

Age, gender and ability appropriate entry level and participation pathway opportunities

COUNTRY GIRLS PLAY GOLF GROUP, VICTORIA

A win-win for small clubs and country women

Local Demographic:

The East Gippsland district is in south-eastern Victoria, approximately a 3-hour drive from Melbourne. It covers an area of 41,556 square kilometres and spans about 300km x 200km. There are more than 46,000 people in the area with a median age of 50 (national average 38).

- Children aged 0-14 years: 15.9% of the population (average 18.7%)
- People aged 65+ years: 28.2% (average 15.8%)
- People born in Australia: 83.7% (average 66.7%)
- Full-time workers: 47.4% of the population (average 57.7%)
- Part-time workers: 41.1% (average 30.4%)

The Story:

"There is an opportunity to play if you want to play." This was the ethos behind Tania Holmes' enthusiasm to create opportunities for working women and schoolgirls to play competition golf with other women and girls on weekends.

"We played with the men for some time but did think it would also be nice to play with other women."

In 2017, Tania, who works full-time at a local school, was frustrated that the weekly women's competitions and honour board events were only conducted on weekdays when she was unable to play.



Country Girls Play Golf launch event at South Pines Golf Club

"The men invited my friend and I to join them on a Saturday, which was really lovely," Tania said.

"We played with the men for some time but did think it would also be nice to play with other women. That is where we came up with the interclub 'Country Girls Play Golf' concept.

"The group initially developed quite organically. Rather than base ourselves at one club, I wanted to engage numerous clubs and their female members around the region. So, with the promise that I would organise where we would play, I phoned lady captains from local golf clubs and asked them to extend the invite to their members to come together and play on a Saturday once a month.

"As women were already paying membership at their clubs, my aim was to keep playing opportunities affordable."

Tania's other main aims for this group were to:

- Create a social environment and foster friendships between clubs; and
- Provide women with the opportunity to play stroke rounds because this is rarely offered to women at weekends.

This case study outlines how Tania successfully:

- Connected female golfers in the region;
- Created opportunities for competition golf for women together at weekends; and
- Generated increased revenue for smaller clubs in the region.

Challenges and Solutions:

"The first step was to recruit local golf clubs to provide tee times and lunch on a Saturday. It has been a challenge to involve the bigger clubs in our region as their Saturday timeslots are already busy, plus they also tend to be more stringent with the format we play," Tania said.

"I have found that it has been easier to engage the smaller clubs in the region – plus it's a win-

win for them. There are usually between 15-20 of us looking for a round of golf and lunch. This has given us the ability to negotiate an affordable price for our girls, but at the same time has been a good way to create additional revenue for our smaller and often quieter country clubs. Currently four golf clubs host our events spanning a 1.5-hour drive (just over 100km between them).

"Another challenge has been promoting our competitions and recruiting new women to play. It can be difficult to get your message through to members from other clubs as often messages will be lost in translation."

To combat this, Tania runs a Facebook group among which information is shared and events promoted. "We currently have 122 members in this group; it really isn't an onerous task administering this, nor organising the events," she said.



We have found that having a collective group of women gives us more of a voice to speak up,"

"I try not to 'own' the group too much, but instead empower others to take more of a leadership role within the group or their own clubs."

Each month, Tania picks a different member to conduct the presentations. "This is good training for women who may someday like to become a club captain or sit on a committee.

"We also realise that while we are currently catering for a group of established female golfers, we need to continuously develop new players in the region. We have therefore organised a women's beginner golf clinic to run on four consecutive Saturdays. The clinic booked out very quickly, demonstrating that there's an appetite for weekend golf for women.

"We will work with this group to develop their skills and assist them to start playing on course. From here, we are looking at introducing a 9-hole social format into our Country Girls Play Golf group as a pathway for these beginners. We hope that with our support, these women may become members at one of our local clubs someday."

While Tania has created a good model for women to play weekend competition on a monthly basis, the group's next aim is to create more regular weekend playing opportunities.



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"For years, our local clubs have run annual tournaments which are a lot of fun but once again, working women do not have the ability to participate in a singles event (usually only mixed events are offered on a Sunday following a men's day on a Saturday). The group has been successful in advocating for change, so now clubs are starting to offer competition for women alongside the men on the Saturday of their tournaments.

"I have also been working with my club to make changes so that women who are unable to participate in our club championships and other honour board events during the week can play. We are in the process of adopting Golf Australia's multi-day club championship format.

"In the past year, our Country Girls Play Golf group has contributed an additional \$3,500 to clubs in our region. This demonstrates the benefits that are not only enjoyed by women when opening weekend play opportunities, but also to regional golf club economies."

Learning:

- Country Girls Play Golf can be a good concept to adopt in other regional areas of Australia where there is a general lack of female golfers.
- It has been a good way to connect small numbers of women at smaller clubs with a larger group of women.
- It generates extra revenue and patronage at smaller clubs
- Having a collective voice, women can advocate for further change, such as new local tournament formats.
- It is important to not only support pre-existing female golfers with access to weekend competition, but also to provide opportunities for working women and schoolgirls to start golf, too.