

REDUCING HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOUR IN AUSTRALIAN RULES.

AN AFL PLAYER LED PROGRAM



The Bartlett Family

WHO WE ARE

Stand Up Events Melbourne Inc. (SUE) is a Not-for-profit incorporated association dedicated to fighting sexual and gender discrimination in Australian sport, and in life. Our primary mission is to create safe, welcoming and inclusive sporting cultures for the LGBTIQ+ community.

The team at SUE are incredibly passionate about what we do, therefore it is very important for us to make sure that the work we do is not only impactful, but measurable and evidence based.

In order to achieve this goal, we raised an unprecedented amount of funding and partnered with Monash University (Monash) to conduct world-first research into the best approaches to addressing homophobia in Australian youth sport. For 18 months, we worked with Monash in developing and trialing a customised program for reducing homophobic language, behavior and attitudes in male grass roots sporting clubs.

This report provides a brief overview of the problem, the program approach, and general findings.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CREATE EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS?

📣 LGBTI people in Australia have extremely high rates of suicidality relative to the Australian population. Young people (16-27 years) are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts. Transgender people are close to 11 times more likely to attempt suicide.

📣 Up to 50% of trans people will attempt suicide at least once in their lives.

📣 Same-sex attracted Australians have up to 14x higher rates of suicide attempts than their heterosexual peers. The average age of a first suicide attempt is 16 years – often before ‘coming out’.

BeyondBlue; National LGBTI Health Alliance (2020)

OUR GOALS

📣 To prevent physical/mental/emotional abuse and suicide in our non-hetero and gender diverse communities, both in urban and rural areas of Victoria.

📣 To eradicate homophobic, discriminatory and derogatory language and behaviour in sporting clubs and environments, which underpin many of the harms encountered by LGBTIQ+.

📣 To create safe and inclusive sporting environments - so everyone is accepted and free to be their complete selves in sport - regardless of their sexuality and/or gender.

📣 To reduce anti-LGBTIQ+ attitudes.

📣 Help make people aware of and accountable for their language and behaviour, and the impact it has.

📣 Challenge people to understand that there should be zero tolerance towards derogatory/exclusionary language and behaviour.

📣 Raise LGBTIQ+ peoples participation levels in sport by designing safe and welcoming sporting cultures.

📣 For every single person to feel embraced and included for being exactly who they are.

OUR RESEARCH

Stand Up Events (SUE) worked directly with experts from Monash in the design and evaluation of the program. This was led by the Behaviour Sciences Research Lab in the Faculty of Arts. This program and evaluation was led by Professor Kerry O'Brien, A/Professor Ruth Jeanes, Dr Muhammad Iqbal, and Mr James Piggins.

The work was the first to implement a formal experimental trial of this nature for reducing homophobic language and behavior in the real-world setting of youth sporting teams. This is despite there being more than 150 studies detailing the problems in this area, primarily in schools.



MONASH
University

OUR RESEARCH

Phase One:

SUE contracted Monash to review the literature and provide a better understanding of why homophobia is still prevalent within male team dominated sport. The below findings are based on reviews of nearly 200 studies, interviews with sport leaders and a review of survey responses from nearly 3000 Australians.

This is what we found:

- There is a disconnect between attitudes and homophobic behaviour in sport. Homophobic language continues despite support for gay people.
- It is the language (mostly unintentional) that sends a message to gay people that they are not welcome.
- 63% of boys admitted to using homophobic language in sport.
- Only 1% said homophobic behaviour never occurs 54% say it occurs "all the time".
- A high percentage of young gay and bisexual men avoid team sport.
- There is a growing disparity in sport participation between straight and gay/bi young males.
- Homophobic language is considered 'normal'. This includes slurs, jokes and harmless banter and occurs as there are usually no openly gay people present when it is being used.
- As the language is viewed as normal - unlike racist language - rules banning it are rarely enforced.
- Thoughtlessness. Young men often state they are not homophobic, yet continue with the language as they believe it is harmless.
- Self-perpetuating. The reality is that most young gay men in sport hide their sexuality, or eliminate themselves all together. This often means that there are no openly gay athletes asking teammates to stop their language.

Challenges of ending homophobic behaviour in sport

- Lack of resources. Community sport is largely run by volunteers and have little finances.
- General discomfort in discussing homophobia/homosexuality.
- Not seen as a main priority to address.
- Straight Allies are Needed. Until gay/bi people feel safer to engage in sport or be open, change will need to be driven by allies.
- Presidents/Coaches believing there is no issue at their club.
- Knowledge. There can be a lack of clarity around the best way to end homophobic behaviour. This leads to inaction.

The research identified three methods that are effective in changing homophobic behaviour

- Zero tolerance of the behaviour, and support for change, by those in leadership positions.
- Educational Programs that are delivered in an engaging and interactive manner. Most effective when delivered by a respected and admired male – such as a professional athlete
- Programs that change the perception of what is normal and acceptable behaviour.

Phase Two:

Based on the findings in phase one, SUE and the Monash Behavioural Sciences Lab worked together to create a customised preventative programs and implemented them into recruited grass roots clubs. Participants consisted of males aged between 16 and 18 years. The main goal was to reduce homophobic language and behaviour within the team environment.

What did we do?

- SUE and Monash trained three current AFL players - Jordan Roughead, Tom Campbell and Jayden Hunt to deliver the program content to teams.
- We created a customised program based on findings in Phase one.
- Hosted 2 x 4 hour face to face training sessions with the three professional AFL players, followed by program implementation practice sessions.
- The program adopted an experimental design whereby half of the recruited teams received the program, and half of teams did not and acted as the control group. This allowed us to determine that any change in behaviour and attitudes was due to the program.
- The programs were delivered to individual teams by either 2 of the AFL players, or 1 AFL player and Angie Greene (CEO of SUE).
- We took measures (surveys) to assess the impact our program on homophobic language and attitudes 1 week before and then at 2 and 8 weeks after the implementation of the program.
- The program were delivered within team training sessions.
- The program was free to clubs.
- The result of this research and development is what we now call the 'Stand Up Preventative Program (SUPP)'. This is the first time that something like the SUPP has been developed and then tested for effectiveness in changing homophobic behaviour and language.

Phase Three: Key Findings

- There was a 23% improvement in perceived norms around the use of homophobic language (i.e., against the use of homophobic language).
- 73% of participants believed the program to be worthwhile.
- 81% stated that the program was received/spoken about positively.
- 79% agreed that the program made them want to reduce homophobic language.
- 73% agreed that they felt more confident in challenging negative language after the program.
- 71% strongly agreed that peak sporting bodies should invest in anti-homophobia programs.
- 77% agreed that anti-homophobia programs would improve the sporting environment.
- An improvement in anti-homophobia culture at 8 weeks post intervention, compared to 2 weeks post intervention. Suggesting the effect of the program increased over time.
- A significant reduction (20%) in participants using homophobic language.
- A 17% reduction in participants having heard homophobic language around the club.
- 20% of participants reported using less homophobic language outside of the club. This suggests that the program may be reducing homophobic language beyond the sports setting.
- The impact was significantly more positive in the focus group than that of the control group. This suggests that the program has a positive impact on the sporting environment and drives real change.

Moving forward, SUE would like as many sporting clubs as possible (from various codes) to have the opportunity to receive the SUPP. Because most grass roots clubs are often volunteer based and money is scarce, we would like the participating clubs to receive our programs for free.

This is why donations and funding are crucial to making our work of making sport more inclusive and safe possible.

Stand Up believes that no one should have to pay to feel safe, protected, included and equal at their club.



WHY OUR 3 PLAYERS GOT INVOLVED

My strong belief that everyone should be treated equally and feel comfortable being themselves, and therefore would love to see all sports clubs free of homophobic language.

One of my best friends came out to my friends and I after years of keeping it a secret from us, felt horrible that he didn't feel comfortable to be himself and decided to quit sport because of the environment.

- Jayden

My whole life I have loved playing sport. From a young age my football clubs have been a constant in my life. I continued playing football from junior level, through to local seniors, then state league in the VFL before finally realising my dream of playing AFL.

It wasn't until I met with Angie Greene from Stand Up Events and heard her speak about the impact of homophobic behaviour and language in male dominated team sports that I considered my football journey and the blatant homophobia that I have witnessed and not confronted. The fact that more than 80% of same-sex attracted Australian youth don't feel comfortable or safe to be their true selves in sporting clubs really affected me, I believe everyone should have the right to have the same enjoyment from team sport as I have.

However, what impacted me the most was hearing that same-sex attracted Australians are 14 times more likely to attempt suicide in their lifetime. This isn't just about participation, this impacts people's lives.

- Tom

I remember using homophobic language when I was younger and feeling uncomfortable about it whenever I did. I have homosexual family and friends, and would hate to think that they felt uncomfortable around me, or hid who they are because of my language use. I've also seen how a more diverse football club community creates a safe environment where everyone can feel comfortable when I was coaching AFLW.

- Jordan

END OF REPORT

We would like to take this opportunity to thank *Tennis Australia* and *The Bartlett Family* for generously contributing to our research. Without them, our work would not have been possible. We would also like to thank Monash University and the Behavioural Sciences Research Lab for working with us on the program.

Thank you to the people who have donated and attended our events. Your support means more than you will ever know.

Stand Up Events has DGR status. All donations are tax deductible.

To make a donation and help us continue our work, please head to: www.standupevents.com.au

We are all in this together.

