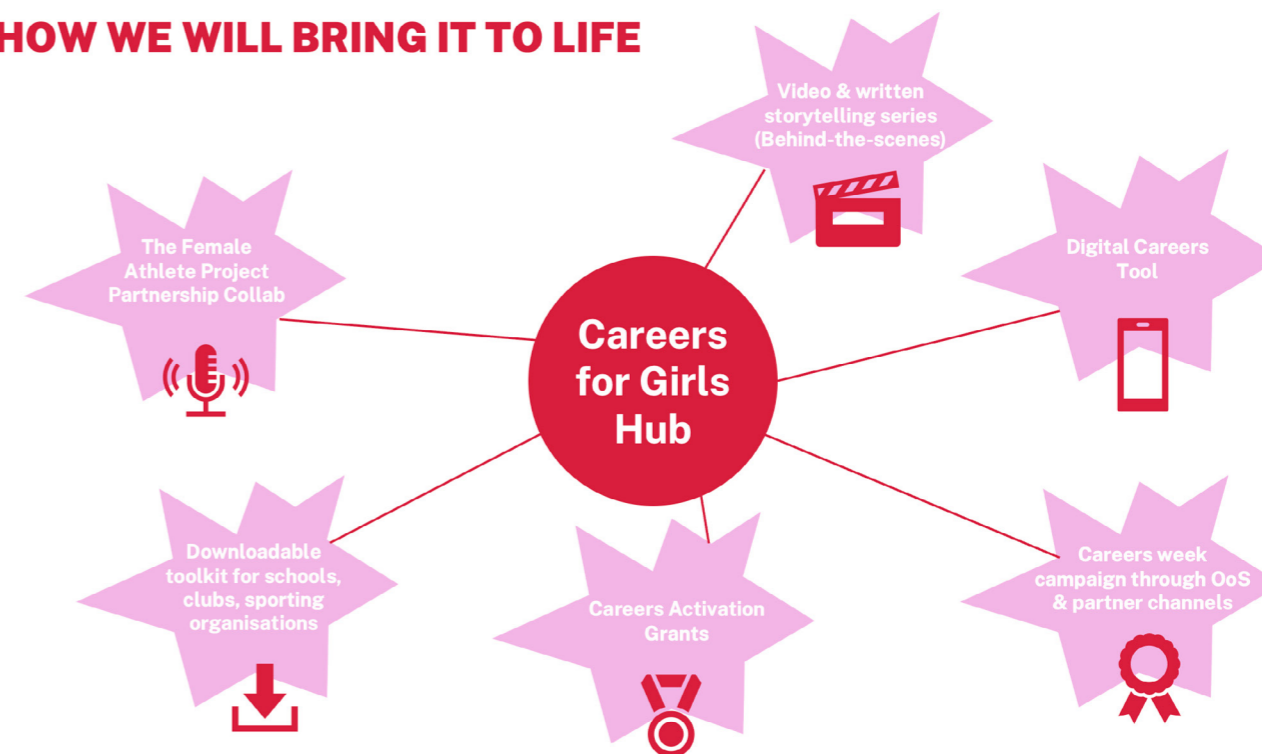
Key projects in 2025 have included:

- **Cross-sector working group established** to inform the sports careers for girls approach bringing together representatives from across the sport, academia, careers, school and tertiary sector.
- **Championing Her Future: Careers for Girls in Sport Summit** saw more than 150 influential figures from education and sport, including teachers, career advisors, university staff and industry leaders come together to gain insights, tools and data to better guide young women toward diverse sport careers. [A snapshot of the summit is here.](#)
- **Seven focus groups** involving 38 young women aged 16–33 were conducted across metropolitan and regional NSW to explore career aspirations, motivations, opportunities, and barriers within the sports sector.
- **'See it to Be it' storytelling** series was developed with video and written profiles showcasing women thriving in a wide range of diverse and interesting sport careers to help girls to imagine possibilities beyond the field. This included the Cricket NSW video and [Championing Her Future booklet.](#)
- **Campaign and tool development** for targeted campaigns and resources designed specifically to reach and inspire teenage girls, informed by the research insights and TAC feedback.

Ella Hewitt, secondary school student explains:

"There's a lot of opportunity for really confident, competitive girls in this industry who are choosing careers that they are more familiar with like nursing or hairdressing. But they could be great in [the sports] industry...because they have that competitive nature and they have been in the sporting environment for so long."

HOW WE WILL BRING IT TO LIFE



What's next?

- A partnership with *The Female Athlete Project* (TFAP) to reach teenage girls through a five-episode series featuring diverse women working across the sports industry.
- A digital career tool to spark interest and inspire teenage girls and young women to see themselves working in the sports industry. Through the digital tool they will get personalised suggestions of sports careers that are relevant to their skills and passions.
- Extending the 'See it to be it' content series with 'Behind the Scenes' and 'Day in the Life' content to spotlight women in varied sports careers.
- New resources for educators, career advisors and sporting organisations to help them better guide girls towards career pathways in sport.
- Practical information and guidance for parents to help them understand and support sport-related career pathways for girls.
- Activation grants for sporting organisations to host career days for girls.

Gender Equity on Boards

In a bold move to create a cultural shift within sporting organisations and clubs, for the first time in NSW, the Office of Sport has introduced a requirement for all State Sporting Organisations (SSOs) to achieve at least 40% female representation on the Boards.

This landmark reform is designed to accelerate gender equity, strengthen governance and ensure women's voices are embedded at the highest levels of sport leadership.

Through partnerships developed with the sport sector, Office of Sport is committed to working closely with SSOs to ensure these targets are achieved.

As of December 2025:

- **69 of 96 funded SSOs** are already meeting the target of at least 40% female board representation.



PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

Under *Play Her Way*, the Office of Sport is partnering with key stakeholders across the sector to deliver initiatives to increase participation and representation for girls and women. Since the launch of the strategy over \$3,618,000 in partnership funding has been provided to support the delivery of *Play Her Way*. Partnerships include:

- Sport NSW for a **Female Leadership and Gender Equity project**.
- Minerva Network for a **Women in Governance and athletes transition to sport workforce program**.
- University of Newcastle for an **adolescent girls' research project**.
- Netball NSW for **legacy initiatives for the 2027 Netball World Cup**.
- Football NSW for **legacy initiatives for the AFC Women's Asian Cup TM**.
- University of Sydney for **evaluation and research tasks** related to *Play Her Way*.

Throughout 2025, University of Newcastle has completed:

- **Five comprehensive literature reviews** analysing current evidence on adolescent girls' participation in sport.
- **17 focus group sessions** with adolescent girls, fathers and mothers of adolescent girls.
- **National surveys** with coaches and PE teachers to better understand their beliefs, challenges and opportunities to influence girls' participation.

Insights from the research:

- Gender stereotypes remain influential, shaping girls confidence, sense of safety and belonging in sport.
- Coaches, teachers and peers play an outsized role in shaping girls' experiences, both positively and negatively.
- Supportive, inclusive behaviours from trusted adults significantly increase the likelihood that girls will stay engaged.
- There is strong demand for practical, research-based tools that help girls remain involved and motivated.

Professor Philip Morgan, Co-Director, Centre for Active Living and Learning, University of Newcastle reflects that:

"In our first year, we've amplified adolescent girls' voices and begun transforming their insights into real change. We've shown what's possible when girls, families, coaches, teachers, and researchers work together, laying the groundwork for a community and school landscape where every girl feels she belongs in sport."

University of Newcastle - Adolescent Girls Empowerment Research Project

A research project delivered by the University of Newcastle to equip the NSW Government with the latest insights and evidence-based approaches to engage teenage girls in sport.

Delivered by the University of Newcastle, this project is designed to address the steep decline in participation among girls aged 15-19, with three-quarters of girls dropping out during these years. Adolescence brings significant physical, emotional and social changes, compounded by increasing pressure from peers and social media. For many girls, this results in feeling self-conscious, unsupported or unwelcome and leads them to step away from sport altogether.

What's next?

The final phase will bring together all insights from the research to produce evidence-based resources designed to support adolescent girls' participation in sport and physical activity.

These tools will focus on building confidence, strengthening belonging and removing barriers that commonly lead girls to disengage. Practical solutions will also be developed for the key influencers in girls' lives including coaches, teachers, parents and boys, empowering them to foster positive, inclusive environments where girls feel motivated and supported to stay involved in sport.

Sport NSW - Gender Equity and Leadership Program

A Sport NSW initiative designed to build a strong pipeline of future female leaders through targeted development programs, alongside strategic networking events connecting women with leadership opportunities across the sporting sector.

The program is dedicated to building a stronger, more inclusive future for sport in NSW by championing female and gender-diverse leaders at every level of governance, coaching and administration through:

- growing a powerful pipeline of board-ready candidates.
- increasing participation in leadership roles across the sector.
- strengthening the capability of State Sporting Organisations to create environments where inclusive leadership is not only supported but expected.

Achievements this year include:

- **25 scholarships** for the Get on Board Program.
- **56 women** completing Sport NSW Fast Track Programs to enhance the skills and confidence of female and gender-diverse coaches and officials, ensuring they are equipped to lead, influence and thrive within the sporting community.
- **Three Women's Networking Events with over 230 participants** to bring together women from diverse backgrounds with leaders and directors from across NSW sport. These events are creating direct pathways between women in business and opportunities in sport, reinforcing the power of connection and the impact of bringing the right people into the same room.

Libby Sadler, Strategic Projects Manager at Sport NSW talks about the impact of their programs on future leaders in sport saying:

“Through the Gender Equity and Leadership Project, Sport NSW has been able to strategically elevate our networking events to connect senior leaders and directors in sport with professional corporate networks creating exciting relationships across sport and business and engaging potential Board Directors with State Sporting Organisations.”

Minerva Network

With support from the Office of Sport, the Minerva Network continues to deliver athlete mentorship, learning and networking opportunities as well as deliver a sports governance program to place women on boards.

A major highlight in 2025 was welcoming the 1,000th athlete to the Minerva Network. This milestone reflects the growth of a vibrant and connected community.

Another standout has been the formation of the Athlete Leadership Group, led by Cate Campbell OAM with NSW athlete representatives Rae Anderson PLY and Nita Maynard-Perrin. This group ensures that athletes' voices are central to Minerva's programs.

In 2025, the partnership also included the launch of Careers Connect which will support athletes into supportive employment including sport-related roles, and the delivery of Minerva's Sport Governance program to foster a pipeline of qualified women prepared for governance roles. This has included athletes and mentors accessing board readiness programs from Accenture and Deloitte and participation in training with Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Victoria Momsen, Minerva's Executive Director reflected that:

“2025 has been a milestone year for Minerva. We welcomed our 1,000th athlete and watched more women step into governance and visibility in ways that are shaping the future of sport. Across the network there is a strong sense of pride, connection and possibility, and it is inspiring to see doors opening now that will stay open for the next generation.”

Football NSW - Women in Leadership Program

The *Women in Leadership* program, delivered by Football NSW, strengthens the knowledge, confidence and support networks of current and emerging female leaders while the *Empower Her* initiative for young athletes fosters long-term success on and off the field.

The *Women in Leadership* program empowers women to reach their full leadership potential by strengthening their knowledge, confidence, and support networks.

In 2025:

- **130 women** from all areas of the game including administrators, club volunteers, referees and coaches completed the *Women in Leadership* program culminating in an inspiring *Follow Your Lead* event highlighting excellence in women's sport leadership.

- **The Empower Her program** was launched. This initiative, for U14 and U15 NPLW players, guides young athletes through an interactive session focused on building confidence, overcoming challenges and understanding how to fuel both mind and body for long-term success.

Hayley Todd, Head of Women's and Schools Football, Football NSW reflects that:

“Every single one of these women are leaving their mark on football across NSW and continue to inspire those around them in clubs and associations. These women are coaches, referees, in media, volunteers and administrators and all are role models for the future leaders in football. We are grateful to have been able to engage with players through the introduction of the Empower Her program that will equip female athletes with practical tools to set goals, build emotional resilience, and highlight importance of fuelling your body and mind for success. Thank you to the NSW Office of Sport for their continued support of football initiatives, we look forward to continuing the momentum of the women in leadership programs together.”

[You can hear more about the Women in Leadership program here.](#)



Follow Your Lead: Women's Leadership Event 2025