

CASE STUDY—Melbourne University Squash Club

For a while now, The Melbourne University Squash Club has been a pretty testosterone-charged place. But participating in Squash Vic's *Hits and Giggles* program has led to changes that have been quickly noticed and embraced. More females around the club having a go at squash has definitely had an impact.

"Oh yes, there is definitely a different vibe around now!," said Emily Karahalios, a *Hits and Giggles* coach. A club member for seven years after moving to Melbourne from Canada, Emily confesses she is "obsessed" with squash. She initially started playing in an attempt to meet new people and get fit. But now plays three times a week and works out every day so she can play better squash.

Emily said coaching in the *Hits and Giggles* program has been a great experience for her and the club. "It was the first time I had coached and having the program format given to us has been a really great way to start coaching. The girls are so enthusiastic; it's been really easy for me to share my enthusiasm for the sport with them!" Emily said.

Club President, Lucas Bediaga said the committee had been trying to find ways of attracting more women to the club and it was an issue that kept coming back. "We have been trying to tackle this for years. We really wanted the club to be more balanced and wanted to have more females playing. When we heard about *Hits and Giggles* we jumped on board as we thought great this could be the answer!" Lucas said.

The club has run three rounds of *Hits and Giggles* with more participants coming along to have a hit each time.

"*Hits and Giggles* has been so fantastic for the club, we have wanted something like this for a while now. Word about the program spreads so quickly. I think we now have a team that is almost entirely *Hits and Giggles* participants," Lucas said.

Emily added that the club has benefited in a number of areas directly from having more women participating.

"With women playing in *Hits and Giggles* and then wanting to keep playing, we now have a range of skill levels across the club and squash is seen as a more accessible sport rather than just for elite players. I have male members asking me how they can get their girlfriends involved in the club which is fantastic", Emily said.

One anecdote reveals the club's best player - who is one of the top 20 players in Victoria - has been having an informal hit with some of the *Hits and Giggles* participants on a Saturday. "He is loving it! He has a hit with the girls and gives them pointers on where they can improve. They love it too – it's a win-win for everyone", Lucas said.

Melbourne University Squash Club particularly values the social aspects of being part of a sporting club and likes to balance its competition with activities such as pizza and pub nights. Having a better gender balance has also added enormously to these events. "The social aspects of a club is what keeps it alive. Having more women at the club has really added so positively to this vibe. I would say to any club wanting to attract more female members, please give *Hits and Giggles* a try as is a great way to reinvigorate your club and increase connections to your local community," Lucas added.

Hits and Giggles is a Squash Vic program funded through VicHealth's State Sporting Association Participation Program.

