Leading the way: Coach, parent, and leader perspectives on navigating social and cultural responsibility in organised youth sport.

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ABSTRACT

Youth sport plays a significant role in the lives of Australians. Sporting clubs are often described as multifaceted settings with convening power, which has popularised the settings as a site for various social and cultural programs and initiatives. Furthermore, a large body of literature has focused on youth sporting clubs through investigations about sport participation, health promotion, and socialisation. Since there is an absence of literature explicitly about youth sporting clubs' integration of social and cultural responsibilities among constituents and stakeholders, the literature review guiding this study was underpinned by three inter-related fields of research: inclusion and diversity, mental health and wellbeing, and social relationships. Existing literature in these fields has found that clubs often struggle to navigate social and cultural responsibilities because of a lack of organisational capacity, financial and voluntary resources, stakeholder resistance, and a lack of access to and application of knowledge.

With increasing social pressures to provide and facilitate broader responsibilities in a club setting, it is vital to understand how South Australian youth sporting clubs already involved in social and cultural programs or initiatives have navigated and developed their capacity to do so. This study includes clubs offering Australia Rules football, tennis, surf lifesaving, hockey, and netball; and provides a strengths-based perspective, rather than taking a deficit stance, to deliver a basis for new knowledge. Consequently, this study sought to develop a better understanding of how South Australian youth sporting clubs understand, perceive, and enact social and cultural responsibility in youth sport. Utilising an interpretive description study design, this study employed semi-structured individual interviews with parents and coaches (n = 30) and focus groups with club leaders (n = 16) and analysed the data using a unique blend of reflexive thematic analysis and interpretive description.

The findings of the study provide an in-depth understanding of current facilitators of and barriers to implementing social and cultural responsibility from the experiences and perceptions of parents, coaches, and club leaders. The findings generated from this study are organised into six core themes. The findings suggest that the navigation and development of social and cultural responsibilities are contingent on genuine, passionate leadership; personal connection to the responsibility; visible promotion of and support for responsibilities; support and recognition of volunteers' efforts and burdens; clear club expectations, values or ethos; community collaboration; promoting a holistic environment; identification of volunteers' skills; self-promotion and reputation; clear support or directives from organisational bodies; contingency plans for future change or instability (e.g., COVID-19); and long-term, consistent volunteers (low rates of turnover). Finally, this study concludes with recommendations for practice, in areas relating to volunteer support and retention, club culture and values, organisational capacity, community engagement, and strategies for leadership; alongside recommendations for future research.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: Kayleigh O'Donnell Date: 25/07/2025

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PUBLICATIONS, CONFERENCES, & AWARDS

O'Donnell, K., Elliott, S., & Drummond, M. (2022). Exploring parent and coach relationships in youth sport: A qualitative study. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *14*(4), 1-22.

Elliott, S., Drummond, M., Prichard, I., Lewis, L., Drummond, C., Litchfield, C., Mysko, E., O'Donnell, K., & Truskewycz, H. (2023). The promotion of sporting opportunities for girls and young females and the implications for traditional female sports: A qualitative descriptive study. *Sport in Society*, *26*(5), 920-941.

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O'Donnell, K. (2024, July 29 – August 1). Navigating social and cultural responsibilities in Australian youth sporting clubs [conference presentation]. International Conference for Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, Bath, UK.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> Among the many questions raised by Bowen (1953), one is of special relevance here. He inquired: 'What responsibilities to society may businessmen reasonably be expected to assume?' (p. xvii). Interestingly, we are still asking this same question today. (Carroll, 2008).

1.1 The evolving role of community sporting clubs

An ever-expanding body of scholarship has contributed to the notion that youth sporting clubs comprise important settings for sport participation, health promotion, and socialisation, especially in Australia where sport holds high social and cultural significance (Anderson-Butcher, 2019; Eliasson, 2015; Maguire, 2011; Robertson et al., 2019; Rowe, 2018; Velardo et al., 2010; Vella et al., 2019). Sporting clubs have been described as having "an innate convening power" (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2021, p. 361) and, as such, have comprised an increasingly popular setting for a range of social and cultural initiatives and programs (See, Bean et al., 2021; Haudenhuyse et al., 2013; Hutchesson et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2019; Lawley, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2024; Scifo et al., 2019; Thrower et al., 2019; Vella et al., 2021; Vella et al., 2018; Vincent & Christensen, 2015; Young & Block, 2023). Some of the most emergent and popular aspects of contemporary club programs are policies and practices that promote inclusion and diversity in sport, mental health and wellbeing, and the development of positive social relationships (Gould, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Robertson et al., 2019). This has resulted in the proliferation of journal articles and book chapters (e.g., Drummond et al., 2021; Jeanes et al., 2022), books (e.g., Cunningham, 2019; Toms & Jeanes, 2022), conferences (e.g., the 2022 GAMeS International Conference – a conference dedicated to research and policy surrounding mental health and sport) and edited collections (e.g., Holt, 2016) exploring the unique and ever-evolving social role of organised youth sporting clubs in their respective communities.

In Australia, the community sport sector comprises sport and active recreation clubs, school sport, university sport, and the preventive health and fitness industry. In this thesis, the focus of inquiry surrounds sporting clubs. These community sporting clubs are distinct from high performance or professional sports settings and are typically affiliated with either state or national sporting organisations (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2024). Within this context, social and cultural responsibility refers to programs and initiatives that youth sporting clubs provide with the aim of achieving "either implicitly or explicitly through its outcome, i.e., its policies, programs and impacts, organizational change that can lead to positive social change" (Seitanidi, Koufopoulos, & Palmer, 2010, p.139). The key premise here, is that the development of organisational capacity assists the implementation of social and cultural responsibility which can create social change within the club and its wider environment (Zeimers & Léonard, 2025).

1.1.1 A contemporary focus on social responsibility: social relationships, inclusion and diversity, and mental health

This thesis is primarily concerned with understanding how youth sporting clubs navigate increasing social and cultural responsibility in community sport. In the absence of an established field of research, social and cultural responsibility as it pertains to this thesis is underpinned by three inter-related bodies of literature: inclusion and diversity, mental health and wellbeing, and the development of positive social relationships in organised sport. While there are a range of other social and cultural responsibilities, it's important to emphasise that, within the Australian context, the rationale for this operationalisation is based on contemporary socio-political orientations, industry priorities, and the development of club-focused resources, all of which continue to shape programmatic priorities in many sporting clubs. Social relationships, inclusion and diversity, and mental health and wellbeing are significant and emerging facets of responsibility within youth sport, as seen through the

development of club programs, practices, and policies (Gould, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Robertson et al., 2019).

Firstly, the socio-political orientations present within youth sport lend themselves to the areas of relationships, mental health, and inclusion and diversity. For instance, grant funding schemes that promote inclusion and diversity, such as the 'Raiise program', 'Australian Women's Football Fund', 'The Power of Her' and 'Community Recreation and Sport Facilities Program (CSFP)'. Similarly, industry priorities are focusing on these key areas through commissioned research projects in youth sport and policy development. Examples of industry projects can include the South Australian Government's Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing's (2021) 'Club of the future: More than sport framework' which advocates the larger roles of clubs in "their positive contribution towards mental and physical health, …and social development"; Australia's Sport Participation Strategy (Australian Sports Commission, 2023, pp. 5-6) which emphasises that sport can improve "mental health", "social connection and cohesion", and "inclusion and diversity"; and the Sammy D Foundation's 'Game Changers' program (2025) which has a focus on positive role modelling and relationship development. There has also been an increase in the development of club-focused resources, such as the South Australian Mental Fitness Charter for sport, the Diversity and Inclusion Framework, and again, the 'Club of the Future framework'.

In adopting this view, the focus of this thesis centres on understanding how clubs navigate (and negotiate) their respective social and cultural responsibilities beyond the mere provision of competitive sport participation. This research is situated in club environments that have navigated their social responsibilities, thus offering a strengths-based perspective.

1.1.2 Social and cultural responsibilities in community sporting clubs: An Australian government perspective

The focus of this thesis is timely because national and state governing bodies across Australia increasingly recognise sporting clubs as multifaceted settings for more than merely competitive sport. In the recently released policy, *Australia's Sport Participation Strategy*, the role that sport can play in improving "mental health", "social connection and cohesion", and "inclusion and diversity" to ensure fair outcomes for everyone involved in sport is well documented (Australian Sports Commission, 2023, pp. 5-6). The strategy unequivocally transcends a focus on competition, performative success, and the development of talent, as evidenced by the emphasis on eight elements of the sport ecosystem:

1. People: The people that participate in, facilitate and deliver sporting experiences.
2. Places: The places where sporting experiences take place.
3. Partners: The organisations which do, or can, support the delivery of quality sporting experiences.
4. Programs: The activities that make up sporting experiences.
5. Diversity and inclusion: Ensuring diversity and inclusion are central to the delivery of each activity.
6. Technology and digital: Embracing technology and a digital first philosophy.
7. Yarning: Listening to the community and taking a proactive approach to advocating for sport.
8. Data and measurement: Developing data and measurement approaches and practices (Australian Sports Commission, 2023, p. 16).

Similarly, the South Australian Government's Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing's (2021) *Club of the future: More than sport* framework emphasises the broader benefits of sporting clubs, including "their positive contribution towards mental and physical health, crime prevention and social development" as well as the importance of a "welcoming and connected" club (Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing, 2021). From a sociocultural and political perspective, these policy changes emphasise the changing landscape of community sporting clubs and the importance of managing broader and dynamic social and cultural responsibilities. To this end, national and state government policies reflect an evolution of the youth sporting club which extends beyond competitive and recreational participation.

1.1.3 The importance of volunteers in clubs

Although often difficult to recruit and maintain, volunteers remain a vital resource in youth sporting clubs in Australia. The importance of volunteers has been highlighted by Robertson et al. (2019), who state that volunteers are "one of community sport organisations' most scarce resources" (p. 12). While clubs are facing increasing pressure to take on and navigate social and cultural responsibilities, it is crucial to remind ourselves that sporting clubs are predominantly run by volunteers, who are not necessarily experts in various facets of health or social concerns (Kokko, 2010; Kokko et al., 2016; Wicker & Breuer, 2011). Volunteer burden of social responsibilities is one of the key reasons why clubs find it difficult to navigate social concerns in sport. Volunteers may not have the capacity, knowledge, skills, or simply do not perceive broader responsibilities to be relevant to the club's core responsibilities (Kokko et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2019). A high rate of volunteer turnover is another challenge that youth sporting clubs face, with factors influencing volunteer drop out including dissatisfaction, organisational commitments, children's sport discontinuation, and abuse and conflict (Cuskelly & Hoye, 2013; Ringuet-Riot et al., 2016; Schlesinger et al.,

2013; Wicker, 2017). Therefore, it is arguable that clubs may not be able to expand their social and cultural responsibilities given that the basis of their club is built on a transient volunteer base (Robertson et al., 2019). This concept forms the basis of this PhD research, which investigated clubs who facilitated, maintained, and navigated their social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport.

1.1.4 Expanding clubs' responsibility: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

It is arguable that the growing social and cultural responsibilities of sporting clubs have accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly undermined the mental health and wellbeing of parents (Elliott, Pankowiak et al., 2023), youth athletes (Elliott, Eime et al., 2023), and volunteers, coaches, and club leaders (Elliott et al., 2021). To address feelings of social isolation and declining mental health and wellbeing at the height of COVID-19, clubs sought to maintain connections with players, coaches, and families by communicating ideas to maintain physical activity and sport involvement (albeit from home settings) and offering forms of empathetic support (Elliott et al., 2021). In doing so, many community sporting clubs displayed a high level of responsiveness under difficult circumstances to support the wellbeing of their respective club community (Elliott et al., 2021), epitomising how sporting clubs adapt their role in response to changing sociocultural contexts. To this end, COVID-19 represents a significant part of the contextual backdrop to this thesis because the way club functions have evolved considerably in the recent years (Elliott et al., 2021; Elliott, Pankowiak et al., 2023). It is also important to note that this thesis was largely undertaken during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

1.1.5 Assumptions about clubs' readiness for expanded social and cultural responsibility

Despite advocating change to policy, youth sporting clubs may not necessarily be equipped to assume greater social and cultural responsibilities nor have the resources, skills, or knowledges to sustain these efforts (Elliott et al., 2024; Hurley et al., 2020; Spaaij et al., 2020; Vella et al., 2018). When faced with difficulties including limited knowledge and training for implementing cultural change, and potentially high volunteer turnover, clubs may retreat to their traditional functions as providers of sporting opportunities and competition (Geidne et al., 2019; Kokko et al., 2016). While some research has focused on the pressure to provide a holistic program for members (Kiuppis, 2018; Robertson et al., 2019; Schaillée, Haudenhuyse et al., 2019), far less attention has been given to understanding how youth sporting clubs navigate their social and cultural responsibilities and the capacity in which they are able to do so (Gould, 2019; Robertson et al., 2019). In what is coined in this thesis as the 'crowded curriculum' of social and cultural responsibility, efforts to understand how youth sporting clubs navigate responsibility, resistance to change, and expanding expectations are warranted (Gould, 2019; Robertson et al., 2019).

1.2 Corporate social responsibility in sport

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has historically practiced in business corporations, characterised by strong, philanthropic roots (Godfrey, 2009), but it is emerging as a popular trend in organised sport (Paramio-Salcines et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2019). While business corporations and commercial organisations are distinct from volunteer-run, community-level sporting clubs, both types of entities share similar perspectives and processes in relation to social responsibility. Like commercial organisations, organised sport comprises an important social institution that affords social and economic benefit for local communities and society more broadly (Godfrey, 2009). For instance, Anagnostopoulos et al.

(2014) explored the personal attributes, backgrounds, values, and beliefs in English football (soccer) clubs to fill the gap at the organisational level. It was found that four key micro-social processes ('harmonising', 'safeguarding', 'manoeuvring', and 'transcending') created the basis on which managers within these clubs' made decisions. These four key micro-social processes, as proposed by Anagnostopoulos et al. (2014), are defined by and transpire through:

- *Harmonising*. This concerns the conditions that affect managerial decision-making. This involves the available resources (financial and human); the requirements that assist or constrain their involvement and engagement with social responsibility-based programs; and a level of flexibility that allows for adjusting to and evolving in various situations and conditions.
- *Safeguarding*. This explains the reasons that lead managers to make the decisions regarding social responsibility-based programs. This involves appreciating that what these clubs/organisations do should serve the 'parent' club's business/financial performance, and in turn evolve into more ad hoc support.
- *Manoeuvring*. This is the methods which the managers utilise to control factors that limit harmonising and safeguarding. This process involves strategies used to overcome challenges and constraints managers face in decision-making. These challenges are associated with formation of programs and could be momentary or perpetual, whereas constraints are related to implementation and limitations within the environment.
- *Transcending*. This is the process that inspires managers' decision-making for a larger scope of social responsibility and future social responsibility involvement. This occurs when managers have passion for their job or the issue in question, and it is contingent on trust.

In addition to these four key micro-social processes, Trendafilova et al. (2013) found that scrutiny and regulation, and normative and associative pressures influence action on and adoption of social responsibility. This qualitative study specifically explored corporate social responsibility and environmental sustainability in professional sporting teams and leagues in North America. Scrutiny and regulation and normative and associative pressures contribute to variation in the rate of adoption of responsibility (Trendafilova et al., 2013). Furthermore, constraints such as costs, expertise, evaluation of outcomes, momentum, and passion; and sporting focus, including access to media, facilities, brand image/recognition, and sporting celebrities influence the ability of the adoption or action to be impactful (Trendafilova et al., 2013). While the above factors and the four key micro-social processes certainly have implications and significance for corporate social responsibility at the professional and organisational level, it is worth considering how youth sport and the corporate sector enmesh.

1.3 Situating sporting clubs within a conceptual model of youth sport

When investigating social phenomena in youth sport settings, conceptual frameworks may be drawn on to situate the complex role of the sporting club and frame aspects of the broader environment (e.g., sociopolitical, organisational, governing bodies) which influences the social and cultural responsibilities that clubs are facing (Dorsch et al., 2021). As such, various conceptual models and theoretical positions were considered to frame this PhD, including systems theory, the social-ecological model, and social constructionism; all of which have been used in similar research (Casey et al., 2009; Kokko, 2014; Massey et al., 2015). While these models offered some applicability to this investigation, a more interconnected and dynamic model was needed, reflecting a range of social and environmental factors which might influence the expanding social role of sporting clubs.

The youth sport system (see Figure 1) addresses this need. The youth sport system is a popular and flexible heuristic that assists in understanding a phenomenon and supports the development of research theories or recommendations (Dorsch et al., 2022). Key tenets of the integrated youth system include "the set of interdependent persons (i.e., parents, siblings, peers, and coaches) and contexts (i.e., organizations, communities, and societies) that have the potential to influence or be influenced by an athlete's behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and outcomes in youth sport" (Dorsch et al., 2022, p. 106). Consequently, the youth sport system as a conceptual model was highly appropriate for outlining how distal aspects of youth sport (such as societies, communities, and organisations) impact the club, which then affects how the various subsystems enact and experience social and cultural responsibilities. This research, therefore, used the youth sport system as a conceptual model to make sense of, organise, and consider the wide-ranging and interconnecting factors, which influence how social responsibility is operationalised within a youth sporting club.

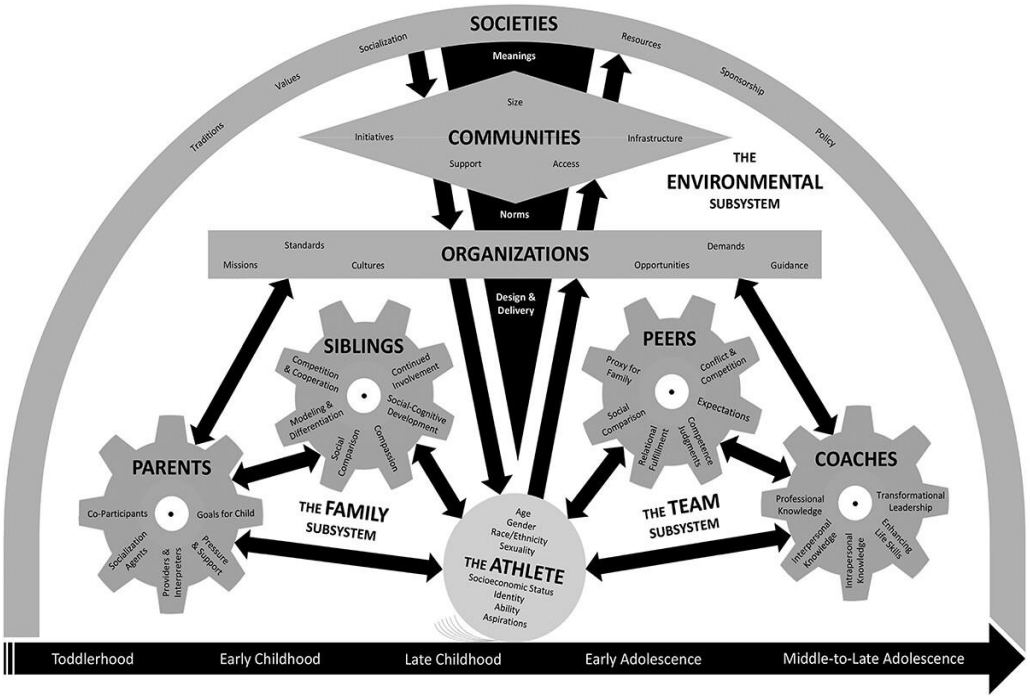

Figure 1: The youth sport system (Dorsch et al., 2022, p. 111). Reproduced with permission from Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group, © 2025.

1.4 Research question and objectives

The research question for this thesis is:

- *How do Australian youth sporting clubs understand, perceive, and enact social and cultural responsibility in youth sport?*

There are three main research objectives of this study:

- Identify the actions, processes, and social conditions with which clubs navigate social and cultural responsibility in youth sport;
- Understand how youth sporting clubs develop their capacity to enact social and cultural responsibility;
- Explore the challenges and opportunities clubs perceive in relation to fulfilling their social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport.

1.5 Significance of the research

This study is significant for multiple reasons. First, this study advances the notion that sport can comprise a social good and a vehicle for positive social change. By exploring how successful clubs navigate and maintain a broad suite of social and cultural responsibilities, this PhD provides valuable insights into the means, methods, practices, and considerations for other clubs seeking to expand their social influence on young people through sport.

Second, this research is significant from a policy and practice perspective given the current South Australian state government's focus on modernising the role and function of sporting clubs. The findings contained in this thesis can play a vital role in bridging the gap between policy intentions and the implementation of club development and training initiatives.

Third, this research can support future research which might seek to evolve the current scope of social and cultural responsibilities pertaining to this PhD. As society and culture shifts focus on key issues which pervade organised youth sport, the findings of this research can provide a conceptual 'blueprint' for clubs to take-up new initiatives of social and cultural responsibility.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Following this first chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the literature that includes corporate social responsibility, the predominant social and cultural responsibilities in youth sporting clubs, and organisational capacity. This literature review discusses the current broader responsibilities of youth sporting clubs, including diversity and inclusion, mental health and wellbeing, and social relationships. Following the literature review, Chapter 3 introduces and discusses the methodological underpinnings of this research, and methods utilised to collect and analyse data. Such as, interpretive description, individual interviews and focus groups, reflexive thematic analysis, and methodological rigour. Chapter 4 displays an integrated findings and discussion chapter, with the themes derived from reflexive thematic analysis from data collected in the individual interviews and focus groups with parents, coaches, and club leaders. Chapter 4 presents an integrated discussion about the findings, connecting and comparing to the current stock of literature, the youth sport system, and implications for practice; also including the strengths and limitations of this research. Finally, chapter 5 concludes the thesis, providing the significant findings, and various recommendations for practice and future research. Below (see Table 1), a thesis summary table is included to provide a comprehensive overview of the entire thesis. This table is designed to be summative and provide a high-level overview of the thesis.

Table 1: Thesis summary table

Chapter	Title	Synopses
1	Introduction	This chapter provides a basis to the research thesis through introducing topics such as the importance of and current role of youth sporting clubs and corporate social responsibility; which assists in laying the foundation for the literature review in chapter 2. This chapter also situates sporting clubs within a conceptual model, provides the research questions and objectives, and project significance.
2	Literature Review	As introduced in the introduction, this chapter provides a review of the literature on corporate social responsibility, the broader social and cultural responsibilities of youth sporting clubs (namely, social relationships, inclusion and diversity, and mental health), and organisational capacity. Additionally, and through the organisational capacity literature, a conceptual model was discussed, developed, and applied throughout the following PhD thesis.
3	Methodology	The methodology chapter provides a comprehensive outline for the philosophical underpinnings, means, and methods utilised throughout this study. This chapter details positionality, research philosophy, research design, participant sampling and recruitment, data collection and analysis, and methodological rigour.
4	Findings & Discussion	This chapter is an integrated findings and discussion chapter. The chapter includes six key themes developed through reflexive thematic analysis, direct participant quotes, and subsequent discussion with links made to the literature or conceptual frameworks. This chapter also contains the thesis strengths and limitations.

5	Conclusion	The conclusion summarises the key finds found within chapter 4; and also provides 20 thematically organised recommendations for practice, for sporting clubs and organisations. The conclusion also provides 5 recommendations for research.
	References	This chapter lists the references used in this research.
	Appendices	This chapter lists the appendices used in this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

> The goal of a literature review should be to further the body of knowledge … Consider therefore whether the authors have derived and clearly presented new ideas and/or new research directions from any identified knowledge gaps. (Byrne, 2016, p. 3)

2.1 Introduction

This literature review serves several purposes in introducing, describing, and critically discussing many of the key debates that have shaped the researchers thinking in relation to the role of youth sporting clubs in navigating increasing social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport. In line with the purpose of this PhD, and given that no specific discipline, subject, or field of research on social and cultural responsibility in youth sport exists in the literature, three disparate lines of inquiry were considered to emphasise the emergence of expanding social and cultural responsibilities. In this pursuit, an attempt was made to create a space for critically exploring the changing discourses, narratives, and sociocultural influences which have compelled youth sporting clubs to 'do more'. This chapter begins by describing and justifying the search strategies used for this review. This chapter reviews literature on corporate social responsibility; the broader responsibilities within youth sport including social relationships in sport, inclusion and diversity, and mental health education; and concludes by addressing organisational capacity in youth sport.

2.2 Narrative literature review

To review and summarise current knowledge about the social and cultural responsibilities of contemporary youth sporting clubs, a narrative (traditional) literature review was undertaken (Sutton et al., 2019). Narrative literature reviews are characterised by covering a wide range of subjects at various levels of completeness and comprehensiveness but have been criticised

for lacking an explicit intent to 'maximise scope' and selecting literature that lends credence to particular world views (Grant & Booth, 2009). However, narrative literature reviews remain an important component of a doctoral thesis that can provide a basis for an understanding of where a particular field of research began, currently is, and where it may go in the future (Rozas & Klein, 2010). Moreover, it was deemed imperative to read across a wide range of subject matter to illustrate what has not yet been adequately portrayed (Grant & Booth, 2009; Li & Wang, 2018; Sutton et al., 2019). Narrative reviews are useful for identifying pre-established patterns and themes across a broad scientific base, consolidating, building on previous investigations and work, and for identifying omissions or gaps (Grant & Booth, 2009; Rozas & Klein, 2010; Sutton et al., 2019). To this end, the flexible methods and characteristics of a narrative literature review described in Grant and Booth's (2009, p. 94) Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis (SASA) framework were openly embraced to guide the current review:

- *Search*: May or may not include comprehensive searching;
- *Appraisal*: May or may not include quality assessment;
- *Synthesis*: Typically narrative;
- *Analysis*: Analysis may be chronological, conceptual, thematic, etc.

Search. The review of the literature commenced in April 2021 and was carried out over approximately three-and-a-half-years, concluding in June 2025. New searches and updates to the thesis occurred on a fortnightly basis, or when notified of new research (through a Google Scholar alert or peer/supervisory team discussion). The specific electronic databases used included ProQuest, Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis Online, Scopus, SPORTDiscus, and SAGE Journals. Google Scholar was used first for broad, initial searches to develop a brief understanding of the area. These databases were chosen because of their frequent utility in

previous research on mental health (e.g., Eather et al., 2023), diversity and inclusion (e.g., Scifo et al., 2019), and social relationships (e.g., parent–coach–child) (e.g., McShan & Moore, 2023) and sport systematic reviews – the three research areas argued to comprise social and cultural responsibilities in contemporary youth sporting clubs. The literature search utilised a key words database search strategy (see Tables 2–5 below), a method of 'citation mining' (other times referred to as 'pearling' or 'snowballing') (Adams, 2015), and an 'aggregative approach' (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013) involving a targeted search of key author names, works, and literature suggestions in collaboration with the PhD supervisory team, who have extensively published in the fields of diversity and inclusion, mental health, and social relationships in sport. The key search terms were generated through an initial exploration of the field to familiarise oneself with the stock of research, supervisory recommendations, and snowballing through research discovery.

Table 2: The search terms used and organised based on relevance and combinations for the sector of mental health

Search term 1	'club', 'sporting club', 'grassroots', 'community', 'youth sport', 'youth sporting club', 'organised', 'sport', 'organised sport'
Search term 2	'mental health', 'wellbeing', 'COVID-19', 'parents', 'youth', 'athlete', 'coaches', 'clubs', 'coach', 'officials', 'stakeholder'
Search term 3	'expectations', 'roles', 'initiatives', 'program', 'education', 'support', 'policy', 'interventions', 'health promotion', 'political', 'historical', 'responsibility', 'social', 'cultural', 'burden', 'stressors', 'effects'

Table 3: The search terms used and organised based on relevance and combinations for the sector of inclusion and diversity

Search term 1	'club', 'sporting club', 'grassroots', 'community', 'youth sport', 'youth sporting club', 'organised', 'sport', 'organised sport'
Search term 2	'inclusion', 'diversity', 'parents', 'youth', 'athlete', 'coaches', 'clubs', 'stakeholder', 'disability', 'females', 'women', 'girls', 'LGBT', 'LGBTQIA', 'immigrant', 'race'
Search term 3	'expectations', 'roles', 'initiatives', 'program', 'education', 'support', 'policy', 'perceptions', 'experiences', 'political', 'novice', 'responsibility', 'social', 'cultural', 'volunteer', 'burden'

Table 4: The search terms used and organised based on relevance and combinations for the sector of social relationships

Search term 1	'club', 'sporting club', 'grassroots', 'community', 'youth sport', 'youth sporting club', 'organised', 'sport', 'organised sport'
Search term 2	'relationships', 'interpersonal', 'parents', 'youth', 'athlete', 'coaches', 'clubs', 'stakeholder'
Search term 3	'expectations', 'roles', 'program', 'education', 'support', 'perceptions', 'experiences', 'responsibility', 'social', 'cultural', 'conflict', 'attitudes', 'behaviours'

Table 5: The search terms used and organised based on relevance and combinations for the sector of corporate social responsibility and organisational capacity

Search term 1	'corporate', 'social responsibility', 'organisational', 'capacity', 'youth sport', 'community club', 'sporting organisations',
Search term 2	'CSR', 'CSOs', 'business', 'stakeholders', 'society', 'communities', 'policy', 'readiness'
Search term 3	'development', 'responsibilities', 'contemporary', 'historical', 'education', 'experiences', 'foundations', 'framework', 'social', 'cultural', 'political'

Appraisal. A total of 296 peer-reviewed references were included in this narrative review. Out of the 296 peer-reviewed references, 271 were peer-reviewed journal articles, published in 97 different journals. Of the 296 peer-reviewed references, the remaining 25 references included books, definitions, government and organisation reports, and official statistics. Within the 97 different journals in this literature review, 51 were published in a Q1-ranked journal at the time of publication, 26 in a Q2-ranked journal, 15 in a Q3-ranked journal, 2 in a Q4-ranked journal, 3 in unranked journals. All references included were considered relevant or useful to integrate and use throughout the literature review (i.e., to build an argument, present information, statistical information, and highlight gaps within the literature).

Synthesis and analysis. The narrative review of the literature was synthesised with consideration of chronological *and* conceptual/thematic developments in each respective field. The rest of this chapter attempts to emphasise the work of scholars on positioning sporting clubs to take on increasing social and cultural responsibility, which now manifests as clubs' roles and responsibilities in promoting mental health, diversity and inclusion, and positive social relationships in sport.

2.3 Social responsibility

2.3.1 The foundations of corporate social responsibility

For 90 years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has developed from a popular idea into an expected commercial practice. Early intrigue about organisations' social concerns can be noted in works such as Berle (1931), Dodd (1932), Bowen (1953), Davis (1960), and Frederick (1960). Specifically, Bowen's book *'Social Responsibilities of the Businessman'* (1953) laid groundwork in the development and conceptualisation of CSR, defining it as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those politics, to make those decisions, or to follow

those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of society" (p. 6). There were other influential contributors in the 1960's such as Frederick (1960, 1978, 1998), and Davis (1960) who states that CSR is "…a public posture toward society's economic and human resources and a willingness to see that those resources are utilized for broad social ends…" (p. 60). The proliferation of work in the 1950's and 60's are considered foundational beginnings, and thus 'more talk than action' on a practical front (Carroll, 2008).

In the 1970's, the meaning and application of CSR was further developed. Key works from Heald (1970), Steiner (1972), Davis (1973), Eells and Walton (1974), Frederick (1978), and the Committee for Economic Development (1971) contributed to the 'social contract' between businesses and society. This detailed the ways business was changing from social movements, wars, environmental care, and regulations. At the end of the 1970's, Carroll (1979) proposed a new definition of CSR, conceptualised as being "responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (p. 500). Throughout the 1980's CSR was 'recast' into newer concepts, theories, and models to find meaning and to elucidate 'truth'. For example, Jones (1980) stated that CSR should be thought of as a process rather than a set of outcomes; and Tuzzolino and Armandi (1981) noted the benefit of an analytical framework to facilitate the operationalisation of CSR. From the 1990's, fewer unique contributions were made. The concept of CSR was considered a 'point-of-departure' where adjacent concepts such as ethics, sustainability, and philanthropy were further developed. These foundational periods were undoubtedly important for the current conceptualisation and operationalisation of CSR, especially when extending into sport and not-for-profit institutions.

2.3.2 The development of corporate social responsibility in sport

From a contemporary perspective, CSR has developed into sport, both professional and not-for-profit. The concept of social programs in sport, have gained significant traction; alongside a general resurgence of research on CSR (Breitbarth, Walzel, Anagnostopoulos, & Van Eekeren, 2015; Paramio-Salcines, Babiak, & Walters, 2013). Godfrey (2009) states that sporting organisations can have a similar social and economic impact on their local communities and society, to that of commercial organisations. In other words, sport can be viewed as both a social and economic institution (Giulianotti, 2015; Selznick, 1996, 2011) – a dual orientation in which business principles and practices are intertwined with the broader goals of sporting clubs (Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). As such, the corporate 'social impact' of sport, it is often regarded as being "no different than any other industry" (Godfrey, 2009, p. 710).

One key study investigated the link and overlap between CSR and the responsibilities that may be central to sport (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Smith and Westerbeek (2007) discovered that when social responsibility was employed in the sports industry, a number of outcomes were observed. The outcomes include increased media distribution and communication, youth appeal, positive health promotion, social interaction, environmental awareness, and cultural understanding. Although this study was conducted within the corporate setting, it was one of the earlier efforts to conceptualise the sporting industry as a legitimate context for studying social responsibility. This study also served as a basis for the consideration and development of social responsibility in various other sporting contexts, such as the youth sport setting.

Although CSR has previously been described as a 'social performance' (Paramio-Salcines, Babiak, & Walters, 2013; Wood, 1991) to legitimise organisational principles, values, and responsibilities, it is arguably emerging as a priority for organised sport

(Paramio-Salcines et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2019). In sport, CSR pertains to the opportunity for clubs to 'reconnect with espoused values' (Wood & Logsdon, 2002) and to "show concern for social issues and leverage their favoured institutional status in helping resolve problems…" (Godfrey, 2009, p. 699). For example, professional sports organisations have engaged with community development initiatives to support community programs (Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Godfrey, 2009; Walzel, Robertson, & Anagnostopoulos, 2018). Similarly, community level sporting clubs are arguably becoming more aware of and invested in the provision of their own social responsibility.

Despite the importance of economic viability, the very social nature of sporting organisations compel the integration of social initiatives and responsibilities (Kolyperas, Anagnostopoulos, Chadwick, & Sparks, 2016; Walzel, Robertson, & Anagnostopoulos, 2018). Adding to this, some scholars agree that sports have an inherent socially responsible and community-focused essence which has only developed further in importance both inside and outside 'the sporting sphere' (Trendafiova, Ziakas, & Sparvero, 2017; Walzel, Robertson, & Anagnostopoulos, 2018). This growing importance and automatic association with social responsibility may lend itself to why corporate organisations utilise various organisations, events, and athletes as ways to meet social (and commercial) goals (Bason & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Walzel, Robertson, & Anagnostopoulos, 2018).

Building on these perspectives, the concept of CSR assumed increasing attention in sporting organisations and professional sporting contexts (Anagnostopoulos, Byers, & Shilbury, 2014; Trendafilova, Babiak, & Heinze, 2013). The literature surrounding professional team sporting organisations and CSR generates a broad range of issues and research topics (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2014; Trendafilova et al., 2013; Walzel et al., 2018), such as motives for social outreach involvement (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Babiak &

Wolfe, 2009; Hamil & Morrow, 2011); concerns about CSR implementation (Hovemann, Breitbarth, & Walzel, 2011; Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Walters & Anagnostopoulos, 2012); outcomes and management of implementation (Inoue, Kent, & Lee, 2011; Walters & Chadwick, 2009); the strategic implementation of CSR (Heinze, Soderstrom, & Zdroik, 2014; Hovemann, Breitbarth, & Walzel, 2011); monetary benefits (Inoue, Kent, & Lee, 2011); communication (Kolyperas & Sparks, 2011; Slack & Shrives, 2008; Walker, Kent, & Vincent, 2010); and perceptions from stakeholders (such as, consumers, beneficiaries, and partners) (Blumrodt, Bryson, & Flanagan, 2012; Kihl, Babiak, & Tainsky, 2014; Walker, Hills, & Heere, 2017). These studies, although diverse in focus, provide valuable insights about the directions, implementation, and relation between CSR and sport (albeit at a professional level).

2.3.3 Social responsibility within youth sporting clubs

While there has been extensive research about CSR of professional sporting clubs and their commercial entities; the role and importance of community sporting clubs and social responsibility have emerged as a contemporary line of enquiry. There are few studies specifically about youth sporting clubs, rather, the literature presents community sporting organisations as an all-encompassing term for non-profit institutions that include children, adolescents, and adults (Misener, Morrison, Shier, & Babiak, 2020). The actions, initiatives, and programs conducted by sporting clubs and organisations can be framed by the concept of 'social responsibility' itself, referring to ethical practices and care for their wider communities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2013; Carroll, 1979; Misener et al., 2020). There are numerous studies of CSR within professional and commercial sectors within management fields, but the focus on social responsibility relating to non-profit organisations or youth sport is much less prevalent (Andreini, Pedeliento, & Signori, 2014; Zeimers, Anagnostopoulos, Zintz, & Willem, 2019; Zeimers & Léonard, 2025).

So, with community sporting clubs holding cultural significance in many countries – why is there limited specific research about social responsibility and non-profit organisations or community sporting clubs? It is theorised by Misener et al. (2020) that this may be because non-profit institutions are considered socially responsible by virtue of providing 'social good' and a service to society or their local community. It is added however, that the concept of social responsibility encompasses a broader philosophy that is found through the organisation's discretionary actions and that the totality of their actions should strive to be responsible (Carroll, 1979). The current research about community or youth sporting clubs and social responsibility has investigated whether community sporting clubs have broader responsibilities (outside of sport) (Robertson, Eime, & Westerbeek, 2019); how social responsibility influences community sport membership (Misener et al., 2020); sponsorships (Misener & Doherty, 2014); and spectator behaviours (Morrison, Misener, & Mock, 2020). This field of research, indeed is contemporary and emerging, evidenced by both recent publications and the lack specific studies investigating social and cultural responsibilities, programs, or initiatives in youth sport.

As previously discussed, the 1970s brought around change in the way in which CSR was considered and operationalised through factors such as social change, policy, activism, and environmental care. To draw parallels, youth sporting clubs today face various emergent, popular, and evolving social and cultural responsibilities. Increasing education, awareness, and activism among society has led to the emergence of policies and practices that place inclusion and diversity, mental health and wellbeing, and the development of social relationships (Gould, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Robertson et al., 2019) at the forefront of importance for youth sporting clubs. This serves as a point of research, as community and youth sporting clubs face increasing pressures about the bounds and capacity of their social responsibility. In revisiting Bowen's (1953) initial work, he posited this question: ''what

responsibilities to society may businessmen reasonably be expected to assume?" (p. xvii). This holds much relevance to this day, where youth sporting clubs and organisations are asking this question now about social responsibility.

2.4 Broader social and cultural responsibilities of youth sporting clubs

2.4.1 The role of clubs in fostering positive social relationships

The first pillar of this narrative review concerns the role and responsibility of sporting clubs in fostering positive social relationships through sport. While often considered an implicit responsibility or outcome of sport, sporting clubs also play role in strengthening relationships between key constituents in youth sport including but not limited to parents, coaches and youth participants (Elliott et al., 2018; Gould, 2019; Knight, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022). While social relationships may not always receive much attention, in some clubs there are recent deliberate attempts at enhancing social relationships. For instance, Dittman et al., (2024) developed the Play Well Triple P in Australian junior rugby, which has been widely utilised to improve parental involvement in youth sport settings. Similarly, the Monkey See Monkey Do program is facilitated towards youth players about bullying and violence, and parents and club members about the risks of inappropriate sideline behaviours and attitudes (McCabe et al., 2024).

The dynamic nature of these social relationships has received much academic attention over the past 25 years, focusing on the behaviours, interactions, and perceptions about intersecting tiers of social involvement in youth sport (for reviews, see Dorsch et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2024; Smith & Côté, 2023). While it is important to note that other social relationships exist in youth sport which involve siblings (Blazo & Smith, 2018; Trussell, 2014) and grandparents (Schinke et al., 2010), the social relationships surrounding parents, coaches and athletes (often referred to as the parent–coach–athlete triad) (Smoll et al., 2011)

remain the most researched social dynamics in the field. One explanation for this is that the intricate and complex nature of these relationships can influence sporting performance, attitudes, and retention in clubs (Elliott et al., 2018; Knight, 2019; Knight & Holt, 2014; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2024; Wall et al., 2019). Indeed, social relationships in the field of youth sport can have significant effects on youth athletes' psychosocial developmental including their sporting performance, mental health, and longevity in the sport or club (Harwood et al., 2019; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005).

These interpersonal relationships (typically between parents, coaches, and athletes) have previously been conceptualised as the parent–coach–athlete triad or triangle (Smoll et al., 2011) to represent the major stakeholders involved in youth sport, and the dynamics within those relationships. However, the integrated youth sport system model (Dorsch et al., 2022) is a more recent means to conceptualise the key 'gears' within a broader youth sport system and identifies several key social agents beyond the parent–coach–athlete triad (e.g. siblings). Notwithstanding the positive outcomes that can also develop between parents, coaches, and children, the literature has consistently identified the nature of conflictual and stressful social interactions which can emerge within these social dynamics (Elliott & Drummond, 2017b; Elliott et al., 2018; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Harwood et al., 2019; Knight, 2019; Lisinskiene et al., 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2024; Smoll et al., 2011). It is for this reason that researchers have called for sporting clubs and organisations to play a leading role in supporting, educating, and valuing strong social relationships in youth sport (O'Donnell et al., 2022; Preston et al., 2020). For example, studies about parental involvement in youth sport have repeatedly recommended that clubs play a stronger leadership role in improving youth sport culture to support parents' contributions and understand the stressors they encounter across the sporting journey (Harwood & Knight, 2009; Harwood et al., 2019; Knight, 2019; Newport et al., 2021;

Sutcliffe, Kelly et al., 2021). Clubs and organisations have also been asked to reflect on their role in providing a safer sporting experience that protects children from adult (coach and parent) maltreatment and abuse (Kirby et al., 2000; Shanmugam et al., 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). Clubs have been implored to actively seek out opportunities to strengthen educational and information support between parents and coaches as a means for improving parent and child experiences (O'Donnell et al., 2022; Webb & Knight, 2024).

When actively seeking out opportunities, clubs often experience difficulties when taking an explicit approach to strengthening social relationships. For example, Thrower et al. (2019) used a web-based delivery method to educate parents and support their involvement in youth tennis and found that lengthy program evaluations and a lack of tailored and well-timed content prompted parental attrition. As such, clubs found it difficult to sustain parent education programs. Similarly, Kwon et al. (2020) examined the feasibility of using educational video resources to support parents' involvement in youth sport and concluded that clubs need multiple knowledge dissemination points to share informational and educational resources to improve parenting interactions in youth sport. It is arguable that optimising social relationships in youth sport has been a difficult challenge for organised sporting clubs. Therefore, the following section focuses on current evidence surrounding the unique social relationships that develop within club settings and reviews the role of clubs in shaping relationship quality and experience.

2.4.1.1 Developing parent–athlete relationships in clubs.

It is well documented in sport parenting literature that parents significantly influence their child's involvement and participation in sport (Côté, 1999; Dorsch et al., 2021; Elliott & Drummond, 2017b; Elliott et al., 2018; Knight, 2019; Knight & Holt, 2014; Sutcliffe et al., 2024; Wuerth et al., 2004). It has been consistently shown that parents' emotional and

financial support for a youth athlete is fundamental to their development and participation in sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2017a; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Harwood et al., 2010; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Wuerth et al., 2004). Additionally, parents play a vital role in socialising children into sport, providing them with opportunities for participation, and influencing their experiences (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Neely & Holt, 2014; Newport et al., 2021). However, since there is potential for negative involvement of the parent, researchers have been investigating how to optimise parental involvement, and ultimately the relationship between parents and athletes. The club has been identified as playing a significant and central role as the setting and mechanism that can assist in optimising this relationship (O'Donnell et al., 2022; Rhind & Jowett, 2010; Tagliavini et al., 2023).

Clubs can help to capture important developmental benefits through ensuring parents provide emotional support, appropriate levels of involvement, and positive praise and understanding (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). It is well documented that appropriate parental involvement and emotional support is important as it can result in increased self-esteem and confidence in athletes (via positive reinforcement and support systems), facilitation of skills from sport, increased intrinsic motivation and enjoyment, and long-term involvement (Bremer, 2012; Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006; Weiss, 2019).

Negative or inappropriate involvement can damage athletes' self-confidence and self-perception, which increases the risk of anxiety and depression, decreased enjoyment, higher risk of burnout and injury, and poor emotional control from lack of support systems (Bremer, 2012; Weiss, 2019). Inappropriate and negative parental involvement may include verbal, emotional, and physical abuse, unrealistic expectations (parental pressure), and aggressive gestures towards the athlete, coaches, and officials (Elliott & Drummond, 2015; Furusa et al., 2021; Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Gould et al., 2006; Harwood et al., 2019; Omli & Wiese-

Bjornstal, 2011; Ross et al., 2015). Consequently, the literature demonstrates that youth sporting clubs are in a unique position to facilitate the positive development and maintenance of parent–athlete relationships, minimise the risk of negative adult involvement, and provide resources to nurture communication and interactions.

One key challenge for clubs to navigate relates to the timing, method, and degree with which they support relationship development. Clubs must carefully avoid 'overstepping' their influence through the provision of advice and support given that relationship formation and development within a youth sport triad can comprise of differential values, expectations, and perceptions. To illustrate this, parents may self-perceive their involvement in youth sport as positive, supportive, and encouraging, while athletes may perceive the relationship in more negative ways (Furusa et al., 2021). Common issues such as providing negative feedback, insufficient emotional support, and inappropriate involvement all have the potential to undermine relationships between parents and children (Bailey et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2023; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; McCabe et al., 2024).

Within the club environment, parents may also attempt to coach their child and offer directives which have the potential to disrupt their developmental wellbeing and relationship formation with other constituents in the youth sport system (e.g., peers, coaches, and volunteers) (Neely & Holt, 2014; Preston & Fraser-Thomas, 2016). These behaviours and attitudes not only negatively impact the development and wellbeing of youth athletes but also can potentially disrupt other relationships within the youth sport system (e.g., the parent–coach relationship) (Bremer, 2012; Harwood & Knight, 2009; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Van Mullem & Cole, 2015). In recognising the risks in this side of the parent–athlete relationship, clubs can play a crucial role in minimising or mitigating these issues by establishing and maintaining (or modelling) appropriate boundaries that allow athletes a safe environment to develop and be supported.

The negative impact of inappropriate parental involvement reinforces the importance of sports clubs fulfilling a social responsibility by creating an appropriate environment that allows parent–athlete relationships to positively develop (Furusa et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2022). It has been identified that emotional abuse or inappropriate behaviours often occur on the drive back home (Elliott & Drummond, 2017b), which highlights the youth sporting club's position in facilitatating positive interpersonal relationships. Creating opportunities for parent socialisation, or parent and child training sessions may facilitate the development of parent–athlete relationships through positive reinforcement and support systems, balance within the youth sport system, increased intrinsic motivation, and general enjoyment from both sides of the relationship (Bremer, 2012; Weiss, 2019). Since youth sport participation is an important avenue for strengthening family relationships (Sutcliffe et al., 2024), the club can provide parents the opportunity to display their dedication and investment through providing attention and social support (Hurley et al., 2018; Stefansen et al., 2018; Sutcliffe, Herbison et al., 2021). Clubs have also been called on to support and "upskill" parents' communication and methods of feedback provision in order to improve the quality of the conversations with their child (Furusa et al., 2021). Moreover, several recommendations by Dittman et al., (2024) surround the opportunity for clubs to strengthen junior sport program inductions by integrating a parent induction program to better prepare parents in the role of a supportive parent in their child's sporting experience.

2.4.1.2 Club support in developing the coach–athlete relationship

Another well-documented relationship within the parent–coach–athlete triad and the integrated youth sport system is between coaches and athletes. Coaches have substantial influence on the athlete including their developmental outcomes and success in sport (Chan et al., 2012; Nicholls et al., 2016). Within the coach-athlete relationship, the coach is a highly influential and their behaviour dictates many sporting and relational outcomes. For instance,

coach influence within a club setting is displayed by the fact that they are often considered to the be 'face' of the club to stakeholders, and in direct contact with athletes the most (Drummond et al., 2019), and thus most likely to be responsible for delivering social responsibilities or inclusive messaging. Further, Coatsworth and Conroy (2009) found that positive coach behaviour (e.g., praising autonomous behaviour) can result in increased athlete competence and self-esteem which influences initiative, goal setting, and identity reflection. Clubs can play a fundamental role in supporting coaches in developing approaches that best compliment autonomy-supportive coaching (e.g., training sessions, especially for novice coaches) (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009). Likewise, clubs need to support the coach as the 'face of the club' by ensuring that the coach is aware of the inclusive messaging they are communicating to athlete (Drummond et al., 2019) and provide mental health support for coaches (Breslin et al., 2022; Frost et al., 2024; Walton, Carberry et al., 2021).

According to Chan et al. (2012) and Lopez de Subijana et al. (2021), coaches are crucial in athletes' success and developmental outcomes; however, it is further emphasised under certain conditions and contexts. Namely, the approach a coach utilises matters; and approaches such as the athlete-centred or coach-centred approach will restrict the development and quality of the relationship (Cassidy & Kidman, 2010; Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Clubs may like to guide coaches towards implementing a coach-athlete centred approach – where the relationship is holistic, supportive, inclusive of the thoughts and opinions of both parties, and empowers both parties in self-learning and development (Bowles & O'Dwyer, 2020; Jowett, 2017; Kerr et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2023). Utilising an athlete-centred approach emphasises purpose and positive intentions within the coach–athlete relationship, which assists in developing and fostering support, motivation, and satisfaction that will enhance the athlete's overall performance, experiences, mental health, and physical wellbeing (Cassidy & Kidman, 2010; Jowett, 2017; Jowett et al., 2023; Jowett &

Shanmugam, 2016; Jowett & Slade, 2021). Coaches aiming to minimise interpersonal conflicts and maximise intrinsic rewards/satisfaction have positive relationships with athletes (Jowett & Carpenter, 2015). Similarly, the motivational climate that the coach utilises can enhance the coach–athlete relationship (Keegan et al., 2010). Research by Keegan et al. (2010) has found that athletes have positive perceptions of coaches who set a mastery-based motivational climate, compared to an ego-based climate (which is perceived as more negative). This again highlights opportunities for clubs to support coaches with taking up approaches and coaching styles that would best enhance and positively influence the coach–athlete relationship (Lopez de Subijana et al., 2021).

It is also critical to discuss key research from Jowett & Shanmugam (2016) that discuss four key properties that display how the coach-athlete relationship is operationalised in youth sport. Jowett & Shanmugam (2016) describe the coach-athlete relationship as a social situation which is continuously shaped by the coaches and athletes own interpersonal thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Additionally, the coach and athlete are both mutually and causally interdependent and each other's feelings, thoughts, and behaviours affect and is affected by one another (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Therefore, the quality of the relationship can be described by the 4C's framework, as follows:

1. **Closeness** reflects interpersonal feelings of coaches and athletes that largely encapsulate an affective bond through their mutual respect, trust, appreciation, and liking for one another.
2. **Commitment** reflects interpersonal thoughts of coaches and athletes of maintaining a close (as opposed to distant, detached, unfriendly) relationship over time despite "ups and downs".

3. **Complementarity** reflects coaches and athletes' interpersonal behaviours of leadership (reciprocal complementarity) and co-operation (corresponding complementarity).
4. **Co-orientation** reflects coaches and athletes' level of interdependence in terms of similarity and understanding concerning their views of the quality of their relationship.

The 4C's provide a basis of understanding about the quality of coach-athlete relationships. As such, clubs can play a role in their implementation of the framework within their coaching relationships. For example, clubs may choose to provide goal setting workshops for coaches and their athletes to improve commitment within the relation. Furthermore, clubs play a key role in providing and setting boundaries in the coach-athlete relationship that both safeguards the athlete and promotes the utilisation of the 4C's in the relationship (e.g., coaching styles that are complimentary to the 4C's framework). This body of work thus reflects a timely evidence-base for clubs seeking to optimise social relationships between coaches and youth athletes.

While coaches can positively influence athletes' motivation, mental health, and quality of sport involvement (Wekesser et al., 2021), there are also instances whereby the nature of coach-athlete relationships may become detrimental. Research has shown that coaches can perpetrate physical, emotional, and sexual abuse toward athletes which can negatively impact their psychological and physical wellbeing, training, and sporting performance (Gaedicke et al., 2021; Jowett et al., 2023; Jowett & Slade, 2021; Kerr et al., 2020; Kim, 2024; Kirby et al., 2000; Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2009, 2013; Wilinsky & McCabe, 2021). The 'blurred' boundaries, close proximity, and power imbalances that exist between coaches and young athletes are characteristics of an environment in which coach-perpetrated abuse towards athletes may occur (Gaedicke et al., 2021). So, while coaches hold considerable influence,

there may be opportunities for clubs to strengthen efforts to safeguard athletes and maximise the benefits of positive and supportive coach-athlete relationships.

Despite research about the positives and potential development of coach–athlete relationships, coaches hold a position of power within not only the coach–athlete relationship, but clubs and the community (Gervis et al., 2016; Jacobs et al., 2018; McMahon et al., 2023; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). There are several documented risks surrounding the coach–athlete relationship due to the position of power that is typically tied to being an authority figure and someone responsible for minors (Gervis et al., 2016; Stirling & Kerr, 2009). For example, there are risks of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse occurring as the coach may betray and manipulate the athlete's sense of safety, trust, and fulfilment of needs (Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Investigations of abuse of the coach–athlete relationship show that emotional abuse occurs most frequently in the sport setting (Kirby et al., 2000); and may occur through physical behaviours (aggressiveness, intimidation), verbally (humiliation, dismissiveness, manipulation), and/or lack of attention and feedback (refusing adequate feedback) (Stirling & Kerr, 2008). This emphasises the influence and power coaches possess and their centrality in the way that certain behaviours are normalised in youth sport. It should already be a current responsibility of all sports clubs to ensure coaches, officials, and any other stakeholders working near minors and youth athletes have had the necessary background and Working with Children Checks for paid workers and volunteers to ensure they are fit to work with children, to minimise any risk of abuse.

It is unsurprising that calls for greater coach training and qualifications in youth sport have served as means of furthering safeguarding to prevent coach abuse. O'Donnell et al. (2022) found that factors such as coaching experience, formal qualifications, and reputation serve to maintain and perpetuate ideas that legitimise coaches and coaching practices. So, although reputation, qualifications, and experience dictate how many parents will view

coaches, their presence is not surprising considering training and qualifications are increasingly becoming mandated in youth sport (O'Donnell et al., 2022). From a parent's perspective, this is understandable as safety of children is a key expectation, as well as quality coaching – and qualifications are viewed as a 'safety net'. From a club perspective, to fulfill their social and cultural responsibilities, coaching education is becoming a requirement to meet expectations of quality coaching and safety, which in turn assists with trust development between the parent and coach. Ideally, clubs or sporting organisations would be able to provide coaching education programs or training; however, placing a strict qualification requirement in grassroot clubs may act as a barrier for some coaches depending on their socio-economic situation, and may inadvertently decrease opportunity and accessibility.

2.4.1.3 Navigating parent–coach relationships in youth sporting clubs

Among all the social and cultural responsibilities that clubs can absorb, one that has received less academic and policy attention surrounds the parent-coach relationship (Santos et al., 2024). This lack of policy and academic attention is surprising considering parents and coaches typically work in conjunction with one another in the sporting club towards a mutual goal of developing and supporting the youth athlete (Poczwardowski et al., 2002). Often, the parent-coach relationship is strained due to coaches perceiving parents to be overbearing, interruptive, and disruptive, and parents feeling as though coaches can be dismissive of parental concerns or support (Gould, 2019; Knight & Holt, 2014). To highlight the level of conflict in this relationship, some parents and coaches have gone as far as viewing one another as the 'enemy' (Knight & Holt, 2014). This is less than optimal for the development and management of the relationship and can significantly impact young athletes' emotional wellbeing and psychosocial development (Knight & Holt, 2014; O'Donnell, 2022).

Although there has been lesser academic and practical attention given to the parent-coach relationship, the club can play a crucial role supporting the management of conflict and development of this relationship. It was highlighted by Santos et al. (2024) that the development and maintenance of parent-coach relationships required a collaborative, strengths-based approach. Youth sporting clubs can create periodic social interactions that are vital in creating meaningful, strong relationships; facilitate frequent, transparent, open, and honest communication surrounding the child's needs; and provide a safe and supportive environment to foster respectful interactions between parents and coaches. These practices, however, are built upon the fundamental view that parents are considered an important and valuable part of the team (Santos et al., 2024). While clubs do also have opportunities to set boundaries or expectations (e.g., O'Donnell et al., 2022) regarding parent–coach relationships, Santos et al. (2024) have noted that simply doing the opposite of an ineffective practice will not guarantee an effective relationship.

Conflict management strategies are vital in dealing with conflict within parent-coach relationship. Studies by Horne et al. (2022) and Preston et al. (2020) report that factors such as poor communication, lack of trust, and absence of shared goals will compromise the development of the youth athlete. These factors are also extremely similar those found by O'Donnell et al. (2022), who conducted a study on the relationship between parents and coaches. These authors provide recommendations for further studies on parent and coach conflict management, resolution and collaboration, and enhancing communication. While Horne et al. (2022) and Preston et al. (2020) provided some recommendations regarding conflict management, O'Donnell et al. (2022) provided further recommendations for clubs on successfully fostering, developing, navigating and maintaining parent–coach relationships. These included the use of an intermediary role (to mediate and communicate between parties to an already volatile relationship), sharing goals, values, and expectations (through, for

example, club presentation nights, social events, parents getting involved with training), and having clubs (or coaches) set expectations of behaviour and boundaries within the club (O'Donnell et al., 2022). These recommendations are noteworthy considering the impact that parents and coaches have on the youth athlete (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Knight & Holt, 2014). They also have implications for sports clubs and the way in which they foster, develop, and navigate parent–coach relationships, especially those that are hostile and in need of conflict management, and how to maintain already positive relationships.

To promote fostering positive parent-coach relationships in clubs, Harwood and Knight (2015) argue that sports clubs can assist parents to develop knowledge and skills surrounding ideal athlete development and support, which also supports developing a better relationship with coaches (Harwood & Knight, 2015). This will lead to a better outcome for the club, and club environment. Improved parental involvement and parent–coach relationships can be fostered and developed through educating, understanding, and learning about the sport; and using the sports club to do this benefits parents, coaches, and athletes. Strengthening the parent–coach relationship is vital because both strongly influence attitudes, self-esteem and competence perceptions, values and morals, the motivational climate, and competitiveness and cooperation in youth sport (Blom et al., 2013; O'Rourke et al., 2014; Shanmugam et al., 2013).

While the club can employ strategies as O'Donnell et al. (2022) mention, education or support programs that encourage both parents and coaches to re-think their perspectives (towards one another, and youth sport programs more broadly), are most likely to be beneficial (Santos et al., 2024; Strachan et al., 2021). However, if ineffective practices are present, such as verbal and/or physical abuse (Yabe et al., 2021), poor communication (Lisinskiene et al., 2019), minimal meaningful coach–parent relationships (O'Donnell et al., 2022), lack of knowledge about how to foster positive coach–parent interactions and

relationships (Horne et al., 2023), parents' failure to trust coaches' expertise (Horne et al., 2022), coaches' lack of job autonomy (Horne et al., 2022), and poor time commitment for specific communication strategies (Lisinskiene et al., 2019), an unsafe environment for young athletes is created. Thus, focusing only on the education of parents and coaches could be insufficient (Santos et al., 2024). In such a case, broad education that supports all key decision-makers (i.e., the youth sport system – athletes, parents, coaches, club leaders) to reflect on their beliefs and conceptualisations of what youth sport is, can, and should be is suggested (Santos et al., 2024). Programs or strategies with a values-based, whole system approach are recommended to safeguard children in sport (Rhind et al., 2017).

Clearly, it is in a youth sports club's best interest to ensure that social relationships, such as those seen within the parent–coach–athlete triad or the youth sport system, are largely positive and free from complications. This is due to the multitude of benefits that impact not only the individuals in those relationships, but also those around them and the environment, enabling the building of a healthy, welcoming, and contemporary sports club.

2.4.2 Promoting diversity and inclusion in sport

Broader academic, political, and public debates about inclusion and diversity in sport have been largely influenced by the proliferation of research on female, LGBTIQ+, and disability sport experiences (Denison, Jeanes et al., 2021; Hall & Wilton, 2011; Haudenhuyse, 2017; Kiuppis, 2018; Levitas et al., 2007; Milner & Kelly, 2007; Schaillée, Haudenhuyse et al., 2019; Singleton & Darcy, 2013; Spaaij, Magee et al., 2014). While other studies examining the experiences of marginalised populations including migrants (Smith et al., 2019; Spaaij et al., 2023; Young & Block, 2023), refugees (Agergaard et al., 2022; Doidge et al., 2020), and Indigenous youth (McHugh et al., 2019) have contributed to this debate, the inclusion of female participants, individuals with a disability, and individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+ comprise substantive pillars of diversity and inclusion in sport research, as evidenced by

scholarly handbooks (e.g., Hargreaves & Anderson, 2014) and special issues (e.g., Casey et al., 2019; Kiuppis, 2018).

Historically, the inclusion of disability in sport was organised by separate disability advocacy groups (Fay & Wolff, 2009); however, within the last three decades, scholars and sporting organisations have sought to increase the level of inclusion of those with disabilities in mainstream sporting clubs (Christiaens & Brittain, 2023; Declerck et al., 2021; Jeanes et al., 2018; Kiuppis, 2018; Orr et al., 2018; Pochstein et al., 2023; Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). For example, to address issues of sport access and opportunity for individuals with a disability, researchers have recommended that sporting clubs increase communication and collaboration between different stakeholders including rehabilitation centres, hospitals, and health professionals (Declerck et al., 2021). Other scholars have argued that sporting clubs need to improve staff training, recruit staff with disabilities in sports clubs (i.e., shared understanding/experiences), improve accessibility (e.g., transport, changing rooms, sanitary facilities), purchase adapted equipment, and emphasise conviviality and belonging to promote social inclusion (Pierre et al., 2022).

Clubs have also been challenged to support 'key policy actors' who can invest their own "time, effort and energy into questioning the clubs' existing culture, driving change, and performing the practical tasks of establishing and running ongoing opportunities" as a means for promoting inclusion for young people with disabilities in community sports clubs (Jeanes et al., 2018, p. 49). However, some researchers have argued that clubs tend to adopt the approach of assimilation as integration within their pre-existing structures, meaning clubs focus on specific disabilities they can easily integrate into their club (Kitchin & Howe, 2014; Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). Scholars have suggested that clubs will choose disability policies that align best with their personal identity, resources, and the wants and needs of their existing members (Fahlén, 2015; Stenling & Fahlén, 2016). In essence, sporting clubs and

organisations are viewed as significant and critical settings for navigating increasing levels of responsibility, opportunity and challenge but remain limited by a range of economic and human resources

To explicate this perspective, clubs are readily asked to 'do more' in policy and practice to support diversity and inclusion of women in sport. For instance, to address retention issues, improving coaching interpersonal and communication skills and reflecting on existing participation policies and practices have been posited as important for clubs to address (Drummond et al., 2022). Clubs have also been challenged to re-engineer competition rules to meet the preferences of contemporary young female athletes (Elliott et al., 2020), develop new, 'non-competitive sport products' that are not aligned to a performance pathway (Eime et al., 2020), and provide female participants the opportunity to gain coaching and umpiring experience during youth development (Litchfield & Elliott, 2021). Clubs must also consider their capacity to support efforts to address a lack of female officials involved in community sport (Baxter et al., 2023). Facilitating research in community club settings can assist in the development of stronger policy and governance, officiating pathways, recruitment, and wellbeing strategies for female officiating. This emphasises the active role that clubs can, and arguably should, play to address this shortfall (Baxter et al., 2023), but also underlines the growing range of responsibilities placed on clubs.

To address sociocultural issues of gender, it has been suggested that sporting clubs could play a more central role in challenging stereotypes and other gendered ideologies, which compel and limit participatory opportunities for females in traditionally masculinised sports (Ahmad et al., 2020; Bevan et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2020; Elliott, Drummond et al., 2023). Indeed, in the context of promoting female inclusion and participation in cricket, community-level sporting clubs have been encouraged to recognise and value female achievements, provide improved development pathways, recruit qualified and highly skilled

coaches, and create female-only teams and competitions (Fowlie et al., 2021). While AFL (Australian rules football) clubs have historically reflected a masculine culture and values, they have made efforts to become more socially inclusive through community engagement strategies. These strategies have been displayed through rural AFL clubs merging operations and facilities with netball clubs to maintain stakeholders and financial stability (Frost et al., 2013).

Scholars have suggested that sporting clubs and organisations have an important role to fulfill regarding the development of gender equity facility usage policies (Casey et al., 2019), retention policies (Eime et al., 2022), and strategies for club capacity building (e.g., increasing the volunteer base, increasing revenue and funding) (Hanlon et al., 2022). Similarly, to meaningfully include female athletes from diverse racial backgrounds, clubs have been implored to engage in cultural education to heighten awareness about issues of racism and prejudice, as well as avoiding 'tokenistic' efforts to promote multicultural sport participation by creating culturally inclusive spaces and opportunities for culturally informed conversations (Ahmad et al., 2020). For example, racially and culturally diverse groups of women are further integrated in community-based sporting clubs where modified rules facilitate social inclusion. These modified rules can include flexible dress codes, female-specific training and facilities, female coaches and referees, culturally aware individuals, and Muslim women as role models or 'champions of change'. (Maxwell et al., 2013), reiterating an expanding list of club responsibilities to support diversity and inclusion in sport.

A significant body of LGBTIQ+ and sport research has promulgated the view that clubs can play a more significant role in promoting diversity and inclusion (Drummond et al., 2019; Jeanes et al., 2020; Spurdens & Bloyce, 2022; Storr & Richards, 2024). Sporting clubs have been criticised for 'quick fixes' and 'false commitments' to promote genuine inclusion through 'non-performative speech acts' such as parading in pride marches or endorsing

messages about LGBTIQ+ diversity and inclusion in sport (Storr, 2021b). According to Phipps (2020), these actions risk becoming a 'tick-box' exercise to create an impression of social and cultural change. Consequently, scholars have developed a range of recommendations for clubs to play a meaningful role in promoting LGBTIQ+ inclusion in sport, including improving internal governance and processes (Drummond et al., 2021), surveying their stakeholders (Cunningham & Nite, 2020), and identifying and supporting 'champions of change' (Denison, Bevan et al., 2021). Other studies have identified the need for the recruitment of leadership that espouses a distinct commitment to inclusion and diversity as evidenced by a willingness to act and allocate resources for implementing strategic change (Braumüller et al., 2020).

Through research indicating that strategic change is required to further club inclusivity, the development of sanctions and punitive measures to combat phobic language and behaviours has been recommended as an important club-based strategy to combat prejudices around sexuality (Denison, Jeanes et al., 2021). Clearly, changing a sporting culture characterised by hostility, carelessness and blindness towards LGBTIQ+ people will inevitably take time, commitment and investment (Storr et al., 2022), but clubs are inextricably linked with their actions in response to recommendations that emerge from this broad, interdisciplinary field. Clubs are therefore left to work with a range of scholarly recommendations and implications – but are they ready, and do they have the capacity?

While academic advocacy for greater inclusivity in sport has prompted organisations to reconsider and revise policies and practices at the level of community sport (Denison, Jeanes et al., 2021; Haudenhuyse, 2017), forms of resistance to change can emerge from what Spaaij et al. (2020) describe as a 'confluence of discourses' that enable noncompliance or resistance. Club resistance may emerge from having few volunteers or members who understand intersectionality, a lack of funding, resources and time, and lack of access to education and

training (Robertson et al., 2019). From a volunteer's perspective, resistance to promoting diversity and inclusion can also emerge from individual fears about 'giving socially undesirable answers' or 'getting something wrong' (Storr, 2021a). Moreover, many club volunteers claim that sport should 'just be able to be sport' and not used as a political vehicle for implementing 'social inclusion agendas' (Storr, 2021a). Subsequently, clubs may resist adopting scholarly recommendations because it is simply easier to exclusively focus on "increasing participation amongst diverse and underrepresented groups", even though this does little to alter discriminatory practices (Spaaij et al., 2020, p. 372). In the event that inclusionary policies are co-designed and endorsed, it does not necessarily mean diversity and inclusion practices are effectively implemented once revised (Haudenhuyse, 2017).

There are a range of voluntary and club leader attitudes towards inclusion and diversity, including apathy and indifference. In a qualitative study by Storr (2021a), it was found that up to half of volunteers (e.g., parents and coaches) and leaders (e.g., committee members) were indifferent to issues associated with inclusion and diversity. This perspective has been consistent across various sport settings (e.g., Australian rules football, soccer, netball, and basketball) and in different gendered contexts (e.g. female and male team sports) (Spaaij et al., 2018, 2020; Storr, 2021a, 2021b). Clearly, governmental and sporting organisation policies or initiatives become difficult to implement at a community level when such indifference is shared (Storr, 2021a). Furthermore, Storr (2021a) states that knowledge and awareness are significant factors in the facilitation of diversity policies, and a lack thereof means volunteers are unlikely to hold a supportive or championing mindset.

Club resistance to promoting inclusion and diversity in sport is also influenced by club leadership. Research highlights the pivotal role of club leadership in shaping the attitudes of club members, including players, volunteers, and administrators, either fostering resistance or embracing discussions about diversity and inclusion (Jeanes et al., 2018; Spaaij et al., 2018,

2020, 2023; Storr, 2021a; Storr et al., 2022). Club leaders can play a role in creating open forums or anonymous channels to address concerns (Phipps, 2020), increasing diversity in other club administrative roles (Wicker et al., 2022), mandating anti-discrimination education for leaders (Gurgis et al., 2022; Storr, 2021a), and promoting positive attitudes towards diversity among influential figures (Jeanes et al., 2018). Moreover, leaders play an influential role in shifting policy advice into practice (Jeanes et al., 2018) including targeted policies designed to eradicate discrimination at both national and local levels (Storr et al., 2022). Indeed, Spaaij et al. (2020) argue that club leaders should position inclusion and diversity policy as a core club focus and not 'optional work'. This 'top-down' influence has the capacity to promote policies which arrest discrimination, implement further education and training for club constituents, and minimise complacent and tokenistic efforts that maintain discursive practices.

Club leaders also play a role in addressing issues of resistance pertaining to promoting diversity and inclusion in sport (Adair et al., 2010; Gurgis et al., 2022; Jeanes et al., 2018; Phipps, 2020; Spaaij et al., 2020; Storr, 2021a, 2021b; Storr et al., 2022; Wicker et al., 2022). However, an emphasis on strong leadership may be problematic in situations where leaders perceive that diversity and inclusion are important but not crucial club responsibilities, reinforcing what is and is not perceived as valuable within sporting clubs (Storr, 2021a). This is consistent with research by Spaaij et al. (2018), which found that factors or issues associated with diversity are often not considered to be a part of a club's core responsibility or sit as a separate entity outside of its main operations. In concurring, Robertson et al. (2019) investigated the expectations and perceived importance of social responsibilities within sporting clubs. They concluded that club leaders perceived the provision of safe, accessible, sporting opportunities as their a priori obligation, and saw the explicit uptake of additional social responsibility (e.g. inclusion and diversity) as an important but secondary priority.

It is plausible that leaders might oppose diversity policies and initiatives to preserve power dynamics (Storr, 2021a), especially when the proposed changes threaten existing cultural norms, beliefs, attitudes, and values (Benschop & van den Brink, 2013). The influence of power dynamics and positions of power cannot be understated, and Ahmed (2020) reiterates that when those in positions of power shape and develop responsibility (e.g., diversity and inclusion), it gains power within that institution (i.e., the community club). As such, club leaders can be considered influential 'culture setters' (Gorman et al., 2016), reflecting the degree to with which they can influence club resistance to or embracement of cultural change. In addition to this point, as these key players in positions of power hold influence over factors such as policy, it is also important to acknowledge how their role influences other factors such as expectations, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Therefore, it is important to consider how the attitudes of those in positions of power (i.e., the 'culture setters' or important figures) align with the change wanted (e.g., supportive attitudes towards diversity) (Jeanes et al., 2018; Storr, 2021a). Given that the literature contains many club-specific recommendations for leaders (using a top-down approach) to promote inclusion and diversity, transient attitudes and views among leaders could hinder sporting clubs' capacity, motivation, and willingness to fulfil opportunities and responsibilities to promote inclusion and diversity in sport (at both a policy and attitudinal level).

Alongside policy, specific sports-based educational programs or initiatives concerning diversity and inclusion should be implemented and considered. Sport as a setting has been previously associated with positive educational and social outcomes (including for positive youth development, mental health, and physical health) (Coalter, 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt, 2016), and hence has been viewed as a an avenue to address social issues (e.g., 'sport for all') (Haudenhuyse et al., 2013; Theeboom et al., 2013). However, the positive youth development literature makes it clear that providing a general

(unspecific) program or checkboxes to promote and expect deep cultural and social change is unrealistic and ineffective (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). It was found that, through a sports-based initiative for socially vulnerable youth, the program outcomes had limited transferability and a high drop-out rate of youth participants because the sporting club lacked program management skills and specificity (D'Angelo et al., 2021). Various scholars and studies have suggested that sports-based inclusion programs and initiatives need to be targeted and evidence-based in order to increase their social outcomes and longevity (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Scifo et al., 2019). This could be an avenue for clubs wanting to increase education among leaders and volunteers on sensitive issues regarding racism, intersectionality, and adaptive practices.

One could also argue that many recommendations concerning clubs embracing greater social and cultural responsibilities are devoid of contextual consideration. For example, they lack empathy for the difficulties clubs might be experiencing following the COVID-19 pandemic. Several studies have highlighted the challenges facing community-level sporting clubs including the recruitment of volunteers, coaches, players, and sponsors (see Elliott, Eime et al., 2023; Elliott et al., 2021). As such, scholars perpetuate deeply seated views that club leaders should adopt a 'policy entrepreneur and enthusiast' position (Braun et al., 2011) and "invest considerable time, effort, and energy into questioning the clubs' existing culture, driving change, and performing the practical tasks of establishing and running ongoing opportunities" (Jeanes et al., 2018, p. 49). While this may be feasible in large-scale, multisport clubs with the capacity for strategic planning and establishing relationships with other institutions in the community (Wicker & Breuer, 2014), smaller community sporting clubs simply do not have the same resources and capacity. In this way, it is not surprising if clubs (and club leaders) resort to 'picking and choosing' the nature of their involvement and commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion. Even if one was to overlook the fact that

many programs, resources, and advice lack contextual specificity and/or sufficient evidence to support long-term, positive change (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Scifo et al., 2019), clubs' readiness to assume responsibility for a growing list of social and cultural responsibilities has yet to be critically considered in the literature, and within the current context as the COVID-19 pandemic recedes.

Ultimately, through the lens of inclusion and diversity in sport, it is possible to consider how clubs perceive aspects of their potential social and cultural responsibility. Given that research and policy recommendations have not necessarily led to significant change (Schaillée, Haudenhuyse et al., 2019; Spaaij et al., 2020), sporting clubs may require additional assistance and informational support to better advocate for and support inclusion and diversity in sport (Spaaij et al., 2020; Storr, 2021a; Young & Block, 2023). Otherwise, clubs may continue to 'choose' policies and practices that align with the personal identities, resources, and preferences of their existing leadership (Fahlén, 2015; Stenling & Fahlén, 2016). Clubs might also resort to adopting a piecemeal approach to cultural change by focusing on the initiatives which are easiest to integrate (Kitchin & Howe, 2014; Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). Consequently, if sporting clubs wish to instigate deep cultural, social, attitudinal, and behavioural change, according to Spaaij et al. (2020) researchers must consider the capacity of sporting clubs to meaningfully absorb dynamic social responsibility.

2.4.3 The role of the club in fostering mental health and wellbeing support and education

In addition to diversity and inclusion and the support of social relationships in sport, another contemporary responsibility placed on youth sporting clubs revolves around mental health support and education (Hurley et al., 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021; Robertson et al., 2019). Mental health, as defined by The World Health Organisation (2001) is considered to be "a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his

or her community". The emergence of social, political, and academic discussions pertaining to mental health and sport has been underscored by an expansion of research concerning young athletes (Elliott et al., 2024; Faulkner & Tamminen, 2016; Petersen et al., 2023; Swann et al., 2018), parents (Elliott et al., 2024; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Hurley et al., 2017; Hurley et al., 2020; Petersen et al., 2023; Sutcliffe et al., 2024), coaches (Elliott et al., 2024; Epiney et al., 2023; Petersen et al., 2023), and referees and officials (Epiney et al., 2023; Petersen et al., 2023). Contextually, the global COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to a cultural 'reset' in sporting clubs to acquiesce to participants' changing attitudes about the role of the club in supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing (see Elliott et al., 2021). In this way, it is worth examining the pertinent mental health and sport literature to broaden our understanding about clubs' social and cultural responsibility in youth sport.

It is widely accepted that youth sporting clubs are increasingly important sites for mental health education, awareness, and intervention (Breslin et al., 2017; Geidne et al., 2019; Gould, 2019; Hurley et al., 2017; Hurley et al., 2020; Vella, 2019). While sport participation is associated with a range of mental health benefits such as greater self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, confidence, and enhanced memory and attention (see reviews by Eather et al., 2023; Eime, Young et al., 2013), researchers have devoted much time investigating the utility of 'grassroots' sporting clubs in providing mental health resources (Walton et al., 2021), increasing mental health literacy (Hurley et al., 2020; O'Connor et al., 2024; Vella et al., 2021), and supporting mental health messages (Breslin et al., 2017; Vella et al., 2019). Factors such as high sport participation rates among young people, the amount of time spent at sporting clubs, and the perceived encouraging environment which engenders participation and involvement (Aubert et al., 2018; Gould, 2019; Swann et al., 2018; Vella, 2019) provide a clear rationale for utilising sporting clubs to promote mental health support. In leveraging

sporting clubs for promoting mental health programs, interventions, and initiatives (Breslin et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2019) as well as an understanding of mental health issues (such as having a 'mental health officer') (Pierce et al., 2010), members and stakeholders are empowered to positively influence vulnerable young people through sport (Petersen et al., 2023; Vella, 2019).

The promotion of mental health in sport is driven not only by a desire to support general wellbeing but also by multifaceted concerns surrounding retention issues, burnout prevention, injury mitigation, and reducing interpersonal conflict and abuse (Bean et al., 2021; DiFiori et al., 2014; Walton, Rice et al., 2021). Sporting clubs are compelled to address these issues due to their impact on mental health, as evidenced by a 10–20% increased risk of psychiatric disorder diagnosis within three years of dropout (Bean et al., 2021; Vella et al., 2015). Moreover, interpersonal abuse (Elliott & Drummond, 2017b; Raakman et al., 2010), conflict (Elliott & Drummond, 2017b; Gould et al., 2006) and bullying (alongside non-preferred and inappropriate behaviours) (Elliott & Drummond, 2017b; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011) are additional issues in youth sport which are associated with negative mental health effects such as anxiety, depression, fear, low perceptions of self, and diminished confidence (Brick et al., 2022; Raakman et al., 2010; Shanmugam et al., 2013). As such, teaching young people about mental health issues, clarifying language and misconceptions, and developing referral skills for when mental health problems arise have all become important priorities in community sport settings (Elliott et al., 2024; O'Connor et al., 2024; Vella, 2019). By engaging in a range of mental health education and support initiatives, sporting clubs can begin to challenge a culture which has historically celebrated toughness while disavowing weakness – ideals which have comprised barriers to help-seeking behaviour among young people (Bauman, 2016; Vella, 2019). Many sporting clubs are therefore viewed as having an active role in breaking down and reducing stigma surrounding

mental health, thereby supporting the mental health and wellbeing of sport participants (Livingston et al., 2013).

There are several concerns about the capacity of youth sporting clubs to play a meaningful role in supporting mental health in sport. According to Ferguson et al. (2018) club coaches perceived that they could contribute to supporting young athletes' mental health but lacked education and training, were concerned about limited amount of time they shared with athletes to notice changes in behaviour, and did not possess skills to be able to recognise warning signs. Similarly, Elliott and colleagues (2024) explored clubs' readiness for mental health education, training and awareness-raising activity and concluded that youth sporting clubs do not necessarily have the cultural, organisational, or human resources to sustain a commitment to mental health support. They reinforced that, while club leaders and administrators supported the idea of clubs fostering mental health support, they described a range of perceived barriers such as dismissive attitudes, cultural resistance, deferred responsibility (to national sporting organisations), unsupervised or non-accredited support and advice, and concerns about sustainability. Moreover, a study by Hutchesson et al. (2021) explored the barriers to and enablers of promoting mental health and wellbeing in Australian football clubs and suggested that individual attitudes towards mental health, particularly among 'older people' involved in making decisions about resourcing football programs, may be barriers to change. They noted that clubs would need to carefully manage financial support, the timing of programs and educational sessions, and the curation of content to bring members together and enact positive change. So, while clubs are ideally placed to support mental health initiatives, the increasing responsibility placed on clubs may warrant further deliberation.

Despite this, mental health-based education, programs, or initiatives have proliferated in many youth sports clubs. One of most researched mental health and sport programs – the

"Ahead of the Game" (AOTG) program – is a multilevel and multifaceted program to promote mental health and prevent mental health risks in adolescent male sport participants (Vella et al., 2018). In Australia, the outcomes associated with completing the AOTG program include increased mental health literacy, increased ability to seek out or provide help when needed, and awareness of the mental health resources available (Vella et al., 2018). Similarly, another multicomponent and multilevel mental health program, specific to eating disorders in high school athletes, was purported to prevent new occurrences of eating disorders (Martinsen et al., 2014). These positive potential outcomes are, however, contingent upon significant club-based involvement. For example, clubs are often called upon to identify 'champions of change' (Drummond et al., 2021, 2022) to drive discussions and activities pertaining to mental health and sport. This example is significant because researchers and policy leaders make several assumptions about the capacity of sporting clubs to assume responsibly for mental health support, as critically discussed by Elliott et al. (2024, p. 456):

> But what happens if clubs do not have a champion of change or lack executive leadership to advance such an agenda? First, without guidance, clubs may not have the capacity to identify or develop a champion of change. This is problematic because any sign of resistance, may curtail efforts that might otherwise lead to positive change. Second, and in the absence of a champion of change, clubs may only become truly motivated to navigate the challenges of becoming a site for mental health support provision following unexpected tragedy or emotional distress. In other words, the risk of not having a champion of change means that some clubs adopt reactionary measures and miss the opportunity to help their athletes prospectively. Third, assuming that a champion of change is identified and readily available, what happens next? Does the champion of change undertake mental health first aid training and if so, when, by whom, and why? Clearly, a champion of change who is truly passionate to drive the mental health agenda within a club can be an asset, but we also need to recognize that not all clubs may have a champion of change with the skills and capacity to advocate, lead and effect change. Furthermore, it remains unknown if a champion of change or welfare officer with mental health first aid training can actually improve mental health support in a youth sporting club.

The mental health and sport literature illuminates a tension between broader social and cultural expectations for clubs to 'do their bit' and the difficulties for many community-level clubs to fulfil this responsibility. Notwithstanding the concerns raised by Elliott et al. (2024), the literature contains several recommendations to assist clubs to play a more substantial role in promoting the mental health and wellbeing of their stakeholders. The literature has suggested that clubs can facilitate activities such as team-building exercises to enhance feelings of connection between young people and their sporting club as a means to positively influence their willingness to participate in mental health in sport programs (Swann et al., 2018). The literature also suggests that clubs could consider implementing mental health education and support from 'an early age' as a means to proactively reduce the risk of developing mental illness (Bauman, 2016; Swann et al., 2018). Prior to the implementation of mental health support to broader club members, researchers have even called on club leaders such as coaches and key volunteers to enhance their knowledge by undertaking specific education and training (e.g., online mental health first aid training) (Liddelow et al., 2024). Moreover, researchers implore clubs to generate collaborative partnerships with other community sports clubs to create psychologically safe environments (Liddelow et al., 2024) and facilitate meaningful and non-tokenistic activities to promote mental health awareness (Elliott et al., 2024). In combination these points only reinforce the weight of responsibility being imposed on youth sporting clubs.

In contrast to clubs' resistance to change, which was illustrated in the diversity and inclusion in sport literature, clubs' perspectives on mental health support, awareness, and initiatives are more encouraging. For example, a study by Petersen et al. (2023) found that stakeholders aged 25 years and older had a greater likelihood of supporting mental-health based promotion, compared to those aged 12–25 years old. This finding is noteworthy considering the older age bracket will typically hold positions of leadership in clubs (such as

coaches, volunteers, parents, and club leaders), and therefore have influence on the internal process and subsequent implementation of mental-health initiatives (Petersen et al., 2023; Storr, 2021a). It warrants concern that younger participants are less willing to support mental health initiatives, considering that in Australia 39.6% of individuals aged 16–24 years report experiencing mental health conditions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This finding is also surprising considering that younger individuals are often perceived as being 'more open' regarding social issues such as mental health, whereas older generations in sporting clubs have been referred to as being an 'old boys club' and hesitant to social change (O'Donnell et al., 2022). Therefore, clubs face considerable challenges in delivering health-promoting activities including navigating stigma surrounding poor mental health, perceptions of support services and resources, and low mental health literacy (Petersen et al., 2023). Addressing the perceptions and beliefs about the role of sport in promoting mental health (including its importance and centrality to sporting programs within clubs) thus represents a priority for club leaders (Peterson et al., 2023) if they are to embrace their responsibility to become an accessible setting for mental health support, education, awareness and intervention (Breslin et al., 2017; Walton, Rice et al., 2021).

More targeted club-focused recommendations have also been proposed in the literature. For example, a study by Sutcliffe, Kelly et al. (2021) of parental mental health in youth sport revealed that parents of adolescent athletes reported more time and logistical pressure and life stress. Although they noted that children's sport participation offered some protection against poor mental health (e.g., opportunities to socialise), they suggested that clubs and organisations could reconsider the structure (e.g., timing, scheduling) of sport to minimise the impact on parental mental health. These recommendations cannot be taken for granted given that parents experience a range of organisational (Dorsch et al., 2009; Garst et al., 2020;

Harwood et al., 2019), competitive (Harwood & Knight, 2009; Sutcliffe et al., 2024), developmental and personal stressors (Lienhart et al., 2020; O'Donnell et al., 2022).

The suggestions put forward by Sutcliffe, Kelly and colleagues (2021) build upon previous calls for parents to take a central role in mental health and sport programs given their willingness to engage and participate as well as their support for mental health education in sporting club settings (Hurley et al., 2017; Martinsen et al., 2014; Vella et al., 2017). Parents sacrifice personal time, family time, emotional support and financial resources to enable their child to participate in youth sport (Bean et al., 2019; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Holt et al., 2008) and they are not immune to the stressors that their child experiences during competition. In this way, one can comprehend that parental stressors can be overwhelming and influence their behaviour (Dorsch et al., 2009; Hayward et al., 2017), involvement (Dorsch et al., 2009; Harwood & Knight, 2009), and mental health (Hayward et al., 2017; Kay, 2000; Sutcliffe, Kelly et al., 2021). Therefore, to address parental mental health in youth sport, it has been suggested that clubs could consider playing an active role in building relationships with researchers and parents to support further studies of parental mental health literacy interventions in youth sport (Hurley et al., 2021). The provision of follow-up information, diversified content, and enhanced communication channels may improve parental engagement in sporting club–based mental health programs (Hurley et al., 2021). Clubs therefore occupy a unique position to foster parental involvement in mental health and sport initiatives by circulating more information to members, providing access to club facilities, and supporting research participant recruitment methods (Hurley et al., 2021). In this way, clubs are inadvertently prompted to fulfil a complex and highly integrated role in supporting mental health education in youth sport – a role which they may not be prepared for (Elliott et al., 2024).

In addition to parents and youth participants, club-based recommendations to promote mental health support for coaches are also embedded in key discussions within the literature. Coaches are not always 'front of mind' when discussing mental health support in youth sporting clubs, but they warrant consideration given that coaching is a stressful occupation and heavily entwined with the club setting (Fletcher & Scott, 2010; Frey, 2007; Levy et al., 2009). Due to often being at the forefront of the sporting club, coaches will need to be prepared for mental health–based conversations with youth participants (as coaches are viewed as key stakeholders), which emphasises the role of the broader club in supporting mental health training, knowledge development, and interpersonal skills (Hurley et al., 2017). In this instance, clubs can play a significant role in providing coaches with the appropriate mental health training, in turn promoting stronger coach–athlete relationships and communication which may provide a basis for stronger mental health interventions (Hurley et al., 2017). Additionally, coaches experience stress in sport in response to athlete injury and wellbeing concerns (Chroni et al., 2013) and external expectations of club and organisational stakeholders and leaders (Potts et al., 2019; Robbins et al., 2015). Despite this, coaches commonly perceive themselves as 'facilitators' or 'supporters' but not recipients of mental health initiatives (Mazzer & Rickwood, 2015; Walton, Carberry et al., 2021). For example, a study by Mazzer and Rickwood (2015) which examined coaches' awareness of mental health in youth sport and their perceived ability to support young people's mental health found that coaches actively accepted their role in identifying concerns and encouraging help-seeking behaviours. This view has been corroborated by other studies which have identified the critical role of coaches in fostering a culture of team support and supporting athletes currently receiving mental health care (Bissett et al., 2020).

While clubs have a responsibility to ensure that coaches have the right tools, information, and resources to support other individuals' mental health, the mental health of

coaches cannot be taken for granted. For instance, if coaches are involved in triaging young people towards formal or informal support services, they too may require more routine support from clubs (Elliott et al., 2024). Given that coaches are often viewed as an extension or a crucial aspect of the club, one must question how the sporting club can support coaches in this regard. Coaches at the community level experience a range of interpersonal, personal, and organisational stressors but often lack coping strategies and access to training and resources to support their own mental health (Hogan et al., 2024).

To manage experiences and feelings of isolation, failure, and workload-related stress (Hill et al., 2021; Kegelaers et al., 2021), clubs and organisations have been directed to explore ways to reduce the coaching workload during 'peak periods' and provide adequate resources (including information, peer mentoring, and social support networks) (Hill et al., 2021). These suggestions may be feasible in elite sport settings, but community sport settings are characterised by transient leadership and high volunteer turnover (Elliott, Eime et al., 2023; Elliott et al., 2021), raising questions about their capacity to effectively enact these suggestions to support coaches' mental health. In such situations, there is a risk that clubs cannot adequately 'look after the people looking after the people' (Smith et al., 2020). This perspective reiterates broader concerns about community sporting clubs' capacities to absorb an expanding portfolio of social and cultural responsibilities pertaining to mental health and sport.

Clubs are also perceived to play a vital role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of sporting officials and referees (Baxter et al., 2023). Like players, coaches, and parents, sporting officials and referees' function in highly dynamic and potentially stressful situations, both in community and elite settings (Tingle et al., 2021). Research on mental health support for referees and officials has generally been quite limited; however, the body of research has grown in recent years in elite sporting contexts, particularly AFL and soccer

(Breslin et al., 2022; Brick et al., 2022; Carson et al., 2020; Gorczynski & Webb, 2021; Tingle et al., 2021). Research has shown that referees have experienced stressors from various sources (Webb et al., 2019), including conflict with other officials, job requirements and demands, training and disciplinary processes, isolation, media scrutiny, and harassment and abuse (Cleland et al., 2018; Webb, 2022; Webb et al., 2017, 2020). Soccer referees have experienced cases of non-accidental violence, undermining their safety and physical and mental health (Gorczynski & Webb, 2021; Webb et al., 2020). Youth sporting clubs, especially those socially aware, may therefore feel compelled to extend mental health support to all stakeholders, including referees and officials who are likely volunteers (e.g., siblings, parents) in the community context. While this is a budding area of research interest (Baxter et al., 2023), it reiterates the seemingly endless nature of social and cultural responsibilities in youth sporting clubs. Understanding these wide-ranging issues fosters a more critical consideration of the role of clubs in assuming responsibility for the mental health and wellbeing of young people. However, and similar to the diversity and inclusion in sport literature, the degree to which clubs can fulfil the multitude of responsibilities has yet to be fully considered, despite clubs being cast as a crucial element of mental health support in community sport.

2.5 Organisational capacity

The importance of youth sporting clubs in Australian cannot be understated as they provide an accessible and affordable entry point into sports participation (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014). Youth sporting clubs tend to be limited to their internal goals, modest budgets, and short-term planning and structures – especially, while being volunteer run and led (Millar & Doherty, 2021). These types of constraints and the socio-cultural context in which youth sporting clubs operate present issues surrounding organisational capacity, which includes factors such as volunteer recruitment and retention (Breuer, Wicker, & Von Hanau, 2016; Swierzy, Wicker, & Breuer, 2018), volunteer engagement (Ringuet-Riot, Cuskelly, Auld, & Zakus, 2016), strategic planning and goal setting (Misener & Doherty, 2009), and revenue diversification (Wicker & Breuer, 2013). Alongside these issues concerning organisational capacity, youth sporting clubs are facing increasing operational costs, competition for resources, and calls to implement social and cultural responsibilities (Breuer et al., 2016; Musso, Richelieu, & Francioni, 2016; Robertson, Eime, & Westerbeek, 2019; Wicker & Breuer, 2011). These constraints and increasing demands can make it difficult for youth sporting clubs to collectively organise and implement, for example, a mental health and wellbeing program for youth participants.

Organisational capacity is a vital element of sporting clubs having the ability to broaden their reach and achieve aims outside of their core sport focus. Millar and Doherty (2021) defines organisation capacity as "the assets and resources an organisation draws on to achieve its goals" (p. 22). While research has investigated community sporting organisations' strengths and weaknesses regarding organisational capacity and its dimensions (e.g., Casey, Payne, Brown, & Eime, 2009; Doherty et al., 2014; Kitchin & Crossin, 2018; Millar & Doherty, 2018, 2021; Wicker & Hallmann, 2013). The current focus has shifted towards understanding the conditions and enablers of building organisational capacity as a strategy to

elevate the strengths of and limit the challenges clubs and organisations may face (e.g., Casey, Doherty, Elliott, & Norman, 2022; Girginov, Peshin, & Belousov, 2017; Hanlon, Millar, Doherty, & Craike, 2022; Millar & Doherty, 2016, 2018). The focus on organisational capacity has transcended research inquiry and now comprises a key focus of various grant funding opportunities which prioritise social and cultural responsibilities (Gould, 2019; Rossi, Feiler, Dallmeyer, & Breuer, 2024; Walton & Macmillan, 2015). For example, in South Australia, the Community Recreation and Sport Facilities Program (CSFP) offers funding for sporting facilities and clubs with the purpose of developing a sustainable and inclusive community (Office for Recreation Sport and Racing, 2025). Similarly, the Club of the Future framework aims to develop sporting clubs in developing inclusivity, mental health literacy, sustainability, and the promotion of contemporary approaches to volunteering (Office for Recreation Sport and Racing, 2021). While these opportunities for funding promote the development and expansion of organisational capacity, the clubs' level of organisational readiness, partnerships, and existing resources will influence how these opportunities are utilised and implemented (Casey, Payne, & Eime, 2009).

In order to apply for competitive funding to support social and cultural change, a level of organisational readiness is necessary. Organisational readiness is pivotal for youth sporting clubs to expand into social and cultural responsibilities, such as social relationships, inclusion and diversity, and mental health and wellbeing. Millar and Doherty (2018) assert that organisational readiness can be best understood as the combined influence of psychological, structural, and operational dimensions (Cairns, Harris, & Young, 2005; Casey, Payne, & Eime, 2012; Millar & Doherty, 2016). These dimensions specifically refer to factors such as the ability, willingness, and commitment of stakeholders (psychological); a clubs pre-existing capacity to expand and maintain change (structural); and the aligning of capacity building means with existing club processes and systems (operational) (Millar & Doherty, 2016).

Various studies have investigated organisational readiness and implementing it as a strategy for building capacity in sporting organisations and clubs. For instance, Casey et al., (2009, 2012) sought to understand the effectiveness of capacity building strategies in community sport to implement health promoting programs. It was found that pre-existing resources, internal and community partnerships, and organisational readiness were substantial in the successful implementation of such programs (Casey et al., 2012). In a sport for development program, Rosso and McGrath (2017) discovered that a purposefully structured capacity building strategy (such as, training volunteers in their roles) resulted in new partners and access to resources that increased opportunities of sport participation for disadvantaged groups. In that same year, Girginov et al., (2017) investigated how not-for-profit sports organisations utilised major sporting events (e.g., the Olympics) to build organisational capacity. This study found that multiple organisations across Russia and England were using such events as a means to access grants, develop and implement programs, and acquire new development partners. Similarly, both Chalip, Green, Taks, and Misener (2017) and Macrae (2017) found it is ideal for sporting clubs to engage in capacity building prior to a major sporting event, in order to best leverage the attention on sport and be able to manage an influx of new memberships.

With increasing attention and pressure for social responsibility in community sporting clubs, it is clear that organisational capacity and readiness act as core factors that can assist in clubs assuming social initiatives and programs. However, understanding the mechanisms of capacity building remain fragmented, often focusing on individual factors without capturing the process as a whole (Millar & Doherty, 2016). As a means to implement and further understand capacity building in sporting organisations and clubs, Millar and Doherty (2016) developed a conceptual framework entitled ‘a process model of capacity building’ as seen in

Figure 2. This model captures the organisational change in different stages within the capacity building process. These progressive stages include:

- *Capacity building stimulus*: It is recognised that the need to build capacity stems from an organisation or clubs' choice to respond or act on an environmental prompt (internal or external). Some organisations may not respond to the stimuli and thus no capacity building.
- *Organisational capacity needs*: This refers to the sporting organisation or clubs' assessment of their capacity to respond to the stimuli and hence what is vital or needed in developing their capacity. Having a needs assessment within this process ensures that a club does not face ineffective capacity building which may occur if they're unaware of their own needs.
- *Readiness for capacity building*: Readiness dimensions (e.g., organisational readiness, congruence, capacity to build, and capacity to sustain) will emphasise the challenges and opportunities in capacity building and the possible outcomes. Each of these dimensions need to be considered, as each can impact capacity building.
- *Alternative strategies*: This refers to alternative capacity building strategies that are selected by the organisation or club, however, may not be discussed in the literature.
- *Capacity building outcomes*: The outcomes are the direct result of successful capacity building, which is wholly dependent on the previous stages of the model. The outcomes can be measured through an assessment of intended outcomes to gauge immediate impact and if the capacity was maintained.
- *Program and service delivery*: Finally, the process of capacity building allows the organisation or club to react to the initial stimuli that prompted capacity building, whether that is through a program, initiative, or service (Millar & Doherty, 2016).

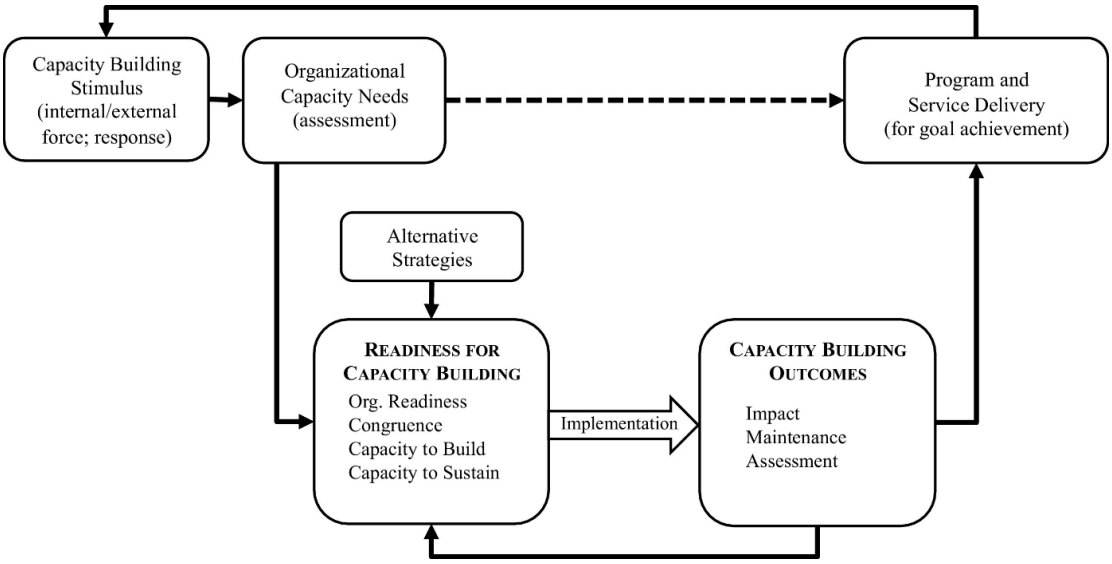

Figure 2: Millar and Doherty (2016) conceptual framework entitled 'a process model of capacity building'. Reproduced with permission from Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group, © 2025.

As mentioned within the introduction chapter, the youth sporting club is situated in the youth sport system, a flexible heuristic that captures a complex system of interdependent persons and contexts that influence and are influenced by a young athlete's behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and outcomes in youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2022). While it is important to capture aspects such as the club community, organisation, stakeholders, and society; it is equally important to consider a conceptual framework that can provide understanding about building capacity for social responsibility. Integrating these two frameworks allow for the convergence of various fields, as is similar in nature to this literature review. It is vital to recognise that the organisational capacity (Millar & Doherty, 2016) of a youth sporting club will have direct impact on the internal functions and programming, stakeholders, feedback, stability, and maintenance within the youth sport system (Dorsch et al., 2022).

In utilising both the youth sport system and the process model of organisational capacity building, this thesis has conceptualised these frameworks as two moving systems that offer a targeted, holistic, and encompassing approach to improving the youth sport experience. To demonstrate a visual heuristic of the two integrated frameworks, Figure 3 displays how they have been combined for the purpose of conceptualising youth sporting clubs as a central focus of this thesis. The process model of organisational capacity building has been overlayed into the organisations level of the youth sport system, with the rationale that decision-making through the club leaders and committees operate at this level and subsystem. For example, club leaders will be the individuals to *respond on an environmental prompt*, such as calls for a mental health program. The leaders will conduct a *needs assessment* and will subsequently plan to *build capacity along one or more of the four dimensions* or *generate alternative strategies.* From this point, club leaders would *implement* the capacity building strategies. Through feedback loops club leaders can *assess the impact and maintenance*, and finally, implement the program into the team and family subsystem.

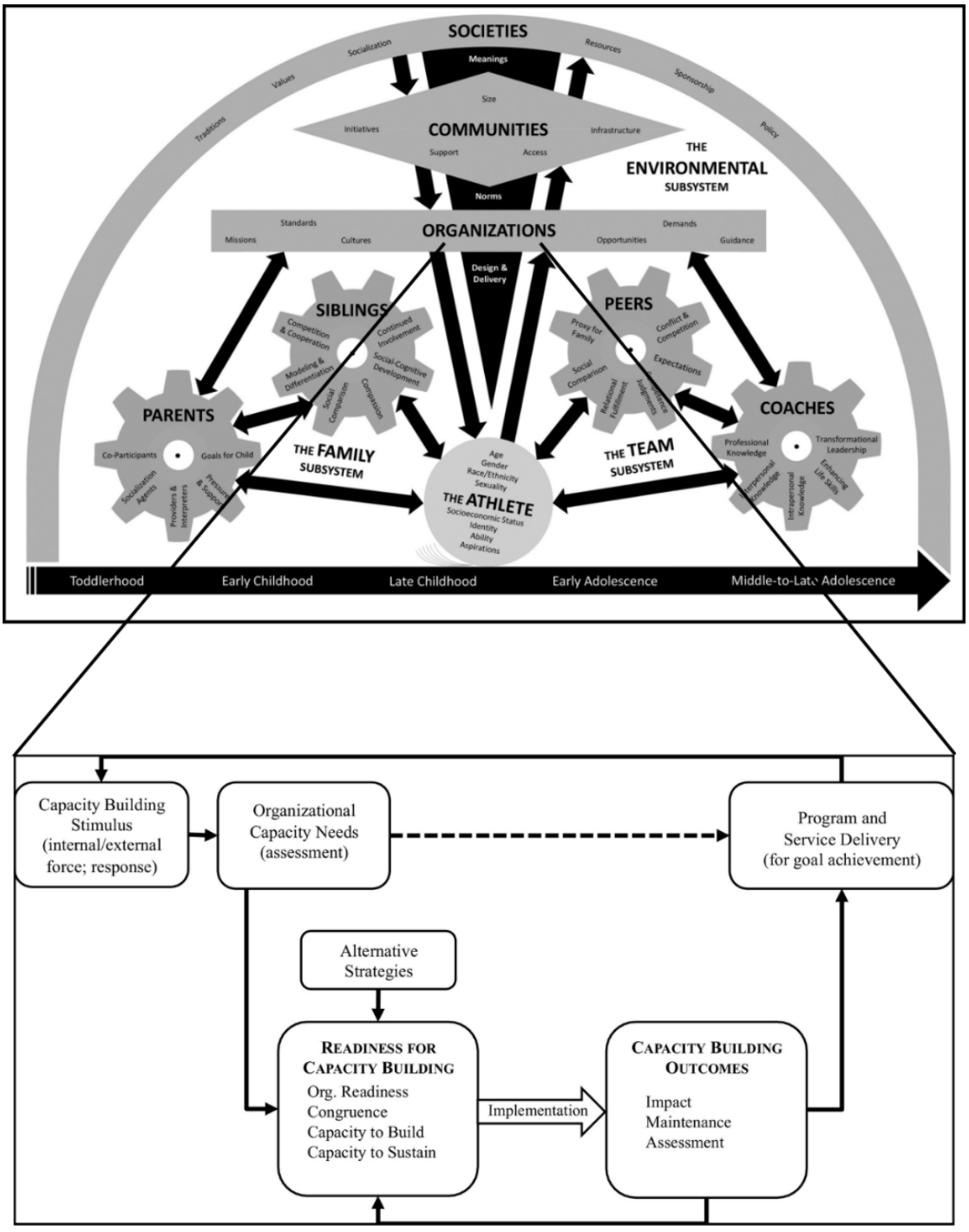

Figure 3: An integrated framework consisting of the youth sport system (Dorsch et al., 2022) and the process model of capacity building (Millar & Doherty., 2016). Reproduced with permission from Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group, © 2025.

2.6 Conclusion

Through the lenses of social relationships, diversity and inclusion, and mental health, the literature portrays the complex and dynamic nature of social and cultural responsibilities which are imposed on youth sporting clubs. At the same time, there is a paucity of literature on how youth sporting clubs perceive, navigate, and enact their social and cultural responsibilities. Additionally, the literature on corporate social responsibility and organisational capacity provide further context as to which youth sporting clubs are expected to fulfill responsibility. The uptake of social responsibilities in youth sporting clubs are community and government priorities (Robertson et al., 2019) and appear to be central in re-engaging local sporting communities (Elliott et al., 2021), especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Elliott et al., 2021). This gap in the current stock of knowledge provides a meaningful justification for exploring how clubs navigate social and cultural responsibilities.

3. METHODOLOGY

> You cannot just pick and choose from any possible qualitative strategy available, throw it into the soup, and expect it to work out. This makes qualitative work sloppy and unscientific. (Mayan, 2016, p. 17)

3.1 Introduction

This research thesis is a targeted exploration of how Australian youth sporting clubs perceive, navigate, and enact social and cultural responsibility and their potential to transform into influential and multifaceted sport settings. To establish the context for this research's design and methods, this chapter will revisit the overarching research question and the related objectives. Furthermore, the research methods employed in this study will be discussed, as well as the philosophical underpinnings and assumptions, and the central methodology. The overarching research question guiding this PhD research is:

- *How do Australian sporting clubs understand, perceive, and enact social and cultural responsibility in youth sport?*

The study is also guided by three main objectives, which will assist in developing the right questions and strategies to answer the main research question:

- Identify the actions, processes, and social conditions with which clubs navigate social and cultural responsibility in youth sport;
- Understand how youth sporting clubs develop their capacity to enact social and cultural responsibility;
- Explore the challenges and opportunities clubs perceive in relation to fulfilling their social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport.

3.1.1 Positionality

Reich (2021) suggests that qualitative research considers the position of both the researcher and participants as core factors of inquiry. In doing so, qualitative research can move past merely examining the words and actions of the participants and engage with the way in which knowledge and experiences are situated and co-constructed (Reich, 2021). As such, this places positionality as a key pillar in qualitative research, reinforcing the notion that researchers' positionality matters because it informs questioning, analysis, and other interpretive, theoretical, and methodological decisions (Reich, 2021). Positionality refers to an internal dialogue and crucial self-evaluation that assists in contextualising the research and research environment (Jafar, 2018). Moreover, positionality is described as an important acknowledgement of the researchers worldview (Rowe, 2014), and of the broader social, cultural, and political contexts that may affect interpersonal relations or the qualitative research processes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

I utilised the social identity map developed by Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) to support critical thinking about my own positionality and reflexive practices which have shaped this work. Engaging in the process of identity mapping (see Figure 4) generated a broader stance regarding my reflexive positionality (Day, 2012; Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). One of the goals of reflexive positionality is to understand how researchers (in this case, myself) interpret and understand meaning in their lives, and the social and political forces, and set of beliefs that shape their lived experience and perception (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Learning about and acknowledging the factors that shape our lives can result in understanding the role of power and privilege, and one's own visibility within the research process (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). The factors that shape our social identities include (but are not limited to); class, citizenship, ability, age, race, sexual orientation, cis/transgender status, and gender (Collins, 2015; Dhamoon & Hankivsky, 2011; Holmes, 2020; Jacobson &

Mustafa, 2019). So, not only do these factors shape how we view the world (and come to the research) but they also influence how others see us (Day, 2012); therefore, it is imperative to highlight and acknowledge the researcher's reasoning or motivations for conducting their research.

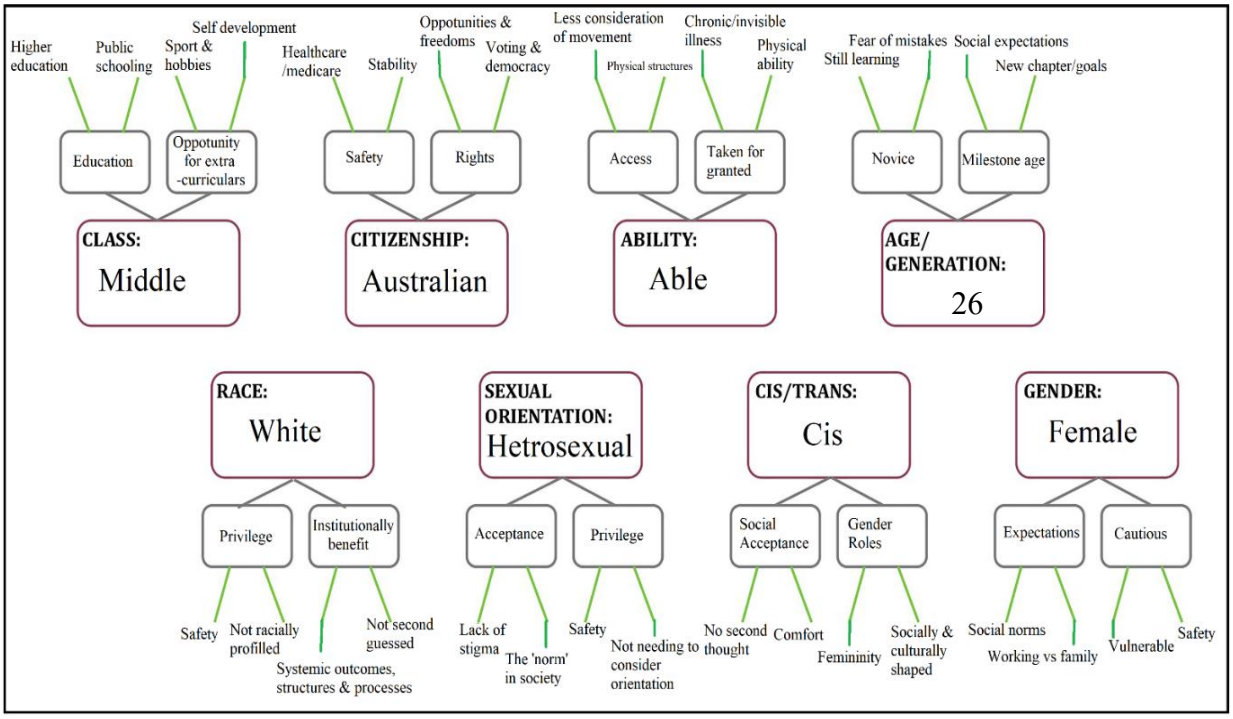

Figure 4: Social identity map (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Reproduced with permission.

The purpose of utilising a social identity map was to support the development of my reflexive practices and internal dialogue when collecting research with a particular worldview (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Jafar, 2018). For example, my race and gender influence how I experience the world, especially as a white female researcher – these facets of my identity, especially race, bring inherent privilege on a systemic level (i.e., being able to conduct research without fear of facing racial, cultural, or religious exclusion, prejudice, insult, or violence). While my racial identity in Australia is systemically and socially privileged, being a female researcher adds further nuance. Many of the sports included in this study were male dominated (e.g., Australian rules football – with only recent inclusion of female participation)

and thus I had concerns about being taken seriously (as a younger, novice, female researcher), organising safety precautions during data collection (i.e., supervisory check-in before and after interviews), or that I would struggle to connect with male participants regarding sensitive topics during data collection. However, while those were some inherent concerns for me as a female researcher, there were times when it worked for my benefit – such as having shared lived experiences and understanding with female sport participants, coaches, and other members of the sporting club (especially in tennis, as a tennis player/coach myself). These types of considerations when conducting research impacted how I perceived and navigated the social world, participant interactions and data collection, and analysis (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019).

Utilisation of the social identity map assisted in the development of my thinking surrounding positionality, how I place myself as a researcher in sport, and how my research was shaped. Through my privilege and identity as a white, middle-class, female researcher, I have been able to navigate sport and research without facing prejudice regarding race, culture, religion, disability, or class. I acknowledge that many others do face judgement, or worse, based on these factors and not having shared experiences impacted how I interpreted participant data. Furthermore, my middle-class socio-economic status (SES) and country of birth have enabled access to higher education to conduct this research – this access has been a result of being able to initially focus on schooling (i.e., not having to work to support myself or my family), being in good health/able-bodied, having a good support system, and systemic processes/policies in place that allow such access. Additionally, being born into a middle-class family may have led to preconceived notions or assumptions as to what lower or higher SES lived experiences are, which may have influenced how I perceived or interpreted the data. Lastly, being a female, in both sport and research, I will have deeper understandings and shared experiences with female interviewees that, for example, a male researcher may not

have. I, therefore, have sought to practice reflexivity and the critical friend technique or, where I can, directly acknowledge my bias or privilege throughout the research.

How I come to the research context

As this thesis is about youth sporting clubs, club culture, and social and cultural responsibilities, it is important to acknowledge my experience in sport and clubs to understand why I came to this topic. I started participating in organised sport, specifically tennis, at 11 years old and still currently participate today at 26 years old. I first was introduced to tennis through my parents. My mum participated in state-level table tennis during her youth and early adulthood. Through my participation in tennis, I only ever participated at the one sporting club, and had the same coach. Now reflecting as an individual in research, it would have most likely been beneficial for me to have sampled various sports, clubs, and coaches.

My experiences at sporting clubs were mostly neutral, in the sense that my tennis involvement and club experience were not negative. Tennis was and is very much a sport I loved and was passionate about; however, my interest in club culture stemmed from the observations I made growing up about the individuals at the club (other parents, coaches, and peers), and the order and function of decision-making within the club. For instance, when young, I experienced feeling like an outsider and perceived other participants to be unapproachable and forming cliques. I did not perceive the overall club culture to be inviting, encouraging, or enjoyable; everyone seemed to have their own groups (parents and children alike). Whilst this was my personal experience, I did notice that the club occasionally organised social events (e.g., club presentations, BBQ nights, holidays). However, I experienced the same issue surrounding cliques and not being directly included, and as a young adolescent I stopped attending. Essentially, I would only go to the sporting club for training and competition. The perception of favouritism of certain groups (especially

committee parents) by other members and coaches was not discouraged by individuals in the same roles or by others with standing in the club (such as other coaches). Being a teenager at this point, this caused feelings of dissatisfaction, dejection, and frustration. Although I experienced this, and my parental support system suggested I try other clubs, I felt loyalty to my coach and the club (as a long-time member). At that age, I also thought it would be awkward to move clubs but continue being coached at my previous club and did not want to be perceived as a 'club hopper', who was someone who was perceived to change clubs solely for competitive advantage. Experiences such as these certainly shaped the way in which I framed club processes, club culture, and social interactions within youth sporting clubs. It also initiated my interest in youth sporting clubs, and how they could best be developed to create positive experiences for both young athletes and their parents, especially in instances where the club culture is not perceived as positive or welcoming.

From ages 13 to 17, I often dealt with injuries. Reflecting on times of absence from sport, there was a lack of communication from or connection with the club. I did not necessarily recognise it at the time, but it did eventually lead to a slow dropout from sport (alongside other factors such as health). I also noticed that, aside from some social events, the club did not provide broader opportunities, such as disability inclusive tennis (wheelchair tennis, for example), mental health education or resources, or other initiatives. This was surprising considering the club had quite a significant membership base, was in a middle–high socio-economic area, and had local business sponsorships. I did wonder why the club did not participate in more social outreach or community-based programs, as it was perceived to be in the position to do so and there were opportunities for club support when a club member had passed due to mental health–related issues. Therefore, my position regarding clubs, coaches, and sport is limited to tennis, having one coach, and experience in one club.

These experiences shaped and cultivated a belief that youth sporting clubs are not just places for sport, but rather community support and social responsibilities.

I continued studying areas associated with sport, health, psychology, and physiology; and through some guidance I found the Bachelor of Sport, Health and Physical Activity degree at Flinders University. During university, I continued participating in tennis until 2021 when COVID impacted team numbers and participation. I continued to play tennis at the same club until approximately 2022. This was because I developed a chronic disease starting around 2020 and eventually became too unwell to continue. I certainly believe this experience influences my position as a researcher, especially regarding invisible disabilities/illnesses (i.e., shared experience of invisible illness or ability). After my bachelor's degree I completed an Honours degree in 2020 in which I achieved First Class Honours and was offered a three-year PhD scholarship from the Australian Government – this led to my PhD candidacy which began in 2021. This description of my sporting background and how I came to this research is extremely important as I reflect on how my experiences and proclivities may have influenced the research process, my assumptions, and my place in the research (Holmes, 2020). Whilst I have discussed my background and interest in the research topic, these areas of positionality are typically considered subjective, fluid, and contextual (Chiseri-Strater, 1996).

3.1.2 Research approach

Methodological consideration for this thesis was initially guided by Melnikovas (2018) who analysed existing systemic models for developing coherent, rigorous, and philosophically sound investigations. One of the existing models that was identified in Melnikovas's review was Saunders and colleagues (2009) 'research onion'. Although the 'research onion' was initially developed in the field of business studies, it has been widely used in the social sciences for the development of a coherent and justifiable research design (Muranganwa,

2016). Although researchers should avoid employing 'off-the-rack' means, methods, and practices, the 'research onion' may comprise a useful tool for novice researchers and support efforts to justify an overall methodology within a designated research paradigm (Melnikovas, 2018; Raithatha, 2017; Saunders et al., 2009). Figure 5 (below) is an adapted version of Saunders and colleagues (2009) 'research onion' to illustrate the methodological and philosophical coherence underpinning this PhD research, which are detailed in the ensuing section.

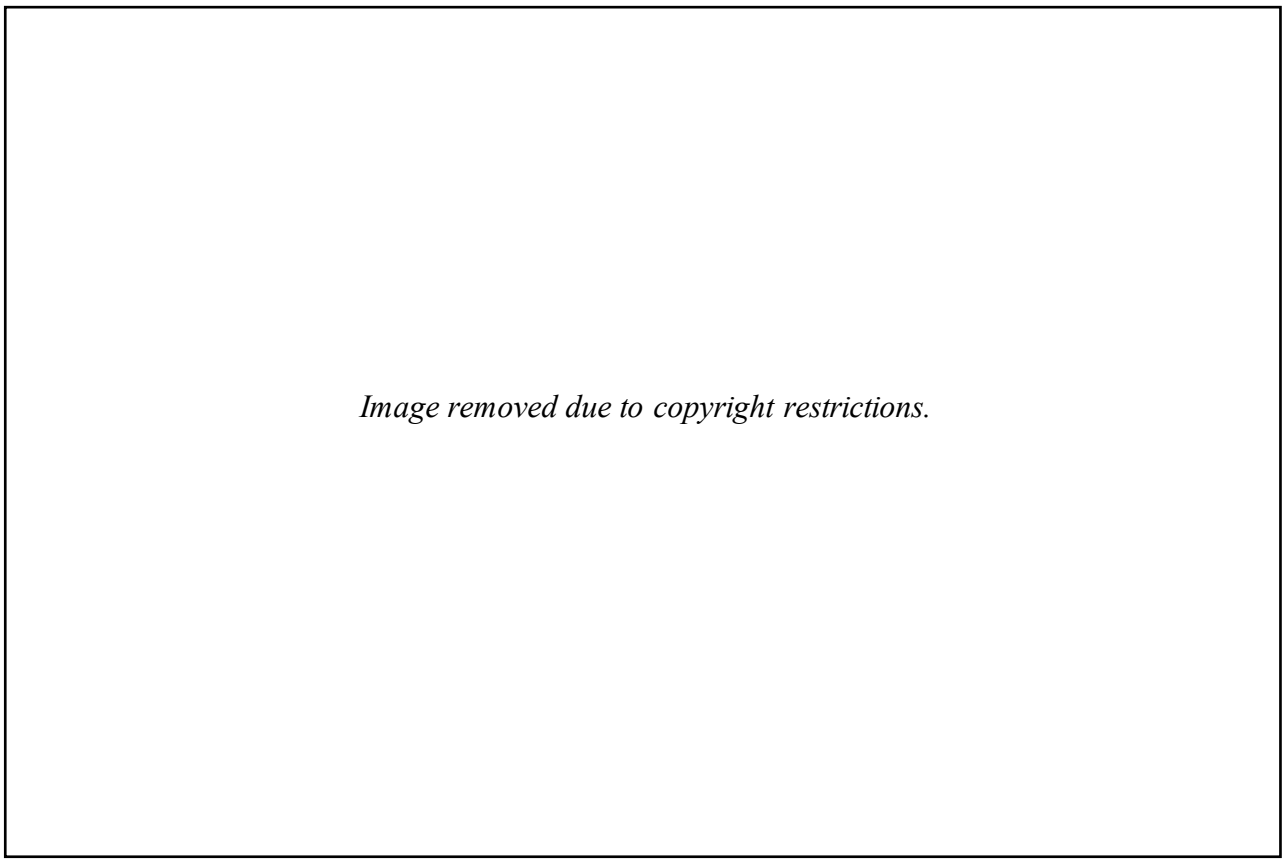

Figure 5: 'Research onion' for this study, modified from Saunders et al. (2009)

3.2 Research philosophy

Branches such as ontology and epistemology, though often debated, are widely viewed as the philosophical basis of scientific research (Ramiz, 2016) because they form integral components of a broader paradigmatic framework and assumptions about reality (Atkinson, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). In developing the philosophical basis for this study, it became apparent that multiple paradigmatic positions could be embraced, including positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, interpretivism, constructivism, and pragmatism (Bleiker et al., 2019; Boucher, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These orientations reflect distinct beliefs (e.g., singular or multiple realities) which provide justification for a total research process (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

3.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

Ontology and epistemology are closely interconnected pillars, along with methodology, that create a research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005). Ontology is specifically concerned with the nature of being, existence, and reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology, on the other hand, concerns the nature of knowledge and how we come to know (Atkinson, 2012; Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is important, as both ontology and epistemology frame the way in which a researcher operates and conducts their research. Despite their significance, the concepts of ontology and epistemology have long been subject to disagreement in the literature, especially in social research. Some researchers, such as Bryman (2008) and Willig (2013), believe that ontology and epistemology are two completely different entities concerning different matters. On the other hand, Guba and Lincoln (1994) believe that ontology, epistemology, and methodology are distinct yet interconnected pillars. The stance that this research aligns more closely with is that of Guba and Lincoln (1994), whereby the three pillars of the research paradigm have some degree of

difference, but are all ultimately interconnected. Nonetheless, the basis for this PhD has philosophical roots which were consistent with Guba & Lincoln's (1994) distinctions about ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

- Ontological question: *What is the nature of being, existence, and reality, and what can be known about it?*
- Epistemological question: *What is basis of what is known, and how is it known, and what else can be known?*
- Methodological question: *How can a researcher find further knowledge that they believe can be known?* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

This study was underpinned by a relativist ontology, which suggests that reality is a subjective experience, that it is something which is constructed solely within the human mind, and therefore, no one 'real' reality exists (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Rassokha, 2022). Interactions are the key to understanding reality within relativism; a key quotation to describe this is "I interact– hence, I exist" (Rassokha, 2022, p. 1433). Therefore, as this study, and ones position as a researcher, was established on the ontological assumption that an individual's reality is subjective and shaped by personal experiences, conditions in their life, interactions, and events (Atkinson, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), this study sought to understand subjective, multiple realities and truths (Levers, 2013). In the context of this study, this applied to the individual interview and focus group participants, and how the data received from these were all projections of multiple individual realities, with different experiences and perceptions of the issue being investigated (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Rassokha, 2022).

When discussing ontology (and epistemology) it should be emphasised that one does not necessarily 'use' them; rather, the philosophical choices made relate to a set of

assumptions, beliefs, or ideas that one operates under. A relativist ontology assumes that individual actions, interactions, and experiences create their own local and specific reality (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Relativism may also be understood as the assumption that there is no single reality external to the individual, and that reality exists through mental constructions of the world that are changed through lived experience (Poucher et al., 2020). In this study, data collection (individual interviews and focus groups) occurred under the assumption that the participants' experiences and perceptions were their sole reality, and such reality was shaped by their interactions and actions.

In alignment with a relativist ontology, this study was underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Scotland, 2012). An interpretivist epistemology is concerned with how the world is understood through subjective experiences, and one's individual perception of the social world (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). The interpretivist epistemology also assumes that individuals actively construct and then act upon realities they assign to events, actions, processes, and conditions in the world (Atkinson, 2012). Interpretivism follows the idea that individuals are intricate and complex and understand 'reality' in different ways, through interactions with others and the world in which they exist; and that collective definitions of reality shape and direct human thought and behaviour (Atkinson, 2012; Crotty, 1998). Through conducting research under an interpretivist epistemology, this study sought to explore the varying contexts provided by the participants' subjective experiences and perceptions, as social contextual meaning is essential for interpreting data (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Saunders et al., 2009).

To further elucidate this perspective, interpretivist epistemology supports the view that knowledge is constructed through interactions between the researcher and participant (Poucher et al., 2020); and that researchers cannot come to research as a 'blank slate' as if to separate themselves from their own experiences and interpretations of their experiences

(Poucher et al., 2020). A distinctive feature of interpretivist epistemology is that humans construct knowledge and meaning when they interpret experiences throughout the world (Hiller, 2016; Pascale, 2010), and that interpretive experience is closely intertwined with local and political values which are not universally generalisable or applicable in other situations (Hiller, 2016). When discussing interpretivism, Pascale (2010) highlighted that "in order to understand a situation … researchers must understand the meanings the situation holds for the participants, not just their behaviours" (p. 23). This provides a sound epistemological foundation for the current study which is concerned with exploring experiences and perceptions about club-based social and cultural responsibilities in youth sporting contexts.

It is also important to recognise that interpretivism is often used as both an epistemology and an overall research paradigm (Poucher et al., 2020). For example, interpretivism has been conceptualised as a research paradigm in Brown and Knight's (2022) study of coach and practitioner provision of support relating to the menstrual cycle, Burgess and colleague's (2016) study of parental stressors and coping in elite youth gymnastics, and Elliott colleague's (2018) research surrounding talented youth athletes and parental support. However, interpretivism has also been accepted as an epistemological position in several recent studies including Elliott and colleague's (2020, 2021) examinations of familial involvement in youth sport and Velardo and Elliott's (2021) qualitative investigation about novice researcher wellbeing. Given that there is no clear position in the literature surrounding interpretivism as a philosophical device, the key objectives of this study were reflected upon to justify interpretivism as a sound and appropriate epistemological position.

3.2.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative or social inquiry is a broad field that ranges from discovery, explanation, understanding, reasoning, and evaluation (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Smith & McGannon, 2018). The basis of social inquiry is understanding, interpreting, and representing the human experience and perspective (Marsvati, 2004; Smith & McGannon, 2018). Therefore, qualitative research is suitable for *why*, *how* and *what* questions about human behaviours, motives, thoughts, and perceptions (Neergaard et al., 2009); and is suited for developing understanding about phenomenon (Neergaard et al., 2009; Polkinghorne, 2005).

While qualitative research is understood as being research of 'words', 'stories' and 'interpretations' (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Smith & Sparkes, 2012); there is seemingly not one distinct definition (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Since qualitative research seeks to discover meaning and processes from a phenomenon, it is criticised by positivist researchers who may disregard deep descriptions and meaning in favour of probabilistic, statistical generalisability (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2016). Moreover, qualitative research is beneficial as it allows for a deep understanding of the issue at hand by listening to subjective experiences, perceptions, and developing contextual meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Polkinghorne, 2005). However, qualitative research opposes the positivist paradigm by seeking to uncover deep meaning through understanding in ways that quantitative research cannot (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Skinner et al., 2020; Smith & Caddick, 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2016b; Sparkes & Smith, 2013).

Creswell and Poth (2016) believe that qualitative research is difficult to describe as it is an ever-changing and evolving concept, and often has different meanings to different researchers. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have captured the ever-evolving nature throughout their *Sage handbook of qualitative research* across various years, conveying varying aspects

of qualitative research, such as social constructionism and interpretivism (see also Creswell & Poth, 2016). This is how Denzin and Lincoln describe qualitative research:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (2011, p. 3)

Qualitative research was the methodological choice for this research. The very essence of the current study called for understanding, interpretation, and representation of the human experience of parents, coaches, and club leaders in youth sporting clubs (Marsvati, 2004). In this case, this research was specifically interested in understanding how youth sporting clubs navigate growing social and cultural responsibilities, and to what capacity. Furthermore, qualitative research is beneficial as it allows for a deep understanding of the issue at hand by listening to subjective experiences, perceptions, and developing contextual meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Qualitative-based research has been increasingly utilised within the sport and exercise field over the past three decades (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Within that time period, it has grown significantly throughout sport and exercise psychology, sports management, and social and health sciences. For example, in a review by Culver et al. (2012) of three North American journals (*Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, and The Sport Psychologist*), it was found that from the 1990s to 2000–2009 there was a 68% increase in the amount of qualitative research published (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This also included a greater number of authors, which indicates that more scholars are utilising, engaging with, and producing qualitative-

based research. As a result of growing maturity, scope, and challenges, more specific journals have been established to further support the application and production of such research (e.g., *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*) (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Additionally, a multitude of qualitative studies surrounding mental health, diversity and inclusion, and social relationships in youth sport have been published, reflecting three domains of club-based sociocultural responsibility (See, Elliott & Drummond, 2017b; Elliott, Drummond et al., 2023; Holt et al., 2017; Knight, 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Petersen et al., 2023; Spaaij et al., 2023; Swann et al., 2018; Vella et al., 2021). Therefore, through the rapid growth and utilisation of qualitative research, and a multitude of published sport-based research, it was appropriate for this present study to adopt such an approach.

Noteworthy, using qualitative enquiry to explore social contexts is epistemologically important given the inability to isolate the social context from individuals' experiences or perceptions in relation to the main issue (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Polkinghorne, 2005). In this PhD study, much was gained from listening to the voices of individuals within successful clubs about how they have managed to sustain and enact their social and cultural responsibilities surrounding mental health promotion, diversity and inclusion, and social relationship development. As such, a qualitative research approach aligns with relativist and interpretivist thought and supports an approach which seeks to hear voices that may be silenced or unable to communicate freely themselves; and to empower and encourage people to share their stories (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore, to gain a deep understanding of community sporting clubs and their capacity, burdens, and ability to navigate changing social and cultural responsibilities, a qualitative research position was most deemed most suitable.

3.2.3 Research design

This current study utilises interpretive description as developed by Thorne (2016). Interpretive description was initially developed to gather information, perspectives, and experiences from experts (nurses on the frontline) because of their lived and laboured experiences. The development of an interpretive description methodology was influenced by three particular methodologies developed for the disciplines of sociology (grounded theory), anthropology (ethnography), and philosophy (phenomenology) (Hunt, 2009). These methodologies often lacked the ability to provide applied outcomes, especially in nursing, and due to this, researchers found themselves departing from such approaches in search for a more applied approach (Cutcliffe, 2005; Hunt, 2009). Additionally, some researchers would claim to follow one, but their ensuing design and methods did not align; resulting in what Thorne et al. (1997) consider a "hollow allegiance" to a prescribed qualitative approach (see also Hunt, 2009). While methodologies such as grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology are still key pillars within qualitative research, Thorne et al. (1997) developed interpretive description to give scholars a more flexible qualitative approach. Interpretive description is characterised by a noncategorical approach to develop and generate deep understanding of particular issues or groups of individuals in order to provide recommendations that could be applied in practice (Hunt, 2009; Thorne, 2016; Thorne et al., 1997).

Fittingly for qualitative research, this study employed an interpretive description methodology. Interpretive description (Thorne, 2016) is commonly used within sociological and health science fields due to its capacity to generate insights and perspectives about how groups of individuals experience and perceive phenomenon that have clinical application (Hunt, 2009). It places emphasis on the reasoning behind participants' beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts; and who may benefit from or be hindered by the phenomenon or issue in question

(Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Hunt, 2009). In other words, interpretative description research designs are able to address complex questions or phenomena, and result in practical outcomes for the issue, question, or situation (Thorne, 2016). The use of an interpretive description research design was appropriate for this study given the emphasis on gaining knowledge of the participants' experiences and thoughts on the topic in question (Kim et al., 2017) to then provide youth sporting clubs with resources to inform best practice surrounding social and cultural responsibilities.

Interpretive description encourages the modification and transformation of developing ideas during data analysis (Neergaard et al., 2009; Thorne et al., 1997). The transformation of developing ideas was methodologically coherent for this study as the philosophical underpinnings acknowledged that human reality is a subjective experience and that the interactions an individual has inform their own specific reality (Atkinson, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Since interpretative description is considered noncategorical and flexible, there is no linear sequence throughout the research process, and because of this, it is not viewed as a conventional method in research (Thorne, 2016). While this particular methodology does not have set steps, it aims to work with the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study, or within the field that is it being conducted in. So, while interpretive description is indeed a flexible methodology, it still has specific purposes that it aims to fulfil (referred to as integrity of purpose), alongside the philosophical underpinnings of the research. As described by Thorne (2016, p. 40), these are:

> (1) an actual real-world question, (2) an understanding of what we do and don't know on the basis of all available empirical evidence, and (3) an appreciation for the conceptual and contextual realm within which a target audience is positioned to receive the answer we generate.

While numerous qualitative methodologies (such as rapid ethnography and grounded theory) were considered for this study, the research design most appropriate to answer the

research question and objectives was interpretive description. For example, rapid ethnography was initially appealing due to placing the researcher directly in the setting of interest to document relationships, dynamics, culture, and attitudes (Hoey, 2014; Sugden et al., 2019); however, it was deemed that this would not provide enough depth about the specific abilities, processes, capacities, and attitudes towards engaging social and cultural responsibilities (Hammersley, 2006). Data collection also occurred during the end period of the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore ethnography, compared to interpretive description, would not have been feasible.

As previously mentioned, interpretive description results in practical outcomes and is best suited for research that aims to informs practice or action, or have some form of tangible outcome (Thorne, 2016). The practical or tangible outcome sets interpretive description apart from various other qualitative research approaches. Such outcomes are produced through focusing on real-world questions, understanding what is and is not known based on available empirical evidence, and developing rich understandings that build on current knowledge (Elliott et al., 2024; Thorne, 2016). For example, there is potential for the findings of this PhD study to guide other, and potentially less-resourced, youth sporting clubs to support the expansion, extension, and enhancement of social responsibility.

In pursuit of understanding how sporting clubs navigate rapidly changing social and cultural responsibilities, interpretive description was suitable because complex questions or issues can be examined, and the findings can offer practical outcomes and applications (Thorne, 2016). Interpretive description has gained significant popularity in qualitative sport research given its capacity to provide scholars with the means to apply or translate knowledge into local sporting contexts (such as, Bell et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2011; Elliott et al., 2021; Elliott, Pankowiak et al., 2023; Elliott et al., 2024; Furusa et al., 2021; Holt et al., 2011; Muscat, 2010; Neely & Holt, 2014). Regarding the current study, this cannot be understated

given that many community sporting clubs around Australia (and globally) may not have the capacity, skills, or knowledge to navigate broader social and cultural responsibilities. This methodology comprises an important step for knowledge translation within this context, providing a strong methodological rationale for this approach.

3.3 Participant sampling and recruitment

3.3.1 Recruitment

This study involved targeted focus groups (n = 16) and one-on-one individual interviews (n = 30) with 46 participants from various sporting clubs across South Australia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 parents and 14 coaches and focus groups with 16 club leaders (for participants' profiles, see Tables 6 and 7). In alignment with the methodological hallmarks of interpretive description, which normally involves sampling 'practitioners' and emphasising the generation of applied knowledge, participants were recruited from sporting clubs identified as 'successful' in actively engaging with social and cultural responsibilities through sport. In other words, a strengths-based approach was used as the basis for understanding how 'the best' sporting clubs navigate dynamic and increasing social and cultural responsibility.

The current study's targeted recruitment approach was crucial in upholding methodological coherence. Interpretive description calls for the prioritisation of lived experience perspectives; therefore parents, coaches, and club leaders were considered 'knowledge experts' (Thorne, 2016) because of their lived experiences in youth sport. By conducting interviews and focus groups with parents, coaches, and club leaders at youth sporting clubs considered 'successful', competent, or socially aware, a strengths-based approach was employed. This means that, rather than visiting youth sporting clubs who were less organised or under-resourced and conducting research about, for example, what

processes were lacking that would enable greater opportunities for development; the clubs who were considered the best examples were examined (see Thorne, 2016). Through selecting a sample who were considered as 'having expertise' alongside using an interpretive description design, outcomes were generated that could be used to inform best practice (through, for example, a set of common steps, a blueprint, or starting points).

To support recruitment, candidate sporting clubs were shortlisted in consultation with the South Australian Government's Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR), the peak government sporting body in South Australia, which possesses unique institutional knowledge about all community sporting clubs' activities, innovations, and achievements. Via in-person meetings and email correspondence, the ORSR provided recommendations of youth sporting clubs which they assessed as 'leading the charge' surrounding social and cultural responsibilities pertaining to diversity and inclusion, mental health, and social relationships. The recommendations were based on these criteria: (1) Clubs must have a strong public reputation for leading social and cultural change, evidenced by the acquisition of awards, prizes, and/or honours; and (2) Clubs must have a STARCLUB Club Development Program ranking of 3 or above.

In total, six specific sporting clubs were recommended. These clubs, comprised of Australian Rules football, tennis, netball, and hockey, were considered to be at the forefront of best practice on- and off-field and identified as having high membership, high retention success, positive community contribution and engagement, competitive, reputational, and operational success. For instance, In South Australia, a youth club was recognised as being successful operationally and competitively, and was awarded: Junior Club of the Year (National), SANFL Inclusive Club of the Year, SANFL Juniors – Club of the Year, AdlFL – Club Champions 2021, Clubs SA Awards for Excellence – Sporting Club of the Year, and AFL Disability Inclusion Volunteer Award – State and National Winner.

The identified clubs were then contacted via email containing a recruitment flyer (see Appendix A), an information sheet about the study (see Appendix B), and two consent forms for participation in an individual interview or focus group (see Appendix C and D). Clubs were requested to circulate the recruitment flyer via email to their membership mailing list comprising mainly coaches and parents who fulfilled administrative or committee roles. This email was also forwarded to club leaders (specifically the committee members, administration, and presidents). Clubs were also asked to position a printed recruitment poster in a high-traffic area of the sporting club. The email sent out to clubs contained the researchers email address, and any potential participants were required to email to express their interest. If participants preferred an online interview, they were first required to return the consent form via email to then organise a date and time for the interview to occur. Those participating in in-person interviews had the option to return the signed consent form via email; however, most were signed in person prior to the commencement of the individual interview. This also occurred with the focus groups, as all were conducted in person. Finally, the participants in the individual interviews and focus groups were reminded of the aims and purpose of the research, and that they could withdraw at any point.

Prior to data collection it was anticipated that 25–30 individual interviews and 3–4 focus groups would be conducted. These ranges were treated as arbitrary as pre-stating a specific number for the purpose of reaching data saturation is not consistent with the values of relativist ontology or reflexive thematic analysis (which was employed for this study) (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Additionally, through the data collection methods, the diverse perspectives, the depth of the data generated from the participants, the demands placed on participants, and the use of a reflexive thematic analysis, the sample of 30 individual participants and 3 focus groups from AFL and tennis provided sufficient data to explore the phenomenon under inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2021b).

3.3.2 Sampling and participants

Within this study, various sampling methods were utilised depending on the data collection method and population. The sporting clubs themselves were contacted for recruitment via a purposeful sampling technique. This approach was used because of the specific bounds on which sporting clubs could participate, that is, the youth sporting clubs, as recommended by the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing or from the STARCLUB Club Development Program, had to be considered 'successful' (as previously defined) or at the forefront of practice. A purposeful sampling method involves identifying and selecting participants directly related to the issue in question (Palinkas et al., 2015). Once the youth sporting clubs were selected and contacted to support recruitment, the recruitment of individuals from those clubs, whilst they had come from a purposeful sample, was more randomised in nature, as any parent or coach could volunteer their time for the individual interviews. In total, three STARCLUBs supported recruitment for focus groups.

Table 6: Profile of participants in semi-structured individual interviews

Participant/role	Gender	Age	Sport(s)/club	Children
Parent	M	27	AFL	1 son (5 years old)
Parent	F	42	AFL	2 sons (13 and 10 years)
Parent	M	48	AFL	3 sons (15, 12, and 8 years)
Parent	M	41	AFL	2 sons (13 and 11 years)
Parent	F	34	AFL	1 daughter (6 years old)
Parent	M	36	AFL	1 son (7 years old)
Parent	M	42	AFL	2 sons (15 and 12 years old)
Parent	F	53	AFL	1 daughter (16 years old)
Parent	M	29	Tennis	1 daughter (5 years old)
Parent	M	31	Tennis	1 daughter (5 years old)

Parent	F	45	Tennis	2 daughters (13 and 11 years)
Parent	M	46	Tennis	1 son (17 years old)
Parent	F	37	Surf life saving[1]	1 son (14 years old), 1 daughter (14 years old)
Parent	F	38	Hockey	1 son (10 years old)
Parent	F	48	Hockey	2 sons (15 and 13 years old)
Parent	M	40	Netball	1 daughter (10 years old)
Coach	M	37	Hockey	1 son (12 years old)
Coach	F	28	Tennis	-
Coach	M	40	AFL	2 daughters (10 years old)
Coach	M	34	AFL	1 son (2 years old)
Coach	M	32	AFL	-
Coach	M	42	AFL	1 daughter (19 years old)
Coach	M	30	AFL	-
Coach	F	32	Netball	-
Coach	M	46	AFL	2 sons (14 and 13 years old), 1 daughter (8 years old)
Coach	M	42	AFL	2 sons (13 and 9 years old)
Coach	M	28	AFL	-
Coach	M	31	Tennis	-
Coach	F	55	Tennis	2 daughters (17 and 13 years)
Coach	M	29	Tennis	-

[1] Surf life saving is not only a unique Australian sport; it is also designed to replicate dangerous situations that a lifeguard may face in rescue situations.

Table 7: Profile of participants in focus groups

Participant/role	Gender	Age	Sport(s)/club
Focus group 1 (junior AFL committee, 4 participants)			
Committee	F	46	AFL
Committee	F	38	AFL
Committee	M	35	AFL
Committee	M	43	AFL
Focus group 2 (AFL club management committee, 7 participants)			
President	M	-	AFL
Committee	M	-	AFL
Committee	F	36	AFL
Committee	F	67	AFL
Committee	M	-	AFL
Committee	M	45	AFL
Committee	M	43	AFL
Focus group 3 (tennis club committee, 5 participants)			
President	M	52	Tennis
Committee	M	42	Tennis
Committee	M	36	Tennis
Committee	M	47	Tennis
Committee	F	40	Tennis

3.3.3 Research context

To provide further detail and contextual information about the above recruitment, participants and sampling, this thesis will also include a research context section. As previously mentioned, this study sought youth sporting clubs with the assistance of the Office of Recreation, Sport & Racing, the government sporting body in South Australia, as that had insights about club programs, initiatives, and participation in social and cultural responsibilities. While ORSR identified various clubs, these recommendations were made with their STARCLUB development tool. The STARCLUB Club Development Program ranking was a tool created by the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing to identify clubs that are considered "well-run clubs where quality coaches and officials work alongside valued volunteers in a safe and welcoming environment" (Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing, 2023). While this tool is no longer available in 2025, it assisted in the identification of clubs to contact who had a ranking of 3 or higher. This tool and specific recommendations from ORSR resulted in six Adelaide metropolitan-based clubs being involved in this study.

These six clubs included a range of sporting codes, including: Australian Rules football, tennis, surf-life saving, hockey, and netball. All clubs included in this study are located in suburbs considered to be of a mid- to upper- SES. These clubs facilitated some form of social and culturally based program or initiative, had achievements surrounding on- and off- field/court success, and ranked above a STARCLUB level 3. Below will provide a detailed description about each of the clubs:

- *Australian Rules football club 1*: This club is located in the Western suburbs of Adelaide. The club conducts inaugural Indigenous Rounds, inclusion teams, and women's teams. They have a level 3 STARCLUB rating.
- *Australian Rules football club 2*: This club is located in the inner Southern suburbs of Adelaide. This club runs inclusion teams for disabilities, women's teams, mental-

health education and literacy programs, annual Indigenous rounds, and alcohol and drug education sessions. They have a level 3 STARCLUB rating.

- *Tennis club*: This club is located in the Eastern suburbs of Adelaide. This club provides a program with inclusive adaptions, and previously, wheelchair tennis. They have a level 4 STARCLUB rating.
- *Surf-life saving club*: This club is located in the Western suburbs of Adelaide. This club provides programs for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, inclusionary adaptions, and initiatives surrounding cultural education and support for immigrants. This club has a level 3 STARCLUB rating.
- *Hockey club*: This club is located in the South-Western suburbs of Adelaide. The club provides inclusive and mixed gender teams, and mental health education and support. This club has a level 4 STARCLUB rating.
- *Netball club*: This club is located in an inner South-Western suburb of Adelaide. This club provides men's and mixed netball teams, mental health education, and disability inclusion. This club has a level 3 STARCLUB rating.

3.4 Data collection

The data collection methods employed in this study were consistent with interpretive description methods, namely, face-to-face individual interviews and targeted focus groups. Individual interviews and focus groups aligned with the epistemology and ontology of the study, which acknowledged that people's reality is an individual, subjective experience, and that their reality is based on the interactions, events, actions, processes, and conditions in the world (Atkinson, 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). Thus, through interviewing parents and coaches, and conducting focus groups with club leaders and committee members, a complex,

deep, rich set of data was obtained from the subjective and individual realities that form the experiences and perceptions of these participants (Atkinson, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Individual interviews (parents and coaches) and focus groups (club leaders/committee members) were undertaken with different populations from various youth sporting clubs. The decisions to do this was informed by the fact that previous studies within similar fields have successfully used this method to elicit diverse perspectives on contemporary issues, as seen in studies by Watson et al. (2020) and Carlman et al. (2020). In this study, the population groups were separated within the two methods in order to seek different answers to specific research questions from these various perspectives. For example, parents held different opinions about the club and their processes to those of club leaders and committee members, thus separating these groups of participants allowed for authentic and meaningful responses not influenced by other populations.

Throughout data collection, participant confidentiality was maintained by conducting individual interviews in an environment that did not reveal their identity, including public locations outside the club (or in a meeting room within the club) such as cafes, libraries, online or in their home. Although no in-home individual interviews occurred, the protocol of contacting someone (such as a supervisor or peer) prior to the interview and then after to confirm safety was adhered to. All names or other details of participants were replaced with alphanumeric codes when organising interviews, as well as with pseudonyms when they are mentioned in this thesis or other publications arising from this research. Identifiable participant information was not published or made publicly available.

It should also be noted that, while there were no active COVID-19 outbreaks or lockdowns during data collection, and most individual interviews and all focus groups were conducted in person, participants were still given the option of online interviews. The rationale for this methodological decision was to accommodate participants who were

continuing to adhere to COVID-19 guidelines as well as convenience for other individuals. Therefore, some interviews were conducted via video calling services such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom. All participants were made aware that audio would be recorded for their individual interview or focus group for the purpose of audio transcription for analysis.

3.4.1 Individual interviews

Individual interviews were employed in this research as they are a widely used data collection method in social sciences and sport and exercise science research (Elliott et al., 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Smith & Sparkes, 2016a; Sparkes & Smith, 2013; Sutcliffe et al., 2024; Thiel et al., 2019). Individual interviews are widely employed because of their capacity to produce rich, descriptive, and complex data, whereby deep exploration and analysis can occur (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a); this capacity was pertinent to this thesis. Logistically, individual interviews are often considered easy, low-cost, and convenient; and because of this are seemingly beneficial to PhD students because of the low cost, as well as the flexibility to occur either in person or via an online interview. However, Smith and Sparkes (2016a) do stress that, while considered a key method, they should not be regarded as simple or as a default methodological choice in qualitative research. Consequently, individual interviews were thoughtfully designed through a process of piloting and open dialogue with a critical friend to avoid producing 'lacklustre' research (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a).

Individual interviews were also used because they are extremely useful in generating participants' perceptions about a social phenomenon or topic (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). Specifically, this research involved interviews with parents and coaches to understand their perceptions and experiences about social and cultural responsibility in youth sporting clubs. Individual interviews are commonly used in qualitative research for their capacity to document individual perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs in order to understand and interpret meaning (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). Through obtaining rich, descriptive, and complex data

about participants' experiences, deep exploration can occur at the data analysis stage and support deeper and nuanced understanding of the issue or phenomenon (Adams, 2015; Ennis & Chen, 2012). Moreover, interviews are an important tool to assist in the co-construction of knowledge with the participants (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a).

This is study utilised semi-structured interviews which allow participants to have greater control and flexibility in the interview. This control and flexibility can result in a greater chance of participants expressing opinions, ideas, and attitudes, which provides a richer data set (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). When utilising semi-structured individual interviews, techniques such as open-ended questioning, probing, and snowballing have the potential to result in strong, rich data (Adams, 2015). Open-ended questioning, probing, and snowballing allows the researchers to be led by the participant to explore ideas that are of interest to them and can produce further depth and richness. These techniques also allow for the ability to probe for more information or clarification where necessary or influence the direction of discussions.

There are some potential problems when employing individual interviews that had to first be addressed. Firstly, semi-structured individual interviews were used as a tool to understand multiple individuals' subjective, local, social realities and thus perceptions and experiences (Atkinson, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It is important for the researcher to not view the participants' experiences as a standard for all within that population, that one opinion may not be reflected amongst others (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). Demographic information such as age, roles, background, and sporting code was captured during this process to contextualised findings and situate key ideas.

Another common problem that has been observed throughout qualitative research, and especially in the sport and exercise sciences field, is that the interactive role of the researcher/interviewer is removed from research reports (Brinkmann, 2013; Potter &

Hepburn, 2005; Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). Individual interviews should be viewed as a social activity or exchange, in which the researcher and participant are actively co-constructing knowledge (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). As mentioned, it is vital to preserve the contextual matter in individual interviews, and this involves including the researcher's questions or responses alongside the participants', within the findings (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). Doing so preserves contextual matter, as well as the researcher contributing to the co-creation of knowledge and preserving meaning (Brinkmann, 2013; Smith & Sparkes, 2016a).

Prior to commencing individual interviews, an interview guide (see Appendix E) was developed, piloted, and refined. The interview guide was developed in collaboration with the supervisory team who possessed significant knowledge and experience in qualitative research which supported re-phrasing open-ended questions and topic statements. As the individual interviews were with parents and coaches, the questions for the two groups were similar in nature, but with slight differences. The questions were piloted with this supervisory team and other fellow researchers in mock interviews and subsequent reflections with a critical friend in which the questions were refined for future interviews. The interview guide contained 'icebreaker' questions to allow the participate to introduce themselves and collect background data, transition and main questions, and concluding questions for further information. Generally, the individual interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes ($\bar{x}$ = 36:08, s = 09:22). Interviews were recorded by an audio recorder or recorded via Microsoft Teams (if online) and transcribed verbatim for analysis by the lead researcher. Moreover, hand-written field notes were recorded to provide additional detail about participants' non-verbal behaviours and actions as additional context for further analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a).

3.4.2 Focus groups

In addition to the interviews, focus groups were conducted in this study with club leaders (committee members and presidents). Focus groups are a useful qualitative method to uncover and explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences in a group setting to develop an understanding of similarities and differences in perspective and experience between individuals (Gill et al., 2008; Kitzinger, 1994). Although similar in process to individual interviews, focus groups differ due to the group interactions and discussions between the participants. The interactive element of focus groups is significant, as it allows the participants to see the similarities and differences in their experiences, perspectives, or opinions on a topic, which can cause further snowballing of discussion (Adler et al., 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). As a researcher conducting focus groups (often referred to as the moderator or facilitator), the main task was to create a supportive atmosphere to allow for open discussion and expression of potentially personal or conflicting viewpoints (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This occurred through ensuring all participants had equal opportunities to talk (i.e., not letting an individual(s) dominate the conversation) by recalling the original question or focus, prompting participants for responses, identifying agreements/disagreements in the group, and emphasising that there were 'no wrong answers' (Adler et al., 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2013).

In focus groups, it has been argued that participants will share more due to being surrounded with like-minded individuals and ideas may snowball further due to being around individuals that can relate or add to the discussion (Stokes & Bergin, 2006). This unique characteristic of focus groups, unlike individual interviews, allows and pushes participants to reflect on their own viewpoints which may deepen participants self-reflections about their circumstances, attitudes or behaviour (Ritchie, 2003; Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). One of the main reasons to employ focus groups in this study was because in new or highly exploratory

studies, passionate and lively group interaction can produce more spontaneous, expressive, and emotional views or attitudes (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This of course, has the potential to generate rich, complex data to develop understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions (McGannon et al., 2021; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Focus groups are beneficial as they allow open, dynamic dialogue that often displays social interactions between the participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This means that the researcher can examine and produce field notes regarding the interactional dynamics that produce the talk (including the researcher/moderator) (McGannon et al., 2021; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). This factor benefitted this research because the interactional dynamics being recorded ensured that the contextual matter of the focus group discussion remained in the data.

A semi-structured question guide for the focus groups was developed and employed, with the questions tailored towards a group of club leaders such as committee members and presidents (see Appendix F). The focus group question guide was initially constructed by creating open-ended unstructured questions that were broad enough to address a group of individuals which were then tested on peers in a group. The questions were then refined to ensure that they were semi-structured, which ensured that they were of high quality and open-ended to encourage broad discussion within the group setting (Smith & Sparkes, 2016b; Sparkes & Smith, 2013). The pre-developed question guide consisted of 'icebreaker' questions (names, roles, how they know one another and for how long, how long at the club), transition and main questions ('how would you describe the communication between the club and its members?') and concluding questions. These questions and set-up allowed for open discussion between the individuals within the group (Tausch & Menold, 2016). The guide developed for these focus groups facilitated open, uninhibited dialogue which was supplemented by sub-questions which enabled clarification, probing, snowballing, and more

detailed exploration of ideas and experiences (Longhurst, 2003; McGannon et al., 2021; Powell & Single, 1996).

While focus groups excel at producing information about a group's views, reasoning, and understanding of experiences, they also have potential limitations that were considered (Gill et al., 2008). Prior to commencing the focus groups, the non-prescriptive, semi-structured guide was developed to be able to moderate group discussion on the topic in question (Gill et al., 2008; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). This was to ensure that the discussion stayed within the bounds of that topic, that the discussion would not be dominated by one or a few members of the group, ensuring that all participants had equal opportunity to contribute, and to allow a range of opinions and differences to be discussed openly and fairly (Bloor et al., 2001; Gill et al., 2008). The guide assisted in the moderation of the participants' discussion in the focus groups. As previously stated, the interactions and non-verbal cues between the participants were not removed from the data before analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a), as the highly interactive nature of focus groups produces the context of the discussion. This was achieved through the method recommended by Smith and Sparkes (2016a) in which vocal expression (e.g., participants' talk, pauses, laughs, and certain vocal emphasis) are added when transcribing to preserve context and shape participants' contributions.

Smith and Sparkes (2016a) state that focus groups typically contain 4–8 individuals, and that there should be no more than 10 in one group to ensure all can share their views. This perspective provided the basis for the recruitment of 16 participants involved in three focus groups, with each running between 45 and 90 minutes. All three focus groups occurred in person and were recorded by an audio recorder, alongside hand-written field notes that provided additional information about participants' interactions and non-verbal behaviours (Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). Focus group 1 contained 4 participants and was specifically with

an AFL junior committee, focus group 2 contained 7 participants from the same club but with the AFL management committee, and focus group 3 contained 5 participants from a tennis committee. These participants were involved with a STARCLUB and were willing to be involved in the research during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.5 Qualitative data analysis

Interpretive description as a described by Thorne (2016) favours data comprehension, meaning synthesis, coding and categorisation, and data recontextualisation practices as part of the analytic process. However, Thorne (2016) also encourages researchers to "borrow" broader techniques, tools, and approaches within qualitative research beyond conventional structures and rules (Elliott, Pankowiak et al., 2023). Therefore, reflexive thematic analysis was employed because it was deemed an appropriate analytical tool for the identification of thematic patterns (i.e., themes) and to interpret meaning within the data (Braun et al., 2016) – a key objective of this research. Indeed, reflexive thematic analysis can "provide a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the data" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 848), meaning that the researchers theoretical and ideological assumptions are recognised.

Reflexive thematic analysis has emerged from Braun and Clarke's (2006) earlier work on thematic analysis but has more recently been criticised for its misapplication in social sciences (Byrne, 2022; Joffe, 2011). Braun and Clarke have identified that many scholars and researchers claim to use thematic analysis while neglecting the emergence of more recent perspectives (see Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2019, 2021a), especially concerning reflexive thematic analysis (Byrne, 2022). Consequently, Braun and Clarke have expanded and clarified the use of thematic analysis in qualitative research (see Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2019, 2021a; Braun et al., 2016, 2019) which includes a reflexive approach.

3.5.1 Reflexive thematic analysis

The data derived from the individual interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim and subjected to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Elliott et al., 2024). Reflexive thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible interpretative approach within qualitative data analysis that allows researchers to identify and analyse patterns and themes within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Byrne, 2022). Specifically, reflexive thematic analysis highlights the researcher's role in the production of knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and allows the researcher to acknowledge their position and bias towards the research (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Braun et al., 2016). A key strength of thematic analysis is that it can be used to highlight similarities and differences between individuals' experiences and perceptions and thus produces codes which complement explorations of a particular phenomenon or issue (Smith et al., 2014).

Reflexivity will often occur during the coding stage of analysis, and the codes represent the researcher's own interpretation of patterns and meaning throughout the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022). This can be further applied to the development and conceptualisation of themes, where a critical friend technique can be employed to promote reflexive practices such as sense checking ideas, and exploring multiple assumptions (Byrne, 2022). Byrne (2022) notes further that no two researchers will have the exact same interpretations as each another and therefore there should be no expectations that codes or themes will be reproduced in the same manner, which should result in richer interpretations of the data, rather than coming to a shared consensus on the meaning in the data. This knowledge provided a sound justification for the inclusion of a critical friend technique throughout the analytical process (described further on pages 84-90).

Reflexive thematic analysis, as described by Braun et al. (2016), comprises of a non-linear, six-phase process: *(a) familiarisation, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for*

and identifying themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) writing the report. These six phases guided an iterative undertaking, working back and forth between the phases of familiarisation and identification of themes, and the phases of reviewing themes and writing the thesis. Reflexivity was also practiced during data analysis by examining the fieldnotes taken during the interviews with the corresponding interviews while coding in order to provide context of the participants' non-verbal cues and behaviours. Below is an account of the six-phase process that occurred in this study.

(a) Familiarisation. The audio recordings of both the individual interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim manually by the lead researcher into Microsoft Word. Listening along to the audio recording while transcribing was utilised to become familiar with the data. During this process, participant names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identity. As the transcripts were transcribed manually, the iterative nature of the process (listening, pausing, typing, replaying, continuing) contributed to data immersion and familiarisation. Once all individual interviews and focus groups were transcribed, each transcript was read in full while listening to the audio recording, to ensure there were no transcription errors and to also further familiarise oneself with the data. A second full re-read of the transcripts was conducted over a six-month period which supported a more active engagement with the data. Initial impressions about meaning and patterns developed during this phase, which culminated in a series of notes which would later inform a mind-mapping approach.

(b) Generating initial codes. This phase involved generating codes from the transcripts, whereby segments of text were labelled at a semantic level. The transcripts were coded line-by-line (where applicable) or where data was especially relevant to the research questions. For example, data directly related to the challenges with maintaining programs around mental health was coded as a concept rather than line-by-line. These initial codes were manually

created via the 'review and comment' function on Microsoft Word. The descriptions of non-verbal cues or behaviours in each of the field notes were referred to, which enhanced contextual understanding during the process of initial code generation. At this point, three in-person meetings occurred with the supervisory team who acted as a soundboard to prompt further reflexivity, consider wider perspectives, and discuss potential meaning and interpretation. Supervisory meetings embodied opportunities to practice a critical friend technique which resulted in revisiting the data to further enhance the coding process. This was necessary to ensure that less specific codes and vague interpretations matured into richer, interpretive, and refined codes. From here, the codes from each transcript were placed into a separate document alongside the quotations the codes were connected to. While not strictly adhering to a codebook approach to thematic analysis, this manual documentation technique supported the organisation of the data which would later provide a foundation for an interpretive mind-mapping exercise for theme development.

(c) Searching for and identifying themes. This phase of reflexive thematic analysis involved an intuitive process of grouping data into potential themes and subthemes. These developing themes, according to Clarke and Braun (2017), are "patterns of meaning, underpinned by a central organizing concept – a shared core idea" (p. 297). As previously mentioned, some codes were created where a quotation or text from the data pertained to the research questions. To organise thinking and provide a visual cue, a mind-mapping technique (see Figure 6) was utilised to identify the possible relationship between each theme in pursuit of telling the overall story about the data. At this stage, the duplication of ideas or underdeveloped concepts were reorganised or reanalysed as part of mapping the interconnectedness of potential themes. This process led to the reduction of thematic cross-over by collapsing and combining potential themes (Byrne, 2022). Subsequently, the thematic mind-map was presented to the supervisory team, where a critical friend technique was

utilised to soundboard thinking and receive feedback about how the themes might be reoriented to help address the overarching research question and objectives. The developing themes were presented at a national conference (National Youth Sport Conference, November 16, 2023) to further synthesise the interpretation, meaning, and substantiveness of the proposed themes. One consequence of the mind-mapping technique, conference presentation, and sound-boarding with the supervisory team was a refinement of themes. This backward and forward process reflected an active and iterative commitment to theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

(d) Reviewing themes. At this point, the themes were reviewed and refined, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2012, p. 65) advocacy for "distinctive and, to some extent, stand-alone [themes that] need to work together as a whole". It was anticipated that there would be approximately eight themes; however, one theme was completely discarded and another collapsed into an existing theme (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). While reviewing themes, it was critical that each theme had a central concept, there were multiple interconnecting and related key points surrounding the central concept, the themes answered the research questions and objectives, and that a cohesive story was told between the themes from that data (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Another meeting with principal supervisor occurred at this stage of the process, who has an extensive background with qualitative data analysis, to act as a critical friend to promote reflexive practices, and act as a sounding board through the final stages of theme development and conceptualisation (Foulger, 2010).

(e) Defining and naming themes. The naming of themes was a creative endeavour but required substantially more time to ensure that the theme names reflected the complexity of the data. For example, theme three was initially named 'Dynamic/flexible processes', but later revised to 'Making invisible processes visible', and finally named 'Change and succession', to capture the nuance and meaning tied to implicit club-based processes for

sustaining a commitment to their social and cultural responsibilities. At this point, another visual aid was created using a flow diagram (see Figure 7) to display the themes once they were defined and named, and to organise thinking around the 'subthemes' (these findings did not have explicitly labelled subthemes but closely entwined sub-topics under a theme).

(f) Writing the report. The final stage of the reflexive thematic analysis was writing the report. In this instance, this included the development of a cohesive findings chapter, that fit into a larger PhD thesis. Furthermore, the process of reflexive thematic analysis allowed the generation of ideas for the development of a manuscript to be written from this research. The findings chapter of this thesis was written which was subsequently sent to the principal supervisor for comment. Three rounds of drafting and editing led to a completed findings chapter, which, as Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, was intended to be "a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes" (p. 93).

3.5.2 Data structure

As a means to improve the transparency of the data analysis and depth of data, this thesis will include a data structure similar to that described by Gioia (2021). According to Gioia (2021) and Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) presenting a data structure, or in order words, having a visual representation of the data analysis process, can strengthen data transparency and subsequently qualitative rigor. This visual representation can further assist readers in understanding how raw data or quotes were aggregated into sub-themes or idea, and then the final named themes.

Prior to creating a data structure described by Gioia (2021) to place in the thesis, the researcher created a preliminary findings mind-map to assist in visually ordering ideas after data collection and interview transcription. This mind-map, seen in Figure 6 was prior to the analysis phase occurring and made for the purpose of a presentation, however, it can be noted how core ideas were already being grouped. Similarly, a FLOW diagram was created once the data analysis phase commenced. This FLOW diagram, Figure 7, was utilised as a means to understand and order thinking surrounding themes and sub-themes (although, there are no explicit sub-themes included in the findings chapter). It also assisted in naming and defining the central ideas, which then became the final themes.

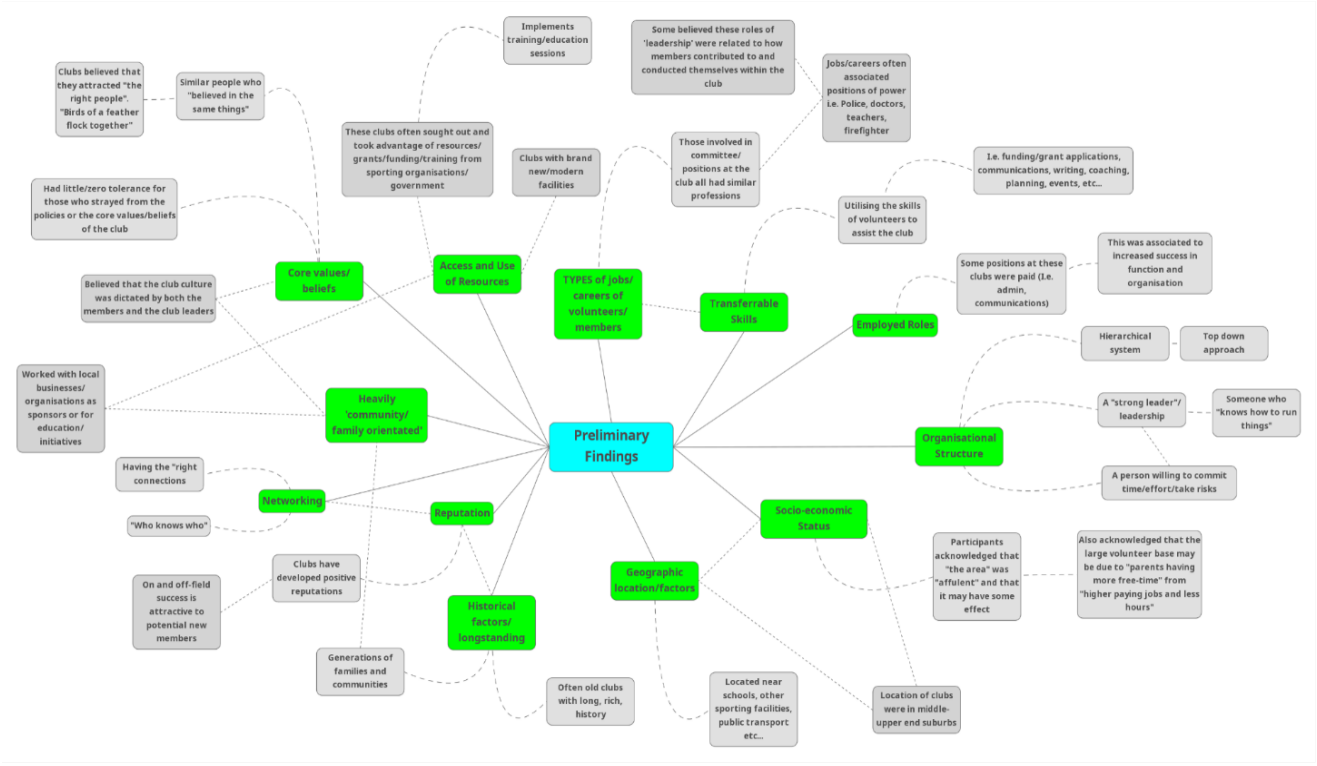

Figure 6: Preliminary findings mind-map

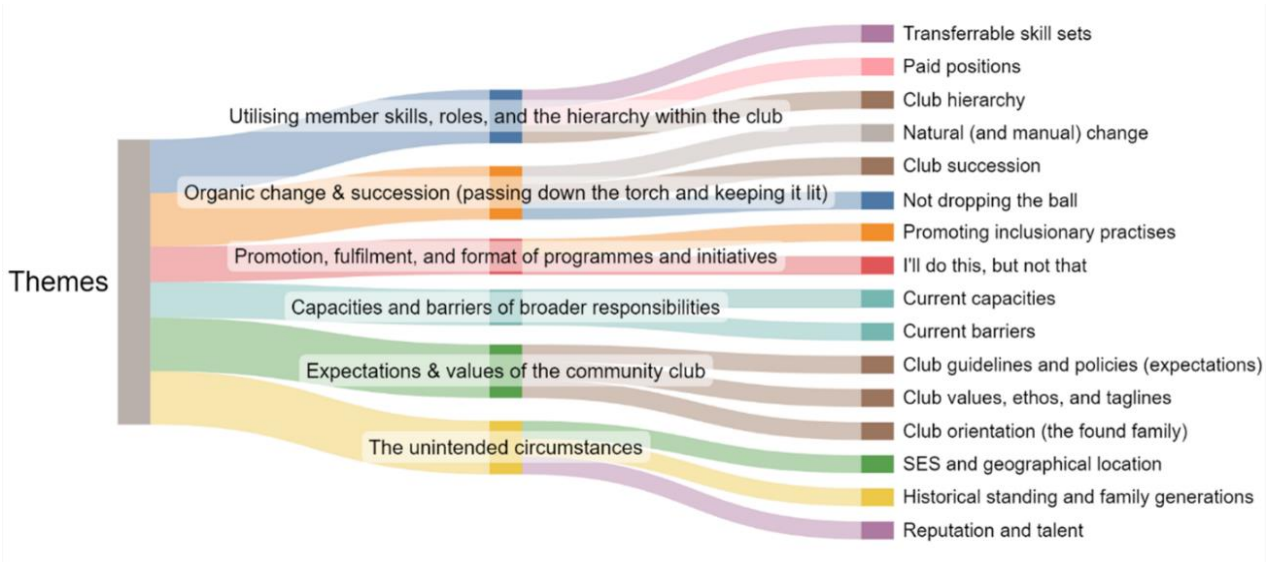

Figure 7: FLOW chart of initial theme names and topics

Finally, through discovering key works by Gioia (2021) and Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) a final, and more polished, data structure was created (Figure 8). This data structure details core quotes (full quotes included in the findings chapter) that led to codes throughout reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020). These codes were grouped into core ideas, which then transpired into the final six themes included in this thesis.

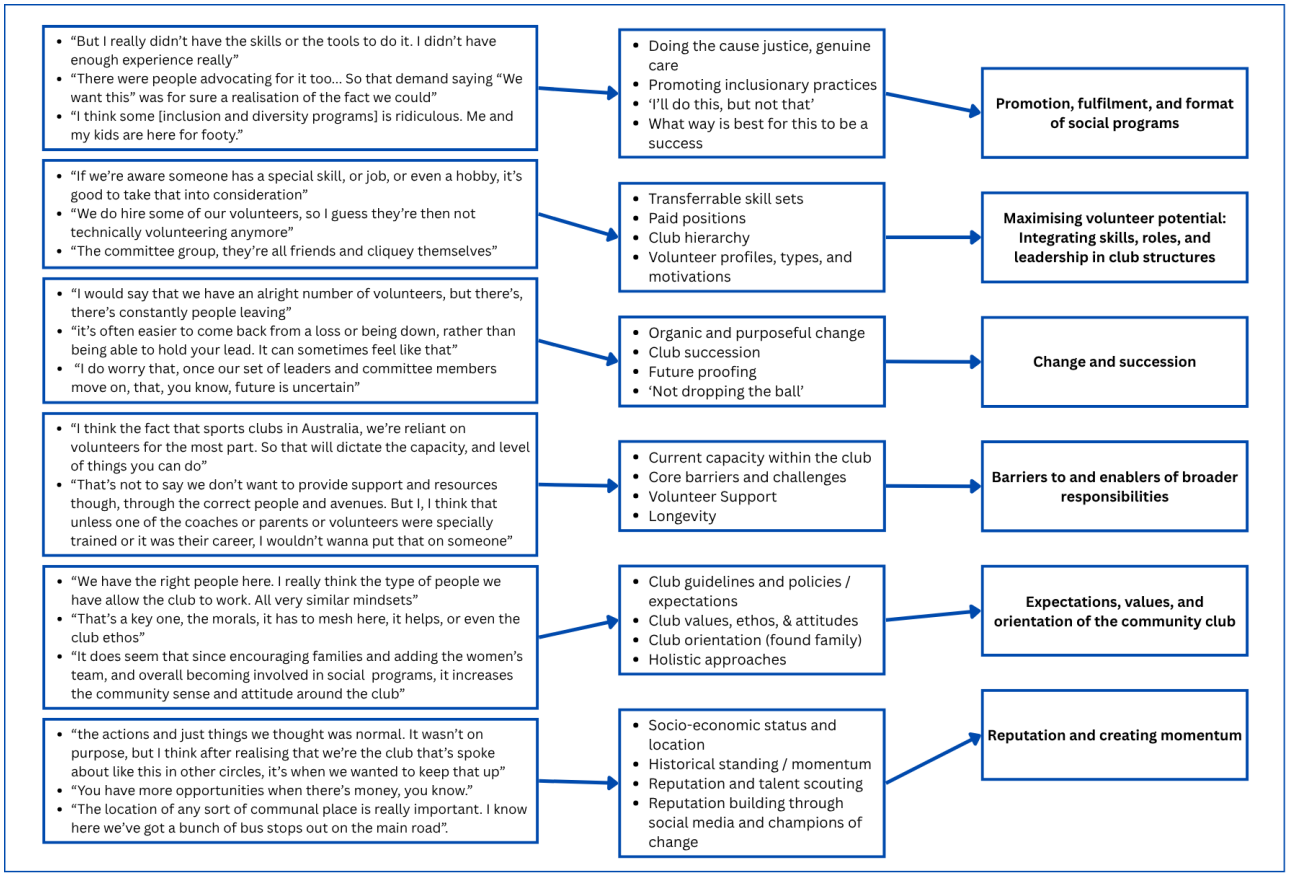

Figure 8: A data structure as seen in Gioia (2021).

3.6 Methodological rigour

Within academic research, methodological rigour has historically comprised as a crucial marker of quality and trustworthiness (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Smith et al., 2014). For this study, rigour is understood as a marker of excellence through the means, methods, and practices used from study conceptualisation through to write-up (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Interestingly, even within the field of qualitative research, scholars have argued about the usefulness and validity of various approaches, such as member checking, also known as respondent or participant validation (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Culver et al., 2012; Denzin, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith & McGannon, 2018), and inter-rater reliability/investigator triangulation (Campbell et al., 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Smith & McGannon, 2018).

In previous works, there have been misapplications of universal criteria (e.g., Tracy's 8 big tent criteria) (Tracy, 2010) to persuade audiences of methodological excellence and scientific rigour, especially in social sciences including sport and exercise (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Indeed, some have argued that Tracy's (2010) work on rigour and quality is "on the verge of becoming the new 'benchmark' for judging all qualitative research within this sub discipline" (Burke, 2016, p. 333). However, a universal approach to rigour (and thus taking a criteriological stance) might be considered problematic because it compels any qualitative research (regardless of its purpose, design, or methods) to be judged in predetermined ways (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). This means that the use of universal criteria, without a reasonable and justified rationale, may potentially reproduce a very narrow band of research that is considered 'good' (Sparkes & Smith, 2009).

Since this study was underpinned by a relativist ontology, it would be philosophically and methodologically incompatible to be constrained by a set of universal criteria as proposed by Tracy (2010) – this is because universal constraints cannot exist from a relativist

understanding of multiple realities (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Smith & Sparkes, 2016a). While the rigour of qualitative research can indeed be assessed, it is possible for criteria to evolve across different parts, contexts, and purposes of the research, and therefore rigour cannot be restricted to a single set list across the entire research process (Smith & McGannon, 2018). The use of interpretive description in this research also allows for consideration of Thorne's (2016) own criteria of markers of qualitative rigour, alongside Smith and McGannon (2018). Therefore, this research is guided by Smith and McGannon (2018), who contend that rigorous qualitative research should be judged using a list-like, flexible, and process-oriented approach, and not 'fixed' criteria. The flexible criteria proposed by Smith and McGannon (2018), as well as Thorne's (2016) four criteria will be discussed as a unique blend of criteria for readers to assess the PhD research's methodological rigour.

3.6.1 Worthy topic

The increasing amount of pressure that youth sporting clubs face regarding social and cultural responsibility (i.e., being asked to do more with limited resources) highlights that this is a timely topic of discussion and research. This is a *worthy topic* considering that youth sporting clubs are typically volunteer run. This fact alone makes it vital to consider how volunteers (such as parents and coaches) and club leaders may best navigate challenges surrounding capacity, skills, knowledge, resources, and the potential increase of the burdens involved in social and cultural responsibilities. It is also important to consider that this is a worthy topic for those interested and directly involved in those social concerns (e.g. individuals with a disability) as it could assist clubs to consider and involve those who may typically be excluded. This area of research is also worthy and pertinent following the COVID-19 global pandemic, whereby many clubs had to forgo their broader social responsibilities to focus on core responsibilities and functions. There is an opportunity present for this research and its

recommendations to guide how clubs re-engage with their broader responsibilities post-COVID-19.

This study is also a worthy and original topic as it contributes to social, cultural, and political discussions surrounding sporting clubs and their broader responsibilities (especially regarding youth sport). There are an increasing number of social issues that are complex, and becoming politicised or culturally significant (e.g., efforts to expand inclusionary practices), which requires further research surrounding how youth or community sporting clubs navigate expectations of their involvement. This point relates to priorities that have been highlighted by the South Australian Government's Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (such as the Clubs of the Future – Game On initiative), which has a significant focus on youth sporting clubs. To further emphasise this study's worthiness, there have been multiple invitations and opportunities to share this research and its findings (i.e., 2021 Youth Sport Summit, 2023 National Youth Sport Conference, and the 2024 International Conference on Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise), which demonstrates the interest in this topic and its significance.

3.6.2 Rich rigour

Rich rigour was practiced through multivocality in the research design and selection of participants. The collection of data from various sources such as club leaders, parents, and coaches allowed for an abundance of sufficient, rich, and complex qualitative data from diverse perspectives from individuals who influence and support youth sporting clubs. Rich rigour was also maintained through deep immersion within the data collection period, as well as the time spent transcribing and coding the interviews and focus groups, and the general data analysis – which allowed for deep familiarisation with and immersion in the research data. While data collection occurred just after the COVID-19 lockdowns, there were still strict bounds surrounding social distancing and interactions which impacted the amount of

time spent within the club environment. Various strategies were implemented to maintain immersion and closeness throughout the recruitment, data collection, and analysis, such as pre- and post-interview discussions with participants about the research aims and outcomes; recruitment assistance from club leaders and research updates; following the clubs' social and cultural programs, social media, and emailing lists; as well as post-research presentations about the outcomes, recommendations, and general findings.

3.6.3 Epistemological integrity

The *epistemological integrity* of this research was ensured by operating under a set of cohesive, defensible, and logical philosophical assumptions. The study promoted epistemological integrity by ensuring the study interpreted and discussed the research that was in line with the philosophical underpinnings of the research. Furthermore, practising epistemological integrity through assuming a strong philosophical position resulted in the development of understandings to answer the research question and meet the objectives, as well as practical and applicable recommendations, strategies, and outcomes, as per the use of interpretive description.

3.6.4 Sincerity

Sincerity was displayed and maintained in various ways, mostly through reflexivity and transparency. Firstly, examples of self-reflexivity and sincerity were shown in the positionality section through initial declarations of the researcher's personal connection and history, as well as how their own set of intersectional contexts (race, gender, SES, etc.) and relationship with the topic may influence the research. Another form of sincerity was exhibited through transparency about one's own ability and inexperience (e.g., pilot interviews and focus group, critical friend, and peer support). Lastly, sincerity has been shown throughout the thesis through the exploration of various philosophies and

methodologies. It was important to explore and state the different philosophical underpinnings and methodological changes to understand what would be best suited to the research aims, questions, and outcomes – this contributes to the practice of sincerity through transparency.

3.6.5 Interpretive authority

*Interpretive authority w*as practiced through a series of interpretive 'check-ins'. These interpretive 'check-ins' included the use of a reflexive positionality mapping tool, reflexive thematic analysis (a form of reflexive analytical method), reflexive mind mapping and brainstorming, and the use of a critical friend. For instance, the reflexive mind-mapping tool was utilised to first understand and further familiarise oneself with the preliminary findings, which this occurred before coding, it allowed the researcher to pre-interpret the findings. These forms of interpretive authority were all crucial throughout the development of this research, especially as a means of reflection, promoting critical thinking, sharing ideas, and receiving feedback to improve the quality of the work. They all assisted in promoting rigour throughout this research.

3.6.6 Credibility

The ways in which *credibility* was ensured throughout this thesis include the use of thick and rich descriptions, multivocality from various participants, and crystallisation (Tracy, 2010). The findings chapter is comprised of thick and rich descriptions that assist in illustrating the detail and knowledge that developed into the subsequent themes and interpretation of meaning. These themes illustrate a depth of understanding about clubs and their social and cultural responsibilities through *showing* the reader a story of the data rather than *telling*. Another factor that allowed for a depth of understanding and rich descriptions was the approach of capturing multiple voices to practice multivocality, and to display an array of

perspectives and experiences of the participants. Moreover, crystallisation was utilised to broaden the range of participants included in the study (to gain a range of perspectives from people in different roles within the youth sport system), and through multiple data collection methods (individual interviews and focus groups) and multiple sources (parents, coaches, and club leaders).

3.6.7 Representational credibility

Efforts to achieve *representational credibility* through the interactions with the research participants (parents, coaches, and club leaders) were sought. Scheduled engagement with participants and time spent in the club setting maintained representational creditability. For example, there were initial written interactions with the participants through emails (i.e., discussion of research reasoning, aims, requirements of participants, and informed consent), the interview itself, post-interview email check-ins, and then finally further interactions with those who requested the research findings (both individual participants and clubs as a whole).

3.6.8 Resonance

Resonance has been ensured by communicating the findings by using participants' experiences and perceptions about youth sporting clubs and social and cultural responsibilities. The use of naturalistic generalisability and providing verbatim, yet emotive, compelling, and engaging participant experiences about youth sport involvement that 'speak to' the audience has assisted in demonstrating resonance in this research. While it was attempted to ensure resonance through the thesis itself, resonance also occurred through other research mediums, such as rapid-communication presentations (e.g., the three-minute thesis competition, and rapid communication at summits/conferences), conference presentations (e.g., at the 2024 International Conference on Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise), publications, and podcasts (Beyond the Club podcast). As previously discussed, this thesis

provides rich descriptions about the experiences of the research participants, and because such findings are communicated using evocative language the reader may be able to connect their own experiences, and recognise similarities and differences, through what is naturalistic generalisability.

3.6.9 Significant contribution

This research aimed to make a *significant contribution* to the literature and to clubs' practice. Sports clubs, volunteers, and stakeholders (i.e., parents, coaches, and club leaders) have been provided various avenues to enhance clubs' practices because of the knowledge developed in this research about the social and cultural responsibilities of sports clubs and how to navigate them and expand their capacity. This study was unique in its recognition of the importance of volunteers and their crucial contribution to club functioning and the expansion of responsibilities – this study has made recommendations not only to increase the utility and efficiency of volunteers, but also to alleviate the burden of responsibility volunteers face. While this research had a specific focus on clubs that were already successfully running social and cultural programs and initiatives, the findings have the potential to provide a framework that may influence how sporting organisations can support clubs or how clubs themselves can move towards decisions that expand their organisational capacity, knowledge, and ability to facilitate social and cultural responsibilities. Although the current study involved sports such as Australian rules football, tennis, surf lifesaving, netball, and hockey, the findings could be applied to other sporting codes due to the abundant level of detail of participants' experiences (in quotations from the interviews and focus groups) and contexts that assist readers to make connections through shared experiences. Consequently, this research offers a significant and original contribution to the literature and to the policy and practice of sporting organisations and clubs.

3.6.10 Ethical rigour

This study initially practiced *ethical rigour* through gaining approval from Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Project No. #5090) on 17 February 2022 (see Appendix G). Participants involved in this study (in both the individual interviews and focus groups) were provided with information sheets and consent forms, alongside the purpose and aims of the study, so that they could provide informed consent. The participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the interview or research at any point and subsequently be excluded from the data. The identities of the participants were kept confidential. To further protect those involved in the study, pseudonyms were used to ensure no information will risk a participant being identified in the current thesis, presentations, or future publications. Participants were also further safeguarded from exposure because the data was stored on password-protected files and hard drives that remained on a university campus. In discussing social and cultural concerns or issues in sport settings there was the potential for sensitive topics to arise in data collection; because of this, participants were provided with information about appropriate resources and counselling services (i.e., Beyond Blue and Lifeline) prior to and after the interviews. The participants also received reimbursement for their time and contribution to this study through $20AUD gift cards – approval was sought once again from the Human Research Ethics Committee to provide these to the participants. These were afforded through funding totalling $1,500AUD, through a HDR Award from the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work at Flinders University.

3.6.11 Analytic logic

Analytic logic was achieved through displaying a clear and logical pathway in which the methodological choices were justified and executed throughout the development of this study

and the methodology chapter. This research displayed strong analytic logic through ensuring all methodological choices were logically aligned, for instance, the use of conceptual models and frameworks over a theoretical framework was a purposeful choice while also utilising interpretive description. Furthermore, the use of reflexive thematic analysis and subsequent development of themes was careful and mindful so that, while the themes were produced from the researcher's interpretations of the data, an important contextual basis was maintained.

3.6.12 Meaningful coherence

This study demonstrated *meaningful coherence* by ensuring that the epistemology, conceptual model, study design, and methods emphatically demonstrate methodological alignment. The design choices of this study were heavily influenced by the ontological and epistemological philosophical underpinnings which ensured the methods were methodologically coherent and consistent. For instance, this study utilised qualitative individual interviews and focus groups that facilitated in capturing multiple realities and perspectives about the topic, from multiple sources and types of participants. This study also ensured meaningful coherence in this section discussing rigour and qualitative research excellence by not just utilising rigid criteria to demonstrate rigour, but rather offering an iterative and evolving discussion of the methodology, practices, and decisions made through the study.

3.6.13 Generalisability

It is also important to acknowledge the concept of *generalisability* within qualitative research, as it is often thought to be a limitation. It is thought that when research produces reliable results from a sample of individuals, it should be applicable to a larger population or in different contexts (Smith, 2018). Generalisability is often touted as an issue for qualitative researchers and has been highlighted as a limitation or weakness within the sport and exercise

science and psychology fields; however, it should be emphasised that the belief that qualitative research lacks generalisability is a misinterpretation (Smith, 2018; Smith & Sparkes, 2016b). Generalisability within quantitative fields, especially those concerning statistics, cannot be applicable to judge the generalisability of qualitative research in the same way (Smith, 2018). Rather, Smith (2018) proposes four different types of generalisability: naturalistic generalisation, transferability, analytical generalisability and intersectional generalisability. The type of generalisability that is most applicable to this research is naturalistic generalisability (Stake, 1978, 1995). Naturalistic generalisability occurs when the research or piece of work resonates somewhere within the reader/audience; this could be through their personal life issues or experiences (Smith, 2018; Smith & Sparkes, 2011). An example based on this research could be a parent who wants to engage further with a sporting club (either through volunteering or in the development of social and cultural responsibilities) but is met with a toxic, cliquey environment or club culture, who feels that the findings of this research resonate with their experiences. For naturalistic generalisability to be further practiced and displayed, it is strongly recommended that the research provides details about the participants through interview quotations, field notes, or participant tables.

3.7 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has detailed the entire methodological process utilised throughout this research. These processes and underpinnings include: a relativist ontology, interpretivist epistemology, qualitative research, an interpretive description research design, and the use of the youth sport system for the conceptual model. This chapter detailed the recruitment and sampling processes and strategies, the data collection methods utilised (individual interviews and focus groups), the data analysis (reflexive data analysis), the methodological rigour, and ethical implications. All of these various factors throughout this chapter have informed and

shaped how this research regarding youth sporting clubs and social and cultural responsibilities was conducted. The following chapter sets out the findings of the research. Chapter 4 will provide an integrated findings and discussion chapter. This will include the themes that have been developed from the data through reflexive thematic analysis, along with supporting quotations from the participants. Following the presentation of data, the thesis will discuss the findings and connect them to the literature and conceptual frameworks utilised in this study.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

> Qualitative research may yield results that affirm, contradict, add complexity to, or offer new and novel findings unmentioned in the prior literature. (Drisko, 2005, p. 592)

4.1 Introduction

In pursuit of understanding how leading youth sporting clubs navigate challenges (whether by resisting or capturing opportunities), allocate resources, and fulfil expectations relating to social and cultural responsibilities, a reflexive thematic analysis led to the development of six core themes. These themes were: (a) *promotion, fulfilment, and format of social and cultural responsibility programs,* (b) *maximising volunteer potential: integrating skills, roles, and leadership in club structures,* (c) *change and succession planning*, (d) *enablers and barriers of broader social and cultural responsibility*, (e) *club orientations, expectations, and values,* (f) *reputation and building organisational momentum*. These themes ultimately speak to the broader objectives of the research, which include: (1) identifying the actions, processes, and social conditions with which clubs navigate social and cultural responsibility in youth sport; (2) understanding how youth sporting clubs develop their capacity to enact social and cultural responsibility; and (3) exploring the challenges clubs perceive in relation to fulfilling their social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport. The ensuring chapter combines the findings and discussion into one integrated chapter to elucidate thematic interpretations, build theoretical understanding, and offer practical outcomes for improving and maintain social and cultural responsibility in youth sporting clubs.

4.2 Promotion, fulfilment, and format of social and cultural responsibility programs

This theme refers to participants' experiences of being involved in clubs (and comparative experiences at previous/different clubs) where socially and culturally based programs and initiatives were facilitated for their members. These experiences describe how social and cultural programs or initiatives were promoted (both internally to current members and externally to outsiders) and how they were subsequently run.

Many parent volunteers claim that the social and cultural programs and initiatives (specifically the inclusive practices) in their club received various levels of support, attention, and fulfilment. All of which depended on constraints such as time, availability, coaches' ability, equipment, and costs, and personal drive from club leaders. When discussing the programs and initiatives across sports such as AFL, tennis, and hockey, parents expressed that some youth sporting clubs make claims about providing inclusive programs to appeal to parents and athletes who have a need for such a program. Some parents stated that they were seeking girls-only teams, disability inclusion, or mental health support, but were left disappointed by the program outline, how it was delivered, and the perceived lack of importance placed on these initiatives from club leaders – which resulted in the program ending. The implications of effectively addressing and fulfilling claims about social and cultural responsibility while being perceived as genuine are significant. Participants clearly anticipated high-quality and well-planned programs; and 'saw through' performative attempts to address inclusion and diversity, mental health, and relational issues. This expectation extends to facilitators and coaches, who need to be knowledgeable, educated, passionate, or meaningfully connected to the sociocultural cause (Young & Block, 2023). Lack of attention to these programs was considered a core reason why parents left their previous club in search

of a club they considered an inclusive space, or which provided what others did not. As one parent concurred:

> I don't think it happens here at [CLUB], but I've heard of other places who, I don't think purposely or in a mean spirit or anything, will put together a women's team or disability team – and there's not necessarily the coaches or support people in place to help progress them. So, they'll advertise it or whatever, but when people join and participate, they're left feeling lost or not properly a part of that club, and end up leaving. That's what happened to me. (Joanna, F, 34, AFL, parent volunteer)

A tennis coach reflected on their younger and novice years when they were allocated an inclusive disability team to coach; however, they did not feel equipped and expressed they did not have the knowledge and ability to provide a good sporting experience for the young athletes. This coach discussed a "disconnect" between the goals and expectations of the club (i.e., disability teams of 15 children and one coach) versus what the coaches expected (i.e., provided resources, training, or support). While it may be understandable for club members, participants, and coaches to have high expectations of programs and initiatives (e.g., doing justice to the social cause), it is important to acknowledge that most clubs operate on voluntary efforts (Robertson et al., 2019). Consequently, the implementation of social and cultural responsibility places a burden on volunteers, rather than on a designated individual with specialist knowledge or skills, and this impacts the sustainability of such efforts (Robertson et al., 2019). But, supplying an 'expert' facilitator may not always be possible. Despite this, the findings from this study indicate that there is still merit in pursuing social responsibility, provided it stems from authentic intentions rather than grandstanding purposes. Coaches in this study were typically "more than happy to" provide inclusive practices despite a lack of club-based support:

> I know that at one of the other clubs I was at, well, I was a junior coach back then, but I was coaching a disability team, which I was more than happy to do. But I really didn't have the skills or the tools to do it. I didn't have enough experience really. I do remember talking to one of the older coaches but wasn't helped too much. Didn't get given advice, just brushed off type thing. At the time I was annoyed that I was put to do that and wasn't given any help. I was 16. I think back now, and I just feel bad for those kids. I don't think that club continued the team for much longer. They just did sessions, like training sessions instead, the fun stuff. (Emma, F, 55, tennis, coach volunteer)

And:

> I'm not too sure why the accommodation for these teams are, like, advertised almost, like it's talked about [as] this big great thing. Which I wish it was, it would be great to see it, kids deserve it. But it's just fooling people when there's not the proper support about, or as a coach, if we're not taught the right skills. It needs to be done right for it to be fair … (Rob, M, 32, AFL, coach volunteer)

Although both coaches and parents perceived that not enough effort and support were given to establishing inclusive disability teams, some suggested that slow development and progress of programs was natural when beginning a new venture. They expressed that programs or initiatives can be developed and improved through getting to know the parents and children on the team, learning and reflecting on the go, developing an understanding of various disabilities and perspectives, and starting with the basics. It can be seen however, that sports participants, particularly those in marginalised populations, currently expect more than superficial, tokenistic efforts. For example, poorly managed disability teams that are seen as secondary to able-bodied teams, as seen in this research and across the literature (e.g., Spaaij, Farquharson et al., 2014; Spaaij et al., 2020). A tennis parent also acknowledged that, while their son's coach had 'a learning curve' when working with their child (a wheelchair user), the club of choice was accessible and had suitable facilities, which was important. Interestingly, this parent also stated that their son had private lessons, and through word-of-

mouth or observing a child training with a disability, other individuals joined with similar mobility aids, and they ended up forming a group:

> Those programs, I mean I won't lie, they did start out rough. I didn't know what I was doing, and the club wasn't sure what to provide me with. But um, I mean luckily the kids stuck around, and everyone persevered, and it did get better as it went along. I got to know the kids and their parents, more about who they were, and like, through conversations with them or their parents learnt how to support them, sort of like, based on their disability or learning issue that they had. That really helped. It was slow, and at the beginning, I kind of look back a bit embarrassed, there were racquets and balls flying everywhere. It evolved, though. (Liam, M, 31, tennis, coach volunteer)

A parent agreed, stating:

> [COACH] has been great. It feels like it's been the only club anywhere close that, actually, like they do wheelchair tennis. Well not do, since it's not just wheelchairs or mobility aids, but the facilities are here and its accessible. It was at the start just [COACH] and [ATHLETE] doing private coaching sessions, and I think for [COACH] there was a bit of a learning curve, but he was willing. And then it felt like out of nowhere [ATHLETE] has friends who were in a similar place with him, the social aspect, and I think having that in common was great for him. I also think it was a bit of a domino effect, where [ATHLETE] was seen in his wheelchair out on court, and it was seen or word spread, and now there's a small group. (Lucas, M, 46, tennis, parent volunteer)

One recommendation for applied practice is for sporting organisations to extend support to youth sporting clubs to develop an action plan of short-term and long-term goals of a social and cultural program. This support would be considerable, especially from organisations who often have prior goals to developing the club's involvement in social concerns such as inclusion and diversity, and mental health throughout their sport or state/country (e.g., see the Club of the Future guide as outlined in the South Australian Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing's (2011) Game on report). Building on this perspective,

club leaders from the Australian football context perceived that their own clubs were fast becoming more socially active and invested in the community and taking increased efforts to ensure that individuals of all abilities are able to take part in AFL. The next step for them was the introduction of an inclusive team for individuals with a disability:

> This all started because of, sort of the fact that we were involved in many other social outreach things. It seemed like the next logical step for the club to take. And I think … Yeah, there were a couple of people who were definitely advocating for it too, they wanted to get out here too. So that demand being right there, saying "We want this" was for sure a realisation of the fact we could. (Daniel, M, 35, AFL, club leader)

A club leader added:

> As well as it being the next step for the club, we just, we had the capacity to do so. So yes, we had people wanting it, but since there is coach training in order to coach at [CLUB], I knew there were capable people. There wasn't really any stress as a club in doing so, financially or volunteer wise, or even the building, like the, it's all fairly easy to get to. (Noah, M, 45, AFL, club leader)

Navigating the intricacies of implementing socially and culturally based programs was largely contingent on genuine, passionate leadership from within the club and accessibility. While broader social, cultural, and political forces tended to support such initiatives or programs (within these clubs' social and political context), the findings indicate that a club's commitment to social and cultural responsibility, if visibly promoted, can foster positive perceptions from parents and coaches. In turn, familial (e.g. parents) and volunteer (e.g. coaches) awareness about their club's commitment to creating a culture of support, belonging, and safety enabled them to display interest and encourage their children's attendance at trainings, workshops and presentations across the season. This finding is similar to research by Vella et al. (2018) and Breslin et al. (2017), who both sought to implement visible mental health programs for athletes, and found that there was increased mental health awareness, ability and intention to provide support, improved literacy, and more familial

understanding which reinforced athlete (child) participation. Some parents claimed that, if more youth sporting clubs provided and visibly promoted specific programs for disability teams or girls teams (in typically male-dominated sports such as AFL), then "people will flock to them". They suggested that providing inclusive teams would attract more parents, athletes, and coaches alike. However, many parents also noted that several barriers to accessing social initiatives precluded them from engaging in and supporting these activities. This perspective generates new meaning surrounding the promotion of the social and cultural aspects of a sporting club, which are 'out of reach' for many families:

> I love that it is occurring, but for people like my sister, who live 35 minutes away and a child with an intellectual disability, it's not really feasible currently. And there's not anything similar near her, not sports based anyways. (Alys, F, 53, AFL, parent volunteer)

Despite this, clubs that were perceived to have constructed a strong reputation on- (competitive) and off-field (social and cultural responsibility) had cultivated a consistent line of communication and promotion. The development of club capacity was considered crucial to program promotion and endorsements from stakeholders. It was seen that peer recommendations through school parental networks (e.g., word of mouth), local advertisements (e.g., flyers), and social endorsements from rival clubs (e.g., via competition) comprised the most crucial forms of promotion. High quality and impactful programs, which supported the development of social and cultural responsibility among youth, rapidly led to an increase in positive word-of-mouth and online reviews about each respective club. Importantly, the findings indicated that this assisted in strengthening the profile of the affiliated sporting organisations, generating sponsorship opportunities, and recruiting members, all which supported the development of club capacity for social and cultural change. Previous research by Amjadi et al. (2016) investigated the perceived value of word-of-mouth advertising among customers of sports clubs and found that this type of advertising

had significant positive effects on customers' buying intentions and consideration of alternative clubs. The essence of these organic promotional strategies is successful clubs effectively capturing their 'off-field' work and broadcasting it, including on social media. This cannot be underestimated because most parents acknowledged that their search for a club began with word-of-mouth recommendations that compelled them to research markers of specific club-based diversity and inclusion activities to 'get a feel' for the social environment and programs delivered. This study adds to the literature, indicating that clubs did not always purposefully seek to develop their reputation or receive recommendations. Rather, traction was gained as an organic consequence of their values and orientation. Hence, peer recommendations may be a way for youth sporting clubs to increase their reach and effectively promote their club, programs or teams:

> The way that I find out about most clubs I've gone to is through it being the closest one to me, hearing about it from others at my daughter's school, or from online posts. Oh, also like, if the club typically wins their games, it's like, they've got something good going on there – so that is a selling point too. (Eve, F, 42, AFL, parent volunteer)

Similar sentiments from a club leader:

> Oh yeah, there's certainly cases where us as a club getting involved in a program – like social outreach ones, or even ones that are a bit more education based – benefit us through things like word of mouth, which can sometimes bring in new members. I find that was the case for me. Hearing about all the good, almost extra things within the club, which seemed a bit more community based, rather than straight footy; that definitely was a factor to me bringing my kids here. And even for me as a parent, it just seemed open and welcoming – a place where I could find people to chat to as well. (Josh, M, 43, AFL, club leader)

Another significant finding is the necessity of clubs understanding the bounds of their capacity, the scope of their support, and the relevance of responsibility. Despite the abilities and resources of the clubs involved in this study, it was evident that they could not offer all

programs. Some social and cultural responsibilities were perceived to be more favoured or palatable than others. For instance, both parents and coaches discussed that social concerns and education surrounding mental health or disability was much more relevant compared to LGBTQIA+ issues. Many parents attributed their preference for certain categories of social and cultural responsibilities to their relevance to sport, for example, claiming that mental health support and resources pertains more to sport than education about or inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Consistent with research by Robertson et al. (2019); Spaaij et al. (2020); and Storr (2021a), assuming multiple social and cultural responsibilities was seen as challenging due to factors such as the burden on volunteers; facilitator education; relevance to the club stakeholders; stakeholder resistance; and resources. However, this research extends this literature by finding that the clubs involved were realistic and demonstrated a pragmatic approach where they aligned their responsibilities with their capacities (e.g., volunteer capacity, coach skills, facilities) and ensured they were relevant to their stakeholders' social concerns. There were of course a few individuals who were open to a limitless charter of social and cultural responsibilities; however, this was far less common:

> (laughing) You know what, I think some [inclusion and diversity programs] is ridiculous. Me and my kids are here for footy. They've made their little friends, and I've made some mates here too. I drop them off for training, they have a great time out there and we go home. They're not home sitting around doing nothing and are healthy. Don't need anything else on top. (Tom, M, 41, AFL, parent volunteer)

More specifically, several interview participants articulated strong views on the social and cultural programs clubs should promote and deliver. These included mental health support and education (programs such as mental health awareness training for coaches and staff, Headspace, Breakthrough Mental Health Research Foundation, Growing with Gratitude Sports, Mental Health First Aid courses, Tackle Your Feelings, and Hey Sport, R U OK?), disability inclusion (accessible facilities, inclusion teams, and modified sports), inclusion and

development of women's/girls' teams (opportunities for girls and women to participate in traditionally male-dominated sports), drug and alcohol education, and community and charity support/fundraising. These positive perceptions towards social and cultural based programs are important for youth sporting clubs to recognise. This is because stakeholder interest in programs and initiatives can serve as a capacity building stimuli, as seen within process model of capacity building by Millar & Doherty (2016). Recognising these stimuli in the form of stakeholder interests, demands, or requirements initiates the process of assessing and implementing strategies to expand organisational capacity. However, LGBTQIA+ and First Nations issues (such as reconciliation) were not perceived to be as important. One AFL parent stated:

> I think that there're some circumstances where extra social responsibility stuff is OK, but some of it doesn't always sit right with me. I think that like, as long as it's something to do with sport, or benefits most people, then it's good. Also, programs that don't require big commitments. To me, and I'll be honest I've never really bothered to go or get involved with any, but like, the mental health ones, the drinking one, and gratefulness ones are fine with me. (Lewis, M, 48, AFL, parent volunteer)

Another parent claimed that:

> I do think the basics of social outreach and programs and such are really great. But I do mean the basics, like mental health. I think that's great for these young boys, and even men in AFL. It relates to sport. Other things such as nutrition or healthy eating is great, gratefulness, drug and alcohol foundation, the violence prevention ones. They are all good, I think, in this setting. I don't know about other social issues if it doesn't really apply to the sport or the people. (Rowan, M, 27, AFL, parent volunteer)

While these clubs present a range of off-field programs to support the wider development of child participants, degrees of resistance to some social issues exist. This reflects a unique challenge for clubs because stakeholder preferences can change, emphasising the importance of promoting, fulfilling, and delivering programs that are

dynamic and responsive. One possible recommendation for practice is to foster more club-based support to identify the social issues that are relevant to clubs (e.g. mental health) but are feasible to implement through programming. State governing bodies and sporting organisations could play a role in this regard given that they likely have resources and expertise to assist club leaders in community-level youth sport.

Given the range of aforementioned social and cultural responsibilities, mental health programs and education were predominantly referred to in a positive light. As previously expressed, mental health was generally viewed as being related to sport, and thus considered appropriate for the sport setting. To further this, parents expressed that they would attend, support, and even advocate for mental health support, resources, leaders, and education within youth sporting clubs. The preference for mental health support and disability inclusion was often stated alongside a personal experience or reflection. Personal experience and connection to stories of mental health and wellbeing or disability inclusion brought greater understanding and preference for in-club support. Comparatively, personal connections to racial/cultural and LGBTQIA+ concerns were less evident in the data, which was reflected in participants' lack of support for related off-field programs within the club. One participant related his own experience with mental health issues:

> There was a young man who went to this club who took his own life. It really shook everyone here, and I feel like everyone says it, but it was so unexpected. And guess that's the issue of it, right? Anyone can be struggling and not show it, or not show it here and go home and have a real difficult life. And, and … I've always been a quiet supporter of mental health support having dealt with bouts of anxiety through my life. I don't think it should be a taboo topic. But that happening to someone else so close to me and my family, it, it really made me want to be a more vocal supporter of it. And to make sure my kids know that they can talk to me at any point, judgement free. (Adam, M, 40, AFL, coach volunteer)

Another provided a disability-based perspective:

> My son has autism, and sport has been hard. Hard to find somewhere where they've got the right skills or activities. In the past I've been really shocked about how many people brush us off, that don't really care about the fact that he does have a disability or are almost, um, scared of that word. I will say though, that prior to have [NAME], I did have a lot less, almost no knowledge about autism or disability in general. It was a journey but learning about it and interacting with other parents and kids, it really changes your perspective. (Kate, F, 48, hockey, parent volunteer)

Club leaders explained that they were generally willing and open to exploring initiatives and issues, such as LGBTQIA+ inclusivity, despite resistance from committee/board members and other parents. However, club leaders also expressed concerns about resistance to change, 'overloading' club members and volunteers, uncertainty about how to implement certain inclusionary practices, or appearing as though sport is not the main focus of the club – sentiments that were similarly discussed in a study by Robertson et al. (2019). As such, clubs that can sustain off-field efforts appear to effectively commit (but not overcommit) to broader social and cultural opportunities within their youth sporting programs. To that end, most club leaders expressed they did not have a personal connection to or passion about, for example, issues surrounding LGBTQIA+ people in sport, and thus were not knowledgeable or educated about what would be required to delve into that social and cultural responsibility. Various leaders reiterated their stance that social issues such as LGBTQIA+ have a lesser connection to sport compared to disability or mental health, and that they were not aware of a demand from club members to provide this responsibility:

> I think that it's hard to provide a service or be involved in something when you don't know anything about it, and it doesn't really come up in junior-level or, like, community-level sport on its own. The relevance does feel like it's enough to consider – I only hear about it on the news, like some of the trans controversy stuff. But how do we implement that? I'm not sure we need to. I think kids will also naturally learn about LGBT stuff as they age. Nothing wrong with it, but not sure if it fits here or what would even be included. (Brandon, M, 42, tennis, club leader)

Club leaders also questioned whether it was within the club's responsibility or their place to educate stakeholders in a community club about more complex social issues. In this way, club leaders developed arbitrary methods for deciding what is within and outside the scope of their responsibility. For example, a club leader discussed whether or it was the responsibility of other institutions in society, such as schools, to provide education and support on what they perceived to be 'non-sport topics':

> I like it and think it's beneficial for the kids. But yeah, I feel conflicted about it being at sport, because I know a lot of parents don't really bother 'cos they don't view it as a necessary thing to attend. Like, there's already a lot of conflict among parents and what should be in school curriculums, like sex ed or gender-related issues. I think I prefer them occurring in a school setting, with a knowledgeable person and as education. I'm not sure that type of thing is needed for a sports club. Maybe just sport-related topics. (Katy, F, 36, AFL, club leader)

Importantly, clubs with successful programs of social and cultural responsibility were still willing to support initiatives on their own terms. It is understood that the club's capacity, assuming relevant social responsibilities, and ensuring sport remain as the core focus are critical in introducing responsibility to a club. For instance, when wanting to gauge response to a particular responsibility, clubs 'trial' it in a low-impact, timely manner – in this case, through dedication rounds. A well-known, professional example of dedicated rounds is the Indigenous Round in Australian rules football (Evans et al., 2015). At the grassroots or community level, dedicated rounds give acknowledgement, and sometimes donations, to a cause during one round in a sporting season. As previously mentioned, some participants and club leaders claimed that some social concerns such as LGBTQIA+ or cultural/racial issues did not warrant a specific program or education session; however, they were agreeable to and supportive of dedicated awareness rounds. Dedicated rounds were described as "quick and easy" by a parent and framed in a way in which some social concerns could be acknowledged without being "over the top". While charity rounds tended to occur regardless of interest in

further, full-scale programs or initiatives, they are used as a tool to explore various responsibilities and causes, and gauge participants' responses. Consequently, clubs that can navigate social and cultural responsibility can select the best format for their club to promote or raise awareness about key social and cultural issues in sport. In other words, the format, or the way in which the inclusionary practices or issues are presented, matters:

> Yeah, I've no issue with anyone's gender or sexuality or whatever. But I'm not sure if we need an initiative or program for that. I want them included and to feel comfortable, but not sure of the logistics of LGBT education – like what would be spoken about or taught? I feel like I'm missing something there, I think people just need to be kind to others who might be different from them. (Joey, M, 36, tennis, club leader)

Clubs pre-gauging responses and attitudes may serve as a beginning point for clubs to assume responsibilities by gaining an understanding of their stakeholders' preferences. Knowledge of such preferences may allow for easier implementation, greater attendance, and reduced potential for resistance. Clubs can directly address their stakeholders through emails, in person, surveys, or voting systems as another avenue to understand their perspectives, and allow stakeholders to have a say in the decision-making process. Throughout the sporting literature, the idea of 'sharing power' through decision-making or collaboration is not new, and is seen in circumstances such as parent–coach relationships (Horne et al., 2023; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Preston et al., 2020; Wall et al., 2019); athlete-centred coaching (Jowett, 2017; Jowett & Slade, 2021; Kidman, 2010); and cross-club or non-profit program collaboration (D'Angelo et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2017, 2019; Petitpas et al., 2017). However, this research extends this literature, positing that stakeholders and clubs can work collaboratively to develop the club environment and member satisfaction. Future research should also seek to understand stakeholders' (parent, coach, athlete, and volunteer) perspectives, motivations, and attitudes towards contributing organisationally, how their

voices may impact decision-making, and how they want to be represented (Storr, 2021a). Another club leader claimed that:

> I like the rainbow flag rounds, or maybe donating to a certain cause for that round or something. I think that would be a way to promote that sort of, that sense of inclusion. I don't think many people would want to attend a workshop on those types of topics. The rounds are for the most part quick and easy and let those who want it feel included but isn't over the top for others. (Lauren, F, 38, AFL, club leader)

It is worth considering the importance of understanding a club's capacity through the conceptual lens of the youth sport system, including volunteer capacity (i.e., the environmental subsystem), club members' wants and interests (e.g., family subsystem, communities), and general relevance of each type of responsibility within a club (e.g., team subsystem, societies, communities, and organisations) as an important method of minimising resistance to social responsibility and volunteer burden. The environmental subsystem is distal to the athlete and reflects the design and delivery of socially and culturally based programs, as well as dictating the norms and meanings ascribed to participation (Dorsch et al., 2022). Since organisations (clubs, schools, sporting organisations, etc.) fall within the environmental subsystem and can influence or be influenced by the athlete, it is crucial that programs create a positive (inclusive, educative, fun) feedback loop within the family and the team subsystems. To this point, the findings indicate that this was one of the ways in which clubs justified the 'trialling' of various programs or social concerns – to create an understanding of athletes', familial, and volunteers' attitudes and perceptions through feedback loops between the subsystems, as a means to minimise resistance.

Overall, whilst the clubs in this study have constructed a strong reputation for their commitment to social and cultural responsibility, it is clear there are differences in how certain social and cultural responsibilities are addressed through programs, initiatives, and education. The successful promotion and implementation of inclusive teams, and whether

athletes were provided with a positive and supportive experience, was reliant on the level of knowledge, skill, and ability of coaches and volunteers. Additionally, participants expressed throughout that if a social responsibility is considered more socially accepted or is connected to sport (such as mental health and disability) then it is more likely to viewed as a worthy initiative. Moreover, participants tended to acknowledge and participate in social responsibilities they deemed less relevant to sports (such as LGBTQIA+) if they were integrated into short, temporary dedicated or charity rounds, rather than a distinct program or initiative.

4.3 Maximising volunteer potential: Integrating skills, roles, and leadership in club structures

Another key finding from this study that is consistent within the literature is that volunteers are significant in the development and sustainability of youth sporting clubs (see Kokolakakis et al., 2024). While clubs do indeed function with assistance from other entities (e.g., leaders, state and national organisations), volunteers were considered one of the biggest driving forces in the development of operational capacity for social and cultural responsibilities in youth sporting clubs. This theme developed from the participants' reflections, especially those in leadership roles, on how the club utilises volunteers effectively and efficiently in various capacities. Having transferable skill sets within a club's membership (volunteer) base was identified as a crucial factor in a club's successful internal functioning, particularly in organisational roles. These skills were vital for day-to-day operations but also for leading various initiatives that addressed social and cultural issues within the club.

Clubs developed their capacity through the identification and utilisation of volunteer skill sets. This study found that club leaders identify the skills of volunteers (usually through associations with their career or profession) and allocate them to specific voluntary positions that they would theoretically be the most skilled at. Prior to skill matching, clubs indicated that they struggled to maintain their involvement in social and cultural responsibilities, especially when run by volunteers who may not have the necessary skills or information about the programs. Club leaders found that utilising this method increased the organisational capacity of volunteers, and thus assisted in both general club functions and in the facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities. This, however, was not "always a conscious decision" and club leaders would also consider whether the volunteer fit the role. While there are studies about volunteers and skills, the literature mainly focuses on young individuals developing skills by volunteering in sports (e.g., Kay & Bradbury, 2009). This is slightly

different from the approach used in this research, which offers new findings about clubs utilising pre-existing volunteer skill sets for the benefit of club functioning and organisational capacity (and ultimately enhancing the sustainability of social and cultural programs). Additionally, volunteers would often be drawn to or 'put their hand up' for certain roles. This organic process was characterised by individuals who were longstanding club members with vast perspectives about club operations and dynamics, who had developed strong social connections with club leaders, or who had initiated a conversation with club leaders about their time, capacity, and skills to support the club. One club leader described this process:

> I think that taking advantage of volunteers definitely benefits us. Well, I don't mean take advantage of in a bad way, but just like, if we're aware someone has a special skill, or job, or even a hobby, it's good to take that into consideration. Sometimes we find out those things along the way. But they just might be better at bits and pieces than others would be, and it, it would benefit the other members too. Maybe they're unsure of something, so someone else can do it, or help them too. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

Similarly:

> I think that, well, it's not always done on purpose, but the jobs, careers, that our parents have, oh, and committee and long-time players, they can sometimes come in handy, you know. So, we have a lady who is familiar with admin-type work, she's often so helpful in organising things, especially membership and team type stuff. Or like, we have some guys who are police, they tend to, well, can be decent leaders, or bankers or accountants, so many jobs. And even on the sport side, we've got a physio parent. Sponsorship-type deals or other support can come out of that. (Aden, M, AFL, club leader)

Club leaders recognised the professional or vocational skills of their volunteer workforce as a valuable skill set that could be seamlessly transferred into the management and organisation of the sporting club. In some clubs, this level of awareness did not necessarily inform a deliberate, targeted strategy to recruit volunteers into specific roles but

rather a responsiveness to utilise the skills and strengths of their volunteers as opportunities naturally emerged. In other clubs, more purposeful recognition of the skill set needed to fulfil specific volunteer roles informed club leaders' efforts to identify specific individuals and seek out their interest and availability. This method of skill-matching, whether occurring purposefully or not, fits within 'the process model of capacity building by Millar and Doherty (2016). Through matching volunteer skills to voluntary roles within the club, the club leaders are increasing organisational capacity to meet the demands or requirements for implementing social and cultural responsibilities. This method has, for the most part, worked successfully for these clubs which has resulted in a larger and more 'up-skilled' voluntary force that has allowed the club to achieve program or service delivery, as seen within the framework.

This research uncovered some common assumptions about volunteers' careers and their associated skill sets. Club leaders often made assumptions about the skills, traits, competency, and attitudes of volunteers based on their career or profession. For example, club leaders assumed that volunteers who held positions of power in careers such as police offers, lawyers, and teachers were good leaders, logical, reliable, and intelligent. These assumptions and beliefs are shaped by the broader sociocultural and political contexts and realities of these individuals (Fine et al., 2021; Oliveira & Murphy, 2015), and such associations between careers and skills may not be the same for individuals from different backgrounds. These associations may come from privileged points of view, where individuals such as police offers are considered wholly positive. Having adept and competent volunteers was perceived as crucial for being able to maintain a positive club culture and successfully functioning as a club (including being able to assume social and cultural responsibilities).

> I do think that, yeah, some jobs, like the cop guys I mentioned before, they come with some skills that are unique. Some jobs will have certain traits that are helpful to us, even if we don't really realise it, it's not always conscious, sometimes it is, if it's obvious. It's hard to say how it's picked out. It's not like I interview them before

> they're given those coaching or team manager roles, or other volunteer spots. I've got a decent relationship with them, so I just know what they're like, both in and out of the club, you know. And I personally just do think that some jobs attract certain types of people, or certain attitudes. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

Interestingly, the role of a stay-at-home mother was recognised as a potential volunteer resource, as their caregiving role was associated with having free or extra time, and there was a perception that mothers "don't get up to much other than what their kids want". Such assumptions may lead to negative perceptions of other types of careers or roles, for instance, a club leader made a reference to young mothers having ample 'free time' that could be dedicated to volunteering. Therefore, clubs need to carefully balance their efforts to assess the skills and capacities of their volunteers so that individuals can be matched to voluntary roles without relying on assumptions. A club leader providing perspective surrounding mothers in sport:

> We have a lot of young mums who sort of grew up in the newer social, well, online stage. So, they tend to already have a grasp about social media posts and groups, and whatever else there is, messages and what not. Oh, even some of the older players. But um, some are stay-at-home mums, or work limited hours, but they usually have plenty of time and don't get up to much other than what their kids want. But they, it's something they can do anywhere, you know, just from their phone. They can easily send out a message to a specific, or massive group of people. Or well, some are quite creative, and passionate, so there's always pictures and, like, things they've created to post. It shows their passion, but also makes the kids feel appreciated, keeps parents aware of what's happening too. (Carly, F, 46, AFL, club leader)

One key motivation for leveraging the transferrable skills of club volunteers was to create additional opportunities for community partnerships and sponsorships. Participants reflected on their experiences in different sporting clubs and noted the growing trend of establishing mutually beneficial relationships through sponsorships. On several occasions, participants commented that "other clubs do this too" and "I think it sort of happens

everywhere", highlighting the advantages of aligning parents' specific skills and competencies with particular volunteer roles. These types of relationships or sponsorships often involved services being provided, such as educational programs and seminars, or reduced costs for services like physiotherapy or dietetics. Importantly, these arrangements served as a vital mechanism for sustaining a broader approach to social and cultural responsibility, ranging from the delivery of mental health workshops to sessions about social inclusion. In return, these benefits were often 'traded' for 'in-house' advertising, certificates of recognition, or gifts of appreciation:

> Yeah, and like you said, when we were talking about those education programs and initiatives, it makes it so, um, so extremely helpful when you know the person who is running them, if it comes from like a third party. Or if a volunteer or parent works in a certain job or field that lines up with what we want to do in the club, it really does help. (Noah, M, 45, AFL, club leader)

A parent volunteer stated:

> I actually work in admin myself, and well, I mean I was already heavily involved with the club, but I was pretty much directly asked if I could help out with certain things, that maybe, well maybe I shouldn't say, but I was asked to help with things that maybe not everyone else was. I think it was just because they thought I might have been better, um, well, able to do them a bit easier. (Alys, F, 53, AFL, parent volunteer)

If, however, club leaders decide that they want to use skill identification and role matching, there are some important considerations. Club leaders may like to categorise the volunteer positions within the club and decide on the ideal skills or requirements for those roles. This practice would lay out clear requirements and allow both club leaders and volunteers themselves to have greater understanding about their volunteering abilities, capacity, and enjoyment. There is existing literature about categories and types of volunteers such as Ringuet-Riot et al. (2016), Van der Roest et al. (2017), Schlesinger and Nagel (2013),

and Shibl et al. (1999). These studies explore volunteers' characteristics, motivations and drivers, intentions, and the determinants that influence volunteers' commitment at sports clubs. Categorising roles within the club may serve as a way to match volunteers' skills and characteristics with complementary roles, possibly maximising volunteer motivation, enjoyment, efficiency, and organisational capacity for social and cultural responsibility programs.

Club leaders discussed the recognition of long-time players and members and how their volunteer roles differ from those of newer parent volunteers. Long-time members, being well-known and established within the club context, were regarded as reliable and were perceived differently to new parent volunteers. This distinction was not expressed negatively; rather, club leaders acknowledged that they often rely on long-time volunteers, whose long-term involvement has proven them to be genuine, reliable, and helpful, especially when it comes to certain roles related to taking on social and cultural responsibilities. Long-time, core volunteers are vital for sporting clubs and building capacity, because of factors such as high volunteer turnover. It is understandable as to why sporting clubs place importance on volunteers such as these. When considering both the youth sport system and the process model of capacity building, long-term volunteers (whether they are parents or coaches) within the teams and family subsystem are directly providing support in the form of organisational capacity, for the sporting club.

> Sometimes parents are put into volunteer roles and sometimes they're not. It, it can often depend on how much they are around the club. We do appreciate those who can't give much but try. But they tend to do a good job. Especially those who have been around for a couple of years. They know, they know how things tend to work and sort of the way people feel about certain things, or even just the general, sort of vibe of all the other parents. And you know, I can tend to sometimes, sometimes rely on those people a bit more. I know them and what they can do. (Lauren, F, 38, AFL, club leader)

In contrast, parent volunteers often sensed favouritism, especially if they thought themselves a newer member. They expressed that the feeling of favouritism made them feel as though they were automatically an outsider and tempered their desire to volunteer. However, parent volunteers acknowledged that, although they felt this, no one was intending to be "mean or cruel". They also stated that cliques or pre-established groups of people made it difficult to interact with others, especially for new members. Additionally, perceived judgement from the aforementioned cliques resulted in feelings of anxiousness. Some parents added that, although the perceived judgement was possibly unintended, it resulted in anxiety that made them not want to be involved or to have minimal involvement:

> I will admit, it does sometimes feel like favourites are picked. Like, I know they tend to be appreciative of everyone, and no one is, no one is particularly cruel or mean or anything, but yeah, you know. They do let us know that. But sometimes it feels like, like you can't break into an already close-knit circle, it's um, can be a bit cliquey, which can be a bit frustrating. And, um, I will admit, that some sort of cliquiness does make me feel anxious, like I'm being judged or something. I mean like, realistically I know I'm not, but yeah, I can sometimes feel like the newbie or outsider just who cuts up oranges on the weekend games, yeah, you know. (Joanna, F, 34, AFL, parent volunteer)

A recurring notion among parent volunteers was the presence of cliques in sport, especially in highly individualised sports such as tennis. This was considered an important factor influencing how much a parent considered volunteering or participating in social and cultural responsibilities outside of sports competition itself. Parents expressed that these feelings made them reluctant to be involved within the club beyond fulfilling obligations 'for the sake of the child'. One tennis parent who described the club environment noted that cliques often formed based on factors such as the length of time members had been involved, their volunteer role, or their child's ability. To illustrate the point, this parent observed that those on the club committees were treated differently from those working in the canteen, the

bar or as cleaners. There was also the perception that parents whose children performed better were given preferential treatment and assigned to "better roles". This current study extends the literature by emphasising the dual importance on both the volunteer role/position (and its requirements) and volunteer preferences and satisfaction. A study by Nagel et al. (2020) found that positive volunteer satisfaction is determined by the conditions within the club (i.e., voluntary recognition, material/extrinsic incentives, social relationships, and shared enthusiasm) and a balanced workload. Therefore, club leaders, policy makers, and sport developers could consider the intersection between volunteer motivators and satisfaction, and the nature of the voluntary roles in an effort to promote a longer-term commitment to social and cultural programs. While clubs may need some guidance in this regard, a more complimentary matching of volunteers and volunteer roles is worth pursuing, especially to avoid driving away potential volunteers.

> The amount of cliques that form in clubs is crazy. I thought that was more of a high school thing, but I guess adults are still doing that. It definitely seems that the more, like, committee group, they're all friends and cliquey themselves. It honestly feels like a lot of them want to do that, just get their kid in a better spot … They do it to put their kid forward. It doesn't make the club always feel too nice. You sometimes feel looked down upon by people like that. (Celena, F, 37, surf-life saving, parent volunteer)

Parents who perceived themselves to be outside these groups found it difficult to socialise and create connections or friendships with other parents. The feeling of a lack of belonging discouraged parents from attending other events that often related to the club's social and cultural responsibilities, such as mental health education sessions, presentation nights, and other fundraising activities or social events, as they perceived that they were not wanted or did not want to "look like the weird parent". The club leaders were aware of this perception of cliques and subsequent feelings of anxiety and being an outsider, as parents had expressed this to them directly. Club leaders emphasised that they considered this "an issue

they were working on a solution for" and recognised that it may cause a drop in volunteers and may be a barrier to taking on social and cultural responsibilities. There was also some guilt surrounding this on the parents' behalf, as they believed that their child was missing out on making further friendships, being "in the know", or other opportunities, as the parent could not create those adult connections:

> It can be very fucking frustrating in this club. There's a lot of parents in there that are only volunteering their time or wanting to be on the committee or close to them and the coaches as a way to put their kid forward. Or for them to gain extra benefits. I get it, I want my kid to go as far as she can, as possible, but that kind of shit doesn't create a good environment for others. And the kids sense it too. They don't see their parents being all buddy-buddy with the coaches or whoever 'cos the other parents are always in there first. (Maria, F, 45, tennis, parent volunteer)

Frustrations among volunteers were shared:

> I am new-ish here, and you can definitely feel a bit of a social ladder or whatever. There's the group of parents who are in the know, and I don't know whether it's a case of the coaches or club people playing favourites towards those parents, or if it's just that group of people walking around like they own the place 'cos they've got a role with an ounce of importance (laughs). Like I said, I am new-ish here, so maybe I'm just seeing things from, as an outsider as I haven't made too many friends here. I'm trying to put in effort, but I don't want to show up to things and be a loner or look like the weird parent. (Eve, F, 42, AFL, parent volunteer)

The recognition of volunteers' boundaries and burdens was important in developing and maintaining positive relations between the club and volunteers. While club leaders recognised the burdens placed upon volunteers, it was equally important to visibly acknowledge volunteer efforts, contribution, and value in an appreciative manner – as similarly seen in a study by Nagel et al. (2020). Furthermore, Egli et al. (2014) found that there are four different volunteer profiles, including recognition seekers, material incentive seekers, participation and communication seekers, and support seekers. This was generally

seen within this study, whereby volunteers had different drivers for social and cultural responsibility involvement. Recognition seeking was seen amongst volunteers where there was need for and expectation of appreciation, and for their actions and service to be acknowledged through symbolic recognition (e.g., certificates, awards). Consequently, club leadership that provided clear direction and appreciation fostered a healthy volunteer culture which was perceived to buffer volunteer stressors in relation to fulfilling club-based social and cultural responsibilities.

> There are, well in a way, it seems like there's different volunteers that we tend to get. I find that although there's peace within the club, and no one's upset. There are some who adamantly love getting a certificate at the end of the season, or just getting a shout-out during presentations. Others are a bit more casual, and just help here and there when they feel like it. And some have been here for a long-time, and maybe we take them for granted actually, because they never ask for anything but are always willing to help. (Brandon, M, 42, tennis, club leader)

Clubs should create opportunities for volunteers to be heard and appreciated. Similarly to Nagel et al. (2020) and Schlesinger and Nagel (2018), the current study showed that volunteers can feel 'thankless' and 'used' and over time lose interest in club involvement. It is therefore crucial that clubs establish, maintain, and strengthen volunteer relationships within the club. For example, clubs could create opportunities such as presentation nights, volunteer raffles and gifts, volunteer social nights, and physical/visible representations of gratitude (e.g., certificates or cards), and athlete involvement in creating a positive culture that includes recognising and celebrating volunteers' efforts. Clubs may choose to utilise and participate in pre-existing national sporting organisation campaigns (e.g., 2024 National Volunteer Week created by the Australian Sports Commission), nominate volunteers for local, state, or national sport-specific award ceremonies (e.g., Tennis Australia's Newcombe Medal, Hostplus SANFL Volunteer of the Year), in-club award nominations/ceremonies, and participation in days such as 'Thankyou Day' or 'Appreciation Day'. Providing relevant

opportunities may be crucial in re-engaging and re-invigorating relationships with volunteers, who then feel that their efforts and time are appreciated and thus that they can maintain and develop their involvement.

Coaches often expressed their appreciation for volunteers who assumed organisational and administrative roles, those who were volunteer coaches or worked with disability and inclusive teams, assistant coaches, and team managers. Interestingly, a club leader noted that volunteers would often "bring together their skills and connections" to work collaboratively for the benefit of the sporting club and to ensure operations ran smoothly, especially regarding social and cultural responsibilities. The club leader reflected on a time when a group of parents of children with disabilities wanted their children to be further involved; however, the required equipment was lacking. These parents consequently conducted a BBQ and movie night as fundraising and reached out to local businesses for raffle prizes in exchange for recognition. This sentiment was repeated by a coach from a different sporting club:

> I mean, I know that the volunteers, they're honestly like, somewhat of a backbone for us. I really mean it, we're lucky they're involved as much as they are. And they want to be. Even things like fundraisers and raffles, getting donations for prizes, things like that. The parent coaches and team managers of course too. It's, um, you know, it's amazing seeing a group of people bringing their skills or connections together too, when trying to figure something out or in planning, that drive and motivation for the club is assuring. (Zac, M, 42, AFL, coach volunteer)

Similarly, this study found that club leaders who were personable, social, and strove to create relationships with volunteers were an important factor in volunteer satisfaction within the club. These relationships were developed between leaders and volunteers through open channels of communication, which helped volunteers to feel more intrinsically motivated. Engaging volunteers in this way may help to inform or further develop missions, standards, expectations (i.e., the organisation layer of the youth sport system) which may assist with

sustaining a commitment to club-based social and cultural responsibilities. This again aligns with research from Egli et al. (2014) who asserted that such characteristics from volunteers fall within both the participation and communication seekers and support seekers categories. The social, approachable, and personable orientation of club leaders was a critical factor in developing loyal, strong relationships with volunteers who assist with the undertaking of social and cultural responsibilities.

While the literature expresses that the determinants of volunteer satisfaction include recognition, support, clear communication, material incentives, and appropriate workloads (e.g., Kokolakakis et al., 2024; Nagel et al., 2020; Schlesinger & Nagel, 2018), the current research posits that positive volunteer–leader relationships also increase volunteer satisfaction. This determinant of satisfaction results in volunteers having more general participation in a club's organisation, and social and cultural responsibilities. Additionally, creating and developing volunteer–leader relationships reduce the 'transactional' feeling that volunteers often experience when contributing time and effort to their club (especially in the absence of recognition and appreciation); this is similar to Nichols et al.'s (2019) finding that treating volunteers as consumers will only perpetuate the transactional feeling they perceive. It is therefore crucial that club leaders are personable, approachable, and connect with volunteers to develop positive relationships and support volunteer involvement (and the implementation of social and cultural responsibility).

Building on the idea of collaboration to support off-field initiatives and programs, the partnership between volunteers and the club sometimes involved both paid and hired positions. According to parent volunteers at one club, specifically hired roles at their club included a paid administration position, a social media/marketing position, cleaners, and senior coaches. However, most emphasis was placed on the role of the club administrator. The participants emphasised that the administrator role provided "much needed organisation"

regarding tasks such as preparing documents, player registrations, emails, and timetabling/scheduling for the club. They were also considered a contact point for social and cultural responsibilities. For example, the administrator communicated with key individuals from mental health organisations and could request support within the club:

> So as a club, we do hire some of our volunteers, so I guess they're then not technically volunteering anymore. But it's been great for us, it's very helpful. I mean, I do have to acknowledge that we are in a financial position to be able to even do that, and it's been a long process over a long period of time. We started with just one, almost like a trial, and it went well. It's not like everyone who volunteers for us is getting paid, but some key spots like our admin lady is definitely hired I suppose. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

Similarly:

> God it's been such a massive weight off our shoulder to hire her. She deals with all the emails or directs them to the right people. And phone calls. There's been a noticeable difference within the club. Our new members know what to do, who to see, and it's been good for inducting and getting in new members too. (Alex, M, 43, AFL, club leader)

Another point of discussion surrounds the club providing opportunities for lower-income families to enable participation in sport and its surrounding activities and programs. Club leaders expressed that there were often families or parents and children wanted to become more involved with social and cultural responsibilities, but could not afford them externally (e.g., mental health support). The clubs involved in this study attempted to use their position to support members who might be disadvantaged, or low-income individuals (on a case-by-case basis) by offering fee reductions or free coaching sessions in exchange for canteen/food service, club room cleaning, or other required services. Within this context, clubs discreetly negotiated with low-income families for 'quid pro quo' in exchange for the fulfilment of specific voluntary roles. Although this may not be directly related to the actions

and processes that lead to the navigation and implementation of social and cultural responsibilities, it is important to consider low-income families' and vulnerable youths' access to sport and the social and cultural programs or initiatives that may directly support them (e.g. mental health resources or support through sport that may not be found elsewhere). The link between SES, geographical remoteness, vulnerable youth and at-risk populations, and lack of access to sport has been well-established in the literature, such as studies by Eime, Harvey et al. (2013), Vandermeerschen et al. (2015), Eime et al. (2015), Kellstedt et al. (2021), and Mann and Hacker (2024), to name a few of many. The families in this study, however, were not viewed as a hired or paid roles by the club, but rather a favour being "paid back". Club leaders also voiced that some of these roles with fee reductions are offered as a way of "helping them" or to keep them within the club:

> So, we do have a couple of people that we reduce their fees or provide some extras as we negotiated that they will clean weekly for us or something, or cover the canteen or bar throughout the weekends. There's not too many of those roles, but we do try and help out those who maybe have financial struggles and offer them this type of thing to help them. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

While the clubs involved in this study had the capacity to financially help some families and individuals with access to sport, this is not a practice that all youth sporting clubs could undertake. However, there may be instances where clubs could establish periodic assistance by implementing a formal application process (e.g., fees are halved for one family per month). Such accommodations, if feasible, are important and enable those previously without access to participate or receive resources, especially when the club is engaged in social and cultural responsibilities (Vandermeerschen et al., 2015). On a practical level, the application process may take into consideration factors such as home location, access to transport, parental income, familial support and so on, which would form the criteria for the support. Organised youth sporting clubs are complex and dynamic spaces. So, while the clubs

in this study indicated a series of steps that could be undertaken to support access and involvement, other clubs may be able to take similar but scaled-back approaches; reinforcing the importance of the current study in shedding light on the ways in which clubs might consider access to social and cultural programs or initiatives.

In terms of financial concerns, some volunteers questioned why some individuals were compensated and others were not. Volunteers in roles such as team managers or coaches were initially happy to volunteer without being compensated; however, they did question why some were compensated for their time and contribution and others were not. While this did not seem to cause large issues or conflict within these clubs, the lack of clarity surrounding these inconsistencies (i.e., supporting lower-income families to allow greater participation in social and cultural responsibilities) has the potential to cause tension. These volunteers, especially those within the AFL clubs within this study, did express that they would appreciate clarity around the specific setup, expectations, and compensation (if any):

> I am aware of some people who are paid. I'm not sure of all the ins and outs. Like some of the senior coaches are, the admin, and the financial person. I understand why those ones are specific roles that receive payment. I think they should be too. (Jack, M, 42, AFL, parent volunteer)

Another parent volunteer added:

> I think the parent who works in the canteen gets a slight reduction in fees. I'm not sure about anyone else. Wish I was getting that (laughs). I mean I do volunteer too, so I wonder how the decision gets made. The decision of who gets a bit off the fees. (Rowan, M, 27, AFL, parent volunteer)

Within both the focus groups (with club leaders) and the individual interviews (with parents and coaches), participants discussed transferrable skills and meeting clubs' social and cultural responsibilities. The system of connecting transferrable skills to particular roles was perceived by club leaders as being beneficial to the club, and they explained that having

competent individuals in these set roles provided an important basis for expanding the club's responsibilities. Club leaders perceived that the utilisation and allocation of hired roles allow clubs to organise themselves and focus firstly on their core sporting responsibilities, and then allocate time, resources, and people to additional responsibilities. While this may only be possible for more agile and responsive clubs, it is important to consider that it could significantly improve the consistency and quality of the programs and initiatives being conducted. Club leaders acknowledged that having a large volunteer base and "good financial standing" allowed them to venture into avenues outside of their core sporting focus. The main social and cultural responsibilities that were and are conducted include mental health awareness and resources education sessions, personal growth and reflection sessions, drug and alcohol education, disability teams and coaching, and competitive rounds or weeks dedicated to a certain cause (i.e., LGBTQIA+, Indigenous individuals/NAIDOC, mental health, and disability). A paid position may not be possible for many clubs, and therefore third-party organisations could be considered. Club leaders, coaches, or select long-term volunteers, especially those with pre-existing qualifications, could train and educate others to facilitate sessions. It is important to recognise that these are quite significant measures; however, they may be necessary if clubs are seeking reliability, quality, knowledge and expertise, and consistency in their social and cultural programs.

> When it comes down to it, having those set roles and people in them, having a full committee and president or leader, and having volunteers doing the right things allow us to function. That's the core of it. It makes us able to focus on footy, and then everything else that follows. It sets the groundwork. (Mitch, M, 30, AFL, volunteer coach)

Another significant factor that contributed to youth sporting clubs being able to "dip their toes" into various social and cultural responsibilities was the organisational structure of the club. This included the club's structure, who is a part of it, and how roles and

transferrable skills are associated with this structure. Having a strong organisational structure was important for youth sporting clubs across various sports such as AFL, tennis, and hockey. Participants claimed that those who were in positions of power in the club, namely the committee or president, would dictate how the club functioned with a top-down approach:

> I had mentioned previously how we have some employed people at our club, but there's also a key piece. Or pieces. I really think that the captain of the ship and those who steer it pretty much dictate how things go within the club. I mean it's pretty good here and everyone seems to be on the same page, which is why I think things are pretty good here, both on the field and in the club. But I could imagine in other clubs it going wrong if people on committees make not great choices. (Ryan, M, 46, AFL, volunteer coach)

And:

> The right people need to be seated higher up who share the same values that allow for us to actually get to the point where we can think about dipping our toes into things like mental health or worrying about disability. Like I understand it's important, but thinking about it from a business perspective, you need to first provide a good sport experience. AFL will come first and then of course we can deal with all the benefits and look elsewhere once the sport side of things is solid and successful. It really needs to come first. (Zac, M, 42, AFL, volunteer coach)

When discussing who were considered 'the right people' for key leadership and volunteer positions within the club, participants often mentioned those with desirable careers or jobs outside of sport, as previously mentioned in this theme. Across various individuals and sports there was a widespread belief that competence and status in a well-regarded career automatically translates to being well-suited for pivotal volunteer roles in sport. This assumption led to these individuals being viewed as naturally 'fit' for higher positions within the club. However, some parents questioned, or at the very least expressed curiosity about, how certain individuals came to hold positions on the committee, as it did not appear that these roles were filled purely through people "putting their hand up":

> I'd be pretty interested to find out how these people are picked. Like, I know some had longstanding relationships with each other or have had their family at the club for a long time, but I don't always think that means someone should be leading if it isn't for the benefit for the club. Like I personally don't think I could put my hand up and ask to join, it feels pretty close knit in there. But on the other hand, I don't think that things should be so serious that there is like an election of people. I'd just want those who have good intentions and want to help out. (Ned, M, 31, tennis, parent volunteer)

Organisational structure, hierarchy, club politics, and power dynamics play a significant role in youth sporting clubs and how they are internally conducted. At surface level, there is often the notion of volunteerism, getting involved, and coming together for a shared, sporting experience. A club's structures and dynamics are also associated with how it employs paid positions, volunteers, and transferrable skills in order to prioritise success in its core sporting responsibilities. However, this strong basis also lays the groundwork for youth sporting clubs to expand their social and cultural responsibilities such as mental health education and other educational workshops, once the core sporting foci are addressed.

4.4 Change and succession planning

The participants perceived that change and succession are important factors in maintaining efficient and streamlined internal processes that enable clubs to broaden their social and cultural responsibilities to their members. Coaches in AFL (Australian football) clubs discussed natural or organic change occurring in the youth clubs. These coaches noted that they were allocated a fixed number of seasons in the junior league before being replaced. Club leaders explained that this policy was intended to "give everyone the opportunity" to coach and to allow new coaches to develop their skills:

> So, the junior coaches are rotated after a couple of seasons. This allows for other coaches to come through, new ones to practice their coaching, and it tends to keep things moving. We've got a lot of volunteers, and this seems to be a good way to do things, to keep it fair. There are opportunities though for coaches to return or keep coaching when or where it's needed. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

From the club leader's perspective, this rotation system was beneficial and aligned with typical volunteer turnover. Most sporting clubs typically have a high rate of volunteer turnover (Cuskelly, 2004), and that was the case for most of the clubs involved in this study. However, one club perceived that implementing such a system actively contributed to volunteer turnover in a positive way, helping to 'spread the load' and reduce the risk of burnout or dropout among volunteers. The act of rotating volunteer coaches ensured that someone was always able and willing to fulfil the role. Club leaders also emphasised that this process was also in place to "bring in fresh ideas", and to find "coaches matched ideologically with the club ethos". Club leaders recognised that bringing in fresh ideas is crucial, and they recognised their own perspectives and experiences may inadvertently be limiting what social and cultural responsibilities the club could consider:

> Not everyone likes that that's how we do it, but other than some grievances every now and then about that system, it has only really benefitted us. I think some of the volunteers don't get as burned out or end up stuck doing one thing forever … For the initiatives too, it brings in ideas that I, or anyone, might consider. Just sort of from being genuinely unaware. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

The volunteer bases of other clubs were discussed, primarily in the context of gaining and losing volunteers. The findings indicate that, even in the clubs considered successful, operating in high socio-economic areas, and have a larger volunteer base, volunteer turnover was still a major concern (Nagel et al., 2020; Schlesinger & Nagel, 2018). A high rate of volunteer turnover is a challenge due sporting clubs' dependence on volunteers, which is often why volunteer availability and reliability are reasons why program do not take place, are short-term, or end when there is no new facilitator to take over (Schlesinger et al., 2013). Factors such as the age of the volunteer or child, the child moving on from the club, lack of volunteer time, lack of definition of some volunteer roles, or simply no longer wanting to participate were all cited as reasons for volunteer turnover. The Australian Sports Commission currently has a National Volunteer Plan, which may improve club-based support in the future and assist clubs' efforts surrounding social and cultural responsibilities. This plan comprises of strategies to improve the voluntary experience through government support and minimise instances of volunteer burnout. While this key finding about volunteer turnover is not completely new knowledge, the research being situated in higher socio-economic areas adds new context to the existing literature. But, in these clubs, volunteer changes were more a result of natural turnover rather than a structured rotation system like the one implemented at the AFL club:

> I would say that we have an alright number of volunteers, but there's, there's constantly people leaving. And fair play to them. It is usually due for reasons like they're getting old, their kid no longer wants to play, or their kid has gotten older and doesn't want mum and dad around the club. Um, or, there's a lot of young families

> who are having babies, they don't really have the time to work it. (Alex, M, 43, AFL, club leader)

Additionally:

> It's pretty normal, we constantly have parents coming in and out. And it's not like, you know, we don't have like set categories for volunteers. There's like the committee guys and some volunteer coaches, but those coaches are usually older players who are wanting to get on court and learn [coaching]. But it's more than that. They put their hands up when needed, or we'll tap some people on the shoulder when there's an upcoming event or season coming up. (Holly, F, 40, tennis, club leader)

However, it was found that purposeful turnover of volunteers negatively affected the development of social relationships, such as the athlete–coach and the parent–coach relationships. Volunteer coaches and parents who did not like the way in which structured turnover occurred. Volunteer coaches expressed concerns and preferred a more flexible approach to managing volunteers. This perspective was reiterated by some parents, who emphasised that they were disappointed that the coaches they created relationships with had to change role. These parents also noted that their child had created bonds with the coach and were having to re-build this trust every couple of seasons. This is concerning considering current calls in the literature for clubs to create opportunities for relationship development (e.g., Blom et al., 2013; Knight & Holt, 2014; O'Donnell et al., 2022), and this practice could very well have an opposite effect. As seen within various studies, conflict in social relationships (e.g., parent-coach, and coach-athlete relationship) often stems from misalignment of goals and values, poor communication, and lack of understanding (Knight & Holt, 2014; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Preston et al., 2020; Smoll et al., 2011), especially in the absence of time or opportunity to develop the relationship. So, while such a strategy was successful for one club in this study, this was not seen elsewhere throughout the data, and thus, such an approach needs to be carefully considered and understood in future research.

> I do really enjoy the coaching here, but I won't lie, I was a bit bummed out when my seasons were up. I understand why there's swaps in place but wish there was a way to progress more here; or to just continuously keep going. That'd be good. (Jim, M, 42, AFL, volunteer coach)

A club volunteer reiterated:

> [There are] great coaches here. But [CHILD] did seem to respond really well to [COACH]. He's [son] got autism, so [COACH] seemed to understand that and knew mostly how to deal with him. They just got along well. Would love to see him back out there. (Dorian, M, 36, AFL, club volunteer)

While high volunteer turnover occurs due to the nature of a voluntary position, club leaders need to review how social and cultural programs and initiatives are implemented (Nichols et al., 2019). Rather than volunteers being organisers, facilitators, and program leaders, clubs may need to allocate a team of individuals (i.e., within the family and team subsystems, at an organisational level) who specifically work on the development and implementation of social and cultural responsibility (Wicker, 2017). For example, some clubs involved in this study had a few select individuals who were remunerated to work within the club. But, most clubs did not have a surplus of volunteers and therefore did not require a process to turn over volunteers. Club leaders from various clubs noted that the same consistent volunteers are extremely valuable to the club, "do a lot of the heavy lifting", and ultimately allow the club to function (i.e., day-to-day requirements) and expand further (i.e., social and cultural responsibilities). In these circumstances, the notion of turning over volunteers was not feasible:

> You do get some people stuck in spots and doesn't seem like they want to budge (laughs). I mean, it's good for stability, especially if they've proven themselves reliable and helpful to the club. And you don't really want to get rid of those people. It would feel like a slap in the face to nudge them out. And why would you? It doesn't really make sense to me. (Juliet, F, 38, hockey, parent volunteer)

Some parent volunteers emphasised negative aspects of having long-term volunteers. It was expressed that, while the long-term volunteers were beneficial, they were perceived as "needing to always be involved" and "not making any room" for others. One parent volunteer claimed that they felt like "just another foot in the door", which stemmed from the lack of opportunities to be involved, and even being turned away when offering club support. Parents expressed dissatisfaction with the heavy reliance on long-term volunteers and attributed this to the rigid roles within the club, often making some parents feel sidelined, just an 'orange-slice' parent. These experiences serve as opportunities for the sporting club to provide new volunteers with tasks in the club, especially when considering the process model of building capacity. Negative stakeholder experiences and the potential for turnover are internal stimuli that for organisational capacity building. Youth sporting clubs could conduct an organisational capacity needs assessment about volunteers and subsequently implement strategies to reduce volunteer drop-out and increase voluntary positions within the club. Thus, further developing the club's organisational capacity for social and cultural responsibility.

However, other parent volunteers expressed positive feelings about their volunteer positions or experience. Many tennis and AFL parents expressed that volunteering and general participation at their child's sporting club gave them "something to do", was a "great tool for bonding", and "re-inspired and gave [them] purpose". Volunteering gave these individuals an opportunity to spend time with their children, but was also a way to meet new people and socialise, find a community, and put their spare time towards a positive cause:

> I come here mostly with my son only. Footy is a great tool for bonding, for being able to spend some time one on one with him. I love being able to do that through the coaching. I actually, I didn't, well, didn't really have a great experience in sport with my father. He humiliated my brothers and I in cricket, when we were younger. So, I didn't continue playing sport. But when [SON] was interested in footy, I wanted to give him the experience I didn't quite get. So, I hope I'm doing that through being

> here, and was really trying to build up his confidence when I coached, well, all the kids too. (Lewis, M, 48, AFL, parent volunteer)

When questioned about change over time, succession, and the evolution of the sporting club, many individuals (coaches, parents, and club leaders alike) expressed feelings of uncertainty. Clubs had concerns about how change of leadership may impact the facilitation or longevity of social and cultural responsibilities once they were implemented. To many, the idea of change was scary, whether that be due to fear of the unknown or 'what's next', the connection between change and uncertainty or stability, or the idea that their circumstances will significantly shift. These concerns were prompted by the departure of key leaders who originally sought to be involved with social and cultural programs and initiatives, had connections with organisations, and were generally managing such programs. Much of the uncertainty was related to the perceived risk of instability regarding social and cultural responsibilities, losing programs (such as mental health initiatives) and a changing culture within the club (i.e., the stakeholders and their relationships):

> It's interesting. It [change] can be interpreted various ways. I think for me, and maybe some of the others here, you know like, change can be a good or bad thing. I think it's how you deal with it and what the circumstances are, or what opportunities come up at the time. I know for me in my personal life that change is scary. To me it's the unknown, and the unknown is uncertain … But there is a quote, I think it goes like "Change is scary, but staying stagnant is too". (Scott, M, AFL, club leader)

Similarly, club leaders might grapple with integrating a diversity agenda within their sporting club against changing political climates. For example, there is much debate within sport about transgender individuals and their participation; local-level clubs, unless guided by a state sporting organisation or specific policies, are unsure how to navigate such sensitive and politically charged issues (Sherwood et al., 2020). These examples of perceived instability comprise a key challenge for community-based sporting clubs and potentially lead

to the avoidance of expanded social responsibility. There are a few practical strategies clubs may like to consider in case of future sudden change or instability. Clubs may like to simply familiarise themselves with the idea of change, as youth sporting clubs are evolving settings with changing volunteers, athletes, and leaders (Holtrop et al., 2024; Stefanick et al., 2020). However, club leaders could create an action plan for instances of change or instability, whether that surround changing of club leadership, volunteer turnover, or real-world events, with the aim to preserve current social and cultural programs. Such an action plan can include steps for how to recover, re-engage, and re-inspire when club stakeholders return; club contacts; and tips for staying engaged with stakeholders during periods of absence.

While volunteerism was one aspect of natural (and sometimes deliberate) change within the club, there were also other forms of this concern surrounding club leaders, committee members, and presidents. This concern included whether the club could maintain its current success and not 'drop the ball', especially surrounding community involvement, social and cultural responsibilities, and programs and initiatives. Various club stakeholders who expressed these concerns were aware that they 'had a good thing going' and were worried about "not being able to keep what they've got going". This study found that there were no standard action plans surrounding social and cultural responsibilities. The lack of future planning surrounding succession and management in this study is consistent with research by Schlesinger et al. (2013), Taylor and Robinson (2019), Taylor and McGraw (2006), Taylor and McGraw (2004), and Taylor et al. (2015), who corroborated that succession action plans in management are not a key feature of Australian state sporting organisations. Interestingly, Taylor and Robinson (2019) revisited their studies from 2004 and 2006 and confirmed that over a decade there was little to no evidence of change or development of succession planning and management in sporting organisations – this research continues this trend, in which there were minimal future management plans among the committees. However, this

study did indicate that there is the consideration and beginning stages of future plannings within clubs, especially as prompted by the events of the COVID-19 pandemic, the political climate, and the attitudes of parents and their children (the athletes). For example:

> Having played sport yourself, you might have heard the notion that it's often easier to come back from a loss or being down, rather than to keep the streak going or being able to hold your lead. It can sometimes feel like that. So, while we are in a decent position, the club, and of course, yeah, nothing's perfect and could always be better, it can sometimes feel hard to keep that momentum going. (Ryan, M, 46, AFL, coach volunteer)

To further elucidate concerns about sustainability, the themes indicated that clubs were concerned about the stability of their surrounding socio-political climate. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, clubs did not overcommit beyond their core activities to facilitate sporting opportunities (Elliott et al., 2021; Karg et al., 2021; Staley et al., 2024). COVID-19 affected most youth sporting clubs within this study, especially during lockdowns, which resulted in concerns about engagement, drop-out, and loss of communication between the club and its members. For these clubs, which were actively involved in a range of social and cultural initiatives, programs and education (e.g., mental health education and first aid, inclusive disability teams, dedicated rounds), COVID-19 forced them to renegotiate club priorities and operations, which meant some social and cultural initiatives were relegated to the 'bottom of the list'. The COVID-19 pandemic thus represents an example of environmental instability that cautioned club leaders' actions and decisions for implementing social and cultural change. Club leaders in Australian football emphasised that it was extremely important to re-engage participants (through sessions that followed distancing restrictions, and re-opening the communication channels to parents), and to resume the social outreach initiatives later. The re-engagement of club members and volunteers allowed clubs to focus first on the individuals and create bonds and relationships with them; and also on

providing that sense of community that, for many, was gone during lockdowns and peak COVID-19:

> So, we were fortunate to not have to face a massive repercussion due to COVID. We mainly just had to follow what everyone else was doing. So, the lockdowns, and then the social distancing, but were able to get back up and running somewhat quick. We really just had to focus on each member, almost like reaching out individually. I mean we did check in, but it was more so making sure our emails and newsletters were saying "Hi, we're still here if you need us!" We wanted to re-foster that family, almost community feel to the club. You'd be surprised, some were so desperate to get back. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

Adding to the club-based perspectives about COVID-19:

> You do naturally see different people come and go, but especially thanks to COVID we saw a loss. It's difficult for me to see people who have been long-time members of the club leave or move on. Especially those you become close with, that's hard. And even those I didn't talk to much, they were nice familiar faces to see. They are good people. (Emma, F, 55, tennis, coach volunteer)

Many club leaders raised the idea of 'succession', namely passing down the processes and procedures to maintain the club. Some club leaders, particularly in AFL, had worries surrounding whether in the future new individuals or 'natural succession' would be able to maintain the club's current social and cultural responsibilities. Club leaders commonly used the metaphor of carrying the torch and then passing it along. This finding has implications for youth sporting clubs surrounding succession planning and the ability to effectively manage change and sustain social and cultural responsibilities in the club. It is vital that both sporting organisations and youth sporting clubs implement some form of succession or management plan to deal with the departure of key players and individuals, the transition of new individuals to and from roles, and the general nature of short-term, high-turnover volunteer involvement (Taylor & Robinson, 2019). Doing so will assist clubs to manage changing circumstances surrounding volunteers, leadership and management, and social and cultural

responsibilities. Additionally, Taylor and Robinson (2019) considered the absence of future succession planning to be a significant performance issue as there is the potential for lack of diversity and innovation in thinking and ideas – a perspective that resonated with coach volunteers in this study:

> I do worry that, once our set of leaders and committee members move on, that, you know, future is uncertain. There's no written rule book. I know that [NAME] is currently working on a way to pass down all sort of things for when they leave. You know, things like the current relationships the club has, the history, how it's being run now, and all the contact the club has. (Ryan, M, 46, AFL, coach volunteer)

A club leader states that:

> I'm aware that we have a good thing going. I know that a couple of our committee members and potentially the president are thinking of moving on. I mean, I'm sure things will be fine, but some people just have a thing about them where they're good at leading, conversing, just getting into things and thinking of stuff that benefits the club. And being able to execute that well too. (Noah, M, 45, AFL, club leader)

Alternately, some other clubs seek leaders in people who are passionate, regularly attend games and club functions, reliable and competent, and personable, representing a mix of both personal qualities and motivations to sustain the club's efforts:

> We conduct community nights, have sessions about mental health, safe drug and alcohol education, and have even branched out into nutrition or injury prevention. Other than that, the focus is tennis. But um, we, they are led by individuals here, there's only been a couple of times where someone else has been sourced outside the club to provide a slideshow or something. But for the most part, we've got really intelligent, reliable, competent people. They've got drive and passion. They really care about the holistic approach to sport and health, and so they play a part, but yeah, we really want those kinds of volunteers and members here … (Cole, M, 52, tennis, club leader)

Although the participants are tied to clubs deemed operationally, socially and culturally successful, few mentioned a 'how to' or a guide to how they operate to pass along to other

club leaders (i.e., succession of roles), other than having club and coach policies, member codes of conduct, and parental expectations. Most club leaders mentioned that the broader responsibilities in these cases are seemingly spearheaded by passionate individuals or a small group, but a blueprint or guide for other clubs or people does not necessarily exist. While that was the case for the majority of clubs involved in this study, there were a few instances where club leaders had recently started or completed (prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic) a written document about club practices surrounding responsibility. This document was comprised of contact details (emails and phone numbers) for organisations (or specific individuals from those organisations), third-party individuals and businesses to assist in programs and education, charities, club volunteers involved in past and current social and cultural responsibilities, and recommended resources (e.g. for mental health support). Therefore, club leaders should invest time into creating a succinct succession and management action plan. Succession plan templates can be found online; for example, the Australian Government (via the business.gov.au website) provides a template to assist the development of such plan. There are also implications for key national/state sporting organisations and governing bodies, who should consider implementing sporting club–specific succession plan templates on their websites and social media, steps specific to youth sporting clubs, and integrating (or highly recommending) them into calls to action about club management.

> Like I said, there's not exactly a written rule book or set of steps, it's really to do with the people – what their passions are, how they interact, and really the amount of time they're able to put into something that's a volunteer role. (Ryan, M, 46, AFL, coach volunteer)

Change, striving to maintain 'a lead' (as a driver and stressor), and understanding succession played a significant role in how these youth sporting clubs internally functioned. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the club leaders to consider how a change to

the typical circumstances will affect how the club considers and maintains its core functions and broader responsibilities. Furthermore, clubs found that the high rate of volunteer turnover also applied to club leaders. On this point, club leaders who were long-term members of the club considered the idea of succession and how to continue current club processes in the future with potentially new leadership. These clubs had the capacity to re-start and re-engage participants after significant change by carefully considering their voluntary positions (both long-term and short-term positions), understanding how to maintain successes, and considering succession of club leaders and organisational capacity in order to continue with their current processes.

4.5 Enablers and barriers of broader social and cultural responsibility

One of the most prominent threads and questions through this thesis is related to the capacities and barriers of the youth sporting clubs regarding their potential social and cultural responsibilities. This is due to the fact that there is no clear guide or plan on how youth sporting clubs should handle various social and cultural issues, their ability and capacity to take on these responsibilities, and whether they are obliged to. By focusing on the socially aware and active youth sporting clubs, discussion through individual interviews and focus groups has provided deep insights into how they navigate currently, their capacities, barriers, concerns, and prospects moving into the future.

The discussions surrounding the capacities of the youth sporting clubs included many different opinions from the perspectives of club leaders, parents, and coaches. Within the focus groups, club capacity was a hot topic that resulted in critical reflections from participants. In general, a club's capacity to undertake broader social responsibilities depended on its volunteers, collaborations, funding and finances, government initiatives and directives, sporting organisation policies and guidelines, and the club's facilities:

> These factors are more so do to with capacity though, so, our volunteers, funding, profit, if there's any government or [SPORTING ORGANISATION] goals at the time, um, maybe where you are located or, actually more so how big the club is. Does it have room to accommodate for expanding into other things? (Josh, M, 43, AFL, club leader)

Another perspective stressing the importance of volunteers:

> I think the fact that sports clubs in Australia, and maybe it's everywhere else too, well, we're reliant on volunteers for the most part. So that will somewhat dictate the capacity, and level of things you can do. And you can't force people do things either. They don't work here, they don't get paid, and it's on their own time and desire to do things around here. And it's really sort of, it's made me think, that yes, it's sometimes

> difficult to get volunteers, but I'm not sure that the professionalisation of grassroots clubs is a good thing either. (Cole, M, 52, tennis, club leader)

Club leaders also discussed the risks of undertaking further social and cultural responsibilities, which is contingent on increasing volunteer workload. The main viewpoint was that volunteers should not be expected to carry out professional or educative activities they do not feel comfortable doing. However, volunteers who possessed professional skills and/or background experiences to support club-based initiatives were perceived to be an important asset for clubs in expanding their sporting program from a social and cultural perspective. While skill identification and role matching may have served as an important method for the clubs involved in this study, this may not be universal. Clubs in lower-to-middle socio-economic areas or rural towns may struggle to find volunteers regardless (Stefanick et al., 2020). In these contexts, it might not be recommended or even practical to allocate roles to volunteers if they are limited numbers. Rather, clubs may choose to aim to develop the skills of volunteers in current roles by providing the necessary training or information. This could occur through periodic meetings with volunteers in which club leaders or specific individuals are able to provide enough information (via presentations, videos, booklets, toolkits, etc.) to allow volunteers to feel comfortable in their role. Doing this will assist in developing the organisational capacity of the club and thus facilitate greater involvement in social and cultural responsibilities. Parents and coaches offered various perspectives. Some mentioned that through appropriate preparation (i.e., through a guide, steps, or education) they would happily assist; however, other parents and coaches stated that their participation depended on the topic, level of involvement required, or not wanting to be responsible for others in what are potentially sensitive topics (e.g., mental health programs). A tennis parent expressed:

> like me? Oh I don't think I could do that (laughs). I'm best helping out in the canteen or whatever other little things there are to help with around here. I'm only really here for my daughter, she's usually on court and I'm in here, means I can watch her and volunteer some time too. But no, I wouldn't want the pressure of doing sessions or trying to teach kids and teens anything – that sounds quite scary actually. (Maria, F, 45, tennis, parent volunteer)

A club leader offered the following perspective:

> Like, we were just discussing the mental health stuff earlier. We work with a lot of organisations and charities to get the correct information and helplines and stuff, but I wouldn't want someone who isn't qualified to give psychological advice. Sounds like trouble waiting to happen. That's not to say we don't want to provide support and resources though, through the correct people and avenues. But I, I think that unless one of the coaches or parents or volunteers were specially trained or it was their career, I wouldn't wanna put that on someone. I think people to talk to around the is a – good, trusted, open, non-judgemental people. Conversations like that go a long way. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

One of the initial ways in which clubs developed their capacity for social and cultural responsibility was to collaborate with the local community. Clubs often sought to work with other sports clubs (the same, and different sports), schools, local businesses, and organisations to share resources, information, and knowledge which assisted in the development and implementation of social and cultural responsibilities. Instances of club collaboration are illustrated in the literature. For example, Frost et al. (2013) discuss the merging of AFL and netball clubs in rural Australia which improved sustainability and delivery of their respective sporting programs through sharing resources. While that finding relates particularly to clubs integrating their facilities, resources, and the number of individuals, such a perspective may provide the basis for community-based sporting clubs to work together to promote or host social and cultural responsibilities. A club leader stated that:

> It doesn't happen all the time, but we have worked with other clubs before to put on a weekend charity event, or work with an organisation that's doing a presentation or something. It was mostly before COVID, so it's been a little while now. It was helpful, and brought more kids together too. It wasn't always the same sport either, sometimes it was but just another club. (Cole, M, 52, tennis, club leader)

Studies by Misener and Doherty (2012) and Ibsen and Levinsen (2019) have emphasised the increasing amount of formalised collaboration between sports clubs and local public entities. This community-centred approach highlights the benefits that can be derived from sharing and collaborating (e.g., expanding capacity), especially when applying a similar approach to social and cultural responsibilities as the clubs did in this research. Utilising this approach means there would be communication, collaboration, and facilitation of ideas, knowledge, and events between the communities and organisations that exist within what Dorsch et al. (2022) has coined the environmental subsystem. The connections made between the communities and organisations boost community connections and social cohesion, which according to the youth sport system, has the potential to 'loop' or influence other dynamic elements such as the family and teams subsystems.

The themes identified within this PhD research suggest that community involvement and collaboration are crucial for delivering a holistic sporting program. As previously stated, clubs may choose to reach out and work with other clubs, schools, and local businesses, and utilise mutual contacts via club members. It is important that clubs recognise other sporting clubs around them (even from other sports) may be in similar contexts regarding SES, finances, and membership numbers, and thus may benefit from collaboration (Misener & Doherty, 2012). While clubs may choose to initiate this approach, this finding also has implications for sporting organisations and governing bodies who can also foster meaningful collaboration. For instance, peak sporting bodies likely have greater capacity to create a list of clubs, schools, or organisations that are interested in collaboratively delivering social and

cultural responsibilities (e.g., a mental-health promotion workshop, a parent and coach relationship education session). Collaborative efforts might involve sharing resources, knowledge, expertise, and facilities, and spread the burden on volunteers (Misener & Doherty, 2012) as a means for enacting social change.

Similarly, another enabler of the implementation of social and cultural responsibilities is through club leaders or representatives attending state organisation. Clubs often sought to identify and establish new relationships and collaborations within their local community to further develop their sporting programs.

> There are sometimes summit events that the club is invited to. It's like of like a showcase, or like, information about developing coaches or volunteers and things like that. It's usually put on by the sporting organisation or SANFL. Sometimes we don't have someone to send or we find out last minute, but its usually interesting and a but informative when we send someone. I just think that, it doesn't always get used within the club, the information. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

Consistent with Najafloo (2019), this study revealed that club leaders were making proactive decisions that they thought would support the club's involvement in various responsibilities, programs or initiatives. Club leaders are increasingly establishing connections across academic and industry sectors (e.g., through conferences, summits, and knowledge translation events), and networking with academics, organisations, and local, state, and national sporting bodies from a range of different sports to improve youth sport outcomes (Santos et al., 2022; Schaillée, Spaaij et al., 2019). These academic and industry-based events promote research-based recommendations for clubs, leaders, coaches, parents, and sporting organisations (Schaillée, Spaaij et al., 2019). This promotes the translation of sports research surrounding responsibilities such as mental health and wellbeing, inclusion and diversity, and social relationships (e.g., the Youth Sport Summit in Adelaide, South Australia). By attending industry research events, club leaders are actively demonstrating a

commitment to improving club-based activities while also expanding their local network for future partnership and collaboration. This presents opportunities to develop connections with organisations, industry, other clubs and sports, researchers, potential sponsors or third-party providers of social and cultural activities suitable for youth sporting programs.

From an applied perspective, leaders who are actively engaged in cross-sector knowledge and networking events appear to more successfully implement programs and activities within youth sporting clubs, as seen in this study. Therefore, one recommendation for clubs is to ensure that key leaders and decision-makers are aware of opportunities to attend workshops, seminars, conferences and forums to expand networking opportunities, which may lead to successfully enhancing club-based social and cultural responsibilities. There are a multitude of opportunities and possibilities that can emerge from networking and collaboration, including combining efforts and resources, creating a local club network to support social change, and garnering knowledge and confidence to trial new programs (e.g. diversity and inclusion in sport workshops). It is evident that leaders who demonstrate initiative, attempt to implement research-based recommendations, and take advantage of networking or collaboration opportunities can navigate the complexities of assuming various social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport.

The other prominent point regarding the capacity to take on social and cultural responsibilities was funding and grants. If funding for social and cultural initiatives was not available, clubs felt compelled to at least explore other grant funding and sponsorship options to establish, maintain, and even expand programs surrounding mental health, diversity and inclusion, or social relationship development. All clubs involved in this study were situated in in middle to high (or most advantaged) socio-economic suburbs. The focus groups confirmed that, typically, there are more funding opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, clubs, and suburbs. This factor was acknowledged as being a positive step towards supporting

disadvantaged and struggling clubs. The participants also emphasised that there are still opportunities for support for clubs in advantaged areas, particularly those who have a focus on developing social responsibilities and inclusive practices. Grants identified by participants include the Community Recreation and Sport Facilities Program, State Sport and Recreation Development Program, Active Club Program, Women Leaders in Sport (WLIS), multicultural grants programs, and Sport Access Foundation grants. There grants and programs are provided by the Government of South Australia (Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing; Department of Human Services; Department of the Premier and Cabinet), Sport Australia, and the Sport Access Foundation. One club leader reflected on the importance of winning these grants:

> This can be a difficult one. Obviously we know that our club is at a decent spot, but funding is always needed to improve and implement, you know, whether that's the facilities, equipment, staff and coaching, or new programs. So with the initiatives it can difficult to get them off the ground with the right means without funding like those ones we talked about. But yeah, I know I mentioned it a little ago as well, that we've got our admin lady – she really helps with grant applications. She a wiz at that, bloody handy it is. (Scott, M, AFL, club leader)

Another club leader in the focus group added:

> And just on other clubs. I've a couple discussions with guys at a couple of different clubs, and yeah, after COVID-19 there's some that are struggling to get back into it. I'm honestly happy to give other clubs advice or tell when some of the things we do. I know it probably won't be the exact same but if I can help out at all I'm more than willing. There's always a bit of a misconception that just because we're an opposing club that we won't want to interact and share, but I feel like doing so will only help the greater area, the community. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

The sports club as a facility or setting was perceived to play a role in the organisational and physical capacity to take on broader social responsibilities. Club leaders discussed that typically the size, age, amenities, and accessibility of the club influence how certain programs

and initiatives can be conducted. For example, new or upgraded club facilities have better amenities, accessibility, larger spaces, and tend to be perceived better externally (i.e., the club itself is an attraction or selling point):

> Yeah so, the facilities part is a bit more straightforward, I think. And meshes with funding too. But the bigger and newer, and better amenities that you have, the easier it's gonna be to host community event or programs and things like that. And, and even the club facility itself becomes an attraction or selling point. When it's all sparkly and new, it draws people in. Oh! And typically, these newer buildings are more accessible, so for those with disabilities or just, yeah, it all really snowballs. Upgrading when it's possible helps. (Lauren, F, 38, AFL, club leader)

A sports parent inadvertently confirmed this notion by stating:

> We, well, in the last couple of years, the whole club got upgraded. It's a small, narrow-looking club from the outside, but it's a bit like the Tardis, massive on the inside (laughs). But it's gorgeous, we have a second floor that's almost entirely a balcony, viewpoint type deal. And you can see all the tennis court, all the matches, from above. Perfect for the parents, keeps them out the way off the court, and is great for tournaments or club nights or community events. (Maria, F, 45, tennis, parent volunteer)

It is important to reiterate that all participants in this study attended clubs that were in affluent areas or considered socio-economically advantaged. The participants' opinions and perceptions, therefore, are those of individuals who have the ability and means to attend youth sporting clubs in a higher SES suburbs. The perceptions of a sporting club 'looking better' or being 'more attractive' may not necessarily mean that the club is, for example, of better quality.

> It does matter than this is a high-income area. It's considered pretty affluent. I would say that is a large contributing factor as to why this club does so well. I don't want to ever sound too pretentious, but yeah, there's less of a money concern on our end [the club] and I'm sure for the members too. I think that sort of, privilege, I guess. We've got a lot of members and so those memberships and fees all add up and with that

> we're able to make upgrades and really provide more than we would have otherwise been able to. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

Importantly, the participants identified various barriers to taking on more responsibilities such as the burden on volunteers, lack of funding, the political and cultural landscape, participation in 'less popular' sports, and the risks of branching out into unknown social issues or responsibilities. The factors that were emphasised the most included lack the lack of funding and grants, the fact that lesser played sports will tend to receive less attention, and the risk of programs and initiatives regarding social issues 'going wrong'. Interestingly, some of the factors that enabled a greater capacity to be involved in and expand social and cultural responsibilities can also work as barriers.

Another major challenge for navigating social and cultural responsibility relates to program sustainability. Concerns for maintaining programs can emerge if stakeholders perceive that clubs are grandstanding in an effort for to solely acquire grant funding (Elliott et al., 2024). To some degree, stakeholder hesitation and wariness is unsurprising considering organised sporting clubs, and sport as a whole, are considered social and economic institutions (Giulianotti, 2015; Selznick, 1996, 2011), and the corporate 'social impact' of sport is often regarded as being "no different than any other industry" (Godfrey, 2009, p. 710). Further, Voinea and Uszkai (2020) discuss that companies and organisations often engage in moral grandstanding to appear moral to customers, members, or audiences. In this sense, it is understandable that club stakeholders prefer passionate individuals to facilitate a program that can be maintained. Additionally, club leaders had concerns surrounding a lack of guidance to "point us in the right direction", the risk of incorrectly promoting or educating about social issues, or not fulfilling claims of inclusionary practices. This was emphasised by club leaders who were cognisant that the responsibilities for maintaining these programs would "most likely fall back on our volunteers" without the tools, guidance, and skills

necessary for long-term sustainability. As such, club leaders identified a potential risk in attempting to maintain initiatives by volunteers who were not specifically educated or skilled in the area, and may not believe in the particular cause. There was also a risk of disappointing or offending young people seeking a safe and inclusive environment.

> Since there is not a direction, it's really the easy and safest option to just be the provider of sport, to just continue on with tennis and our community fundraiser-based events that we do. And to like, be able to conduct trainings, coaching, and tournaments. We do still do some social outreach stuff, like we have our junior mental [health] check-ins, our mixed-disability social tennis, and, um, we're very much advocates for using tennis to introduce and teach new international members, immigrants, about Australia and this area. And I think that lines up well since tennis is such a widely, it's a very international sport. But yeah, the social programs and suggestions really come from either, a) a committee or president sort of wanting to try new things, or b) specific directions from [STATE SPORT ORGANISATION], or c) the members themselves who will sometimes make suggestions. (Cole, M, 52, tennis, club leader)

In addressing concerns about grandstanding or performativity, youth sporting clubs will need to demonstrate an authentic and genuine commitment to the socio-cultural aspects of their sporting program. For instance, organisations could resist 'once-only' efforts to promote mental health, and instead dedicate more opportunities for education, training, and knowledge translation across each respective season (Elliott et al., 2024). These 'once-only' efforts could be avoided through demonstrating self-directed research, or even involvement in academic knowledge translation events, to inform club-based decision making and to promote longevity of social and cultural programs through developing sufficient understanding (Najafloo, 2019; Santos et al., 2022; Schaillée, Spaaij et al., 2019). Clubs may choose to rationalise their commitment to social and cultural responsibility by integrating and aligning their values, policies, mission statements to match their actions and develop their club

culture, which displays a pro-active effort to support social change (Jeanes et al., 2018; Storr, 2021a).

Concerns arose regarding participation in a sport with a smaller membership and player base. Interviews with hockey parents revealed a sentiment that smaller sports offer limited opportunities for exploring social and cultural responsibilities within the club. In a light-hearted remark, one parent compared hockey favourably to sports like badminton and diving, indicating a recognition that the size of the club can compel or reject opportunities for 'off-field' programs and workshops. Another parent echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the perceived impact of the shortage of volunteers on the social and cultural responsibilities in smaller clubs and sports:

> It's about the sport, I think. I mean hockey is far less popular compared to soccer, or footy, even cricket. I think it limits us a bit, as for opportunities. And you just don't see as much, um, extracurricular activities, I suppose. But putting it in perspective, we're surely nowhere near as bad as something like badminton or diving or something (laughs). It just feels as though we're barely hanging in there with sport and mental health promotion being enough on some people's plates, let alone adding extras – there's not enough coaches or people to do anything more. (Kate, F, 48, hockey, parent volunteer)

One of the main challenges that clubs experienced was not knowing whether certain social and cultural responsibilities fell within the role of the club (Robertson et al., 2019). A lack of clarity from sporting organisations and broader social and political influences causes confusion in club leadership. There were many questions about social and cultural responsibilities such as: Should responsibilities that have less direct connection to sport be taught by parents at home? Should it be the responsibility of schools? Why should clubs assume responsibilities that are not related to sport? Why should clubs assume any responsibility at all? These are all extremely important, valid questions and concerns for club leaders to have, especially as there is often pressure to take on new responsibilities, but with

no clear path or guide (Robertson et al., 2019). There is an ongoing broader societal debate about who is responsible for the delivery of social and cultural education and training. For instance, within the schooling context, debate continues to surround what topics should or should not be taught within school-based curriculum (e.g., sexualities education, LGBTQIA+ issues, and religion, to name a few) (Bialystok., 2018; Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt., 2017; Ullman & Ferfolja., 2016). Participants in this study were unsure about which social and cultural topics were most relevant (e.g. transgender inclusion or mental health) and how to navigate support and advocacy for sensitive or 'controversial' topics:

> For example, we don't have, well from what I know or can see from the surface, any transgender people here. You know, and that's not only the players but parents and coaches. Everyone seems to be, their, what do you call it, what they were born as. It's become a confusing topic to be honest. I believe this is an inclusive club, whether you're gay or lesbian, LGBT. And in my personal opinion it's not a big deal, I'm not going to treat you any different because of it. But with the transgender one, I'm not actually sure how a program could be done for that, we just consider ourselves inclusive. (Brandon, M, 42, tennis, club leader)

Similarly, competitive sports are increasingly entangled in determining what social and political topics fall 'in' or 'out' of scope of their social responsibility. To illustrate, while the first pride game in the AFL received strong public support and advocacy, there was still an overwhelming amount of homophobia expressed within media and social media (see Sherwood et al., 2020). This reflects the concern or uncertainty facing many community-based sporting with regard to their role in promoting mental health, diversity and inclusion, and improved social dynamics and relationships through sport.

This question of responsibility is a complex issue and depends on the club context including the leadership team, the club's orientation, beliefs, and values, its resources, facilities, and socio-economic factors, the location, and the number of volunteers. In combination, these collectively affect how and what socially and culturally based programs

and initiatives are implemented within the club. One possible outcome of this debate is that clubs may intensify their focus on the performative elements of youth sport and less so on what might be considered the ancillary or ad hoc 'add-ons' to a youth sporting program. In other words, clubs may simply avoid efforts to deliver a program on enhancing relationships between players, parents, and coaches. This is pertinent for clubs who believe they are already struggling with volunteerism and cannot afford to move away from their core focus (Robertson et al., 2019). Other clubs may cite the importance social and cultural education but maintain a view that other parties (e.g. other volunteers, schools, third-party providers) should deliver these initiatives. Furthermore, this logic might extend to clubs who believe certain social and cultural responsibilities are not relevant to them or are inconsistent with their values and beliefs.

In contrast, clubs may appear compelled to assume responsibility if they are passionate about an issue, if there are supporting government initiatives or programs, or if they claim it is relevant to their sport or club (e.g., many club leaders, parents, and coaches preferred to take on responsibilities such as mental health and inclusion, as they could make direct, relevant connections to sport) (Hurley et al., 2017, 2020). A practical suggestion that club leaders may like to consider is a polling system (either just at a leadership level or a whole-club level) to understand what might be the best fit for their club. Or, as previously mentioned in this discussion, various social and cultural responsibilities can be explored and acknowledged through efforts such as dedication rounds, especially as an approach to gauge members' reactions. These often already exist and are utilised within sporting clubs; however, clubs could also provide an anonymous drop-box for opinions, thoughts, suggestions, and concerns regarding general club operations and social and cultural responsibilities.

4.6 Club orientations, expectations, and values

Within the data, there was a significant focus on clubs' expectations, values, and orientation. While all participants recognised the importance of these aspects, they were particularly important for coaches and club leaders. Indeed, club leaders claimed that the club's orientation reflected in its ethos, values, and goals influenced the overarching club culture. These leaders aspired to reinforce a culture of openness, inclusivity, and friendly interactions, enabling members to engage in a rich club-based program that developed social and cultural responsibility.

The concept of expectations emerged throughout both the individual interviews with parents and coaches and the focus groups with club leaders. However, there was a significant divergence in expectations between stakeholders. The larger clubs with various functions and operations often maintained implicit expectations about parents volunteering their time, committing an appropriate level of involvement in club activities, and embodying the values and ethos of the club. Crucially, club leaders maintained a belief that volunteering was the 'right thing to do, to give back' but could not be enforced, rationalising their strong but implicit expectations of parents:

> There is a sort of expectation that a parent will volunteer when they join the club. I think it just shows the type of person that they are, and that they're willing to put the work into, to contribute here. Most are more than happy to, and in all actuality, they're the parents we know the best. So I guess it's also a way for us to get the parent in the club in order to build a relationship. There's, you know, of course some who don't volunteer, and it's fine, you can't force someone to do so, but they just tend not to seem too interested in the sport, and are a car parent. You only ever see their head in the window (laughs). (Daniel, M, 35, AFL, club leader)

While some clubs have expectations surrounding volunteering, these expectations may stem as an inadvertent attempt to recruit and retain volunteers as a means of developing organisation capacity. Placing expectations such as these could potentially result in the

opposite of what the club is aiming for, whereby parents or coaches feel pressured to volunteer their time and negatively react. Other clubs add to this by stating they have the 'right people':

> We have the right people here, that's why it works. I really think the type of people we have allow the club to work. All very similar mindsets. And as for the expectations, I think that the type of people we foster, they know it's the right thing to do, to be able to give back. (Katy, F, 36, AFL, club leader)

Building on this perspective, both club leaders and parents shared the sentiment that their clubs had reliable, hard-working volunteers with shared attitudes, values, and morals that shape club culture. Non-volunteer parents, in particular, described such volunteers as approachable, bright, welcoming, and possessed a drive and passion for the club and community. Conversely, club leaders often referred to their volunteers as 'being the right people'. They also emphasised the individual's attitude and moral values:

> I think what I mean by the right people is that, well, they've got the drive and passion to do well in their own lives and career, so it would transfer over to sport, if they wanted to volunteer or something. People don't just get high up in a company without putting in the effort and having a strong mindset. (Katy, F, 36, AFL, club leader)

The selection of volunteers is further discussed:

> It takes a bit of getting to know them and figuring out if they're a good fit. But it comes down to their attitude, the way they interact with others, whether they are happy to help out, and then things like their morals and values. That's a key one, the morals, it has to mesh here, it helps, or even the club ethos. (Pause) Which thinking, I couldn't actually tell you what was on there (laughs). (Josh, M, 43, AFL, club leader)

One parent associated high-status jobs with motivation and drive, beneficial traits for the club environment, while also noting the value of volunteers with specialist skills like psychologists for mental health support. Another parent mentioned that those with higher SES often bring additional benefits to the club, such as more opportunities for their children

due to less financial pressure, more available time for volunteering (e.g., able to afford time away from work, two or more cars in the family for transport), increased financial contributions (e.g., multiple children involved, spending more in the canteen), and valuable connections for sponsorships and support of the club's social and cultural responsibilities:

> I mean, not to be too stereotypical, but usually those who are more well-off, I mean not always, but a lot of the time they're driven, motivated individual who earned their way up to where they're at in life. They've dedicated a lot of time to be successful in whatever they're doing. Obviously, I don't think it's as simple as that, but that is definitely a common scenario for sure … And maybe as a club we're lucky to be in the location we are because, like, there's a lot of doctors and physicians, um, psychologists in the area, I'm sure. They would for sure be beneficial in a club to help with mental health stuff and relationships too. (Maria, F, 45, tennis, parent volunteer)

Club leaders however, emphasised the importance of their volunteers, regardless of career, SES, or any other 'additional traits' they may bring to the club. To clarify with club leaders, they were questioned whether these status-based attributes were specifically sought after, in which they indicated that a person's status "didn't really matter" and that it was not a focus when recruiting volunteers. But they did acknowledge that attributes such as time, expenditure, support, and drive could be conflated with SES, which influenced perceptions about ability and attitude:

> I personally don't really care about another person's financial situation, like it doesn't really matter or affects my personal life. But I can see how people might think that well-off people are hard-working people, since they're loaded. But they can also be terrible people with money who got it through dodgy ways [laughs]. A person's attitude and what they stand by, rich or poor, woman or man, that's what matters. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

The clubs who directly supported and recognised both the inherent and organisational value of their volunteers had greater volunteer satisfaction and subsequent involvement. Wicker and Breuer (2014) found that high levels of volunteer involvement result in clubs

with greater organisational capacity; Misener and Doherty (2009) found that effective volunteer management practices in clubs result in higher organisational capacity; and through exploration of volunteers in leadership positions, Cuskelly et al. (2006) found that clubs with volunteers in leadership or committee-based roles had higher organisational effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction. However, the current study found that volunteers (parents, coaches, and other club members) who were appropriately supported by the club had greater general involvement and presence throughout the club; had positive volunteer experiences, satisfaction, and wellbeing; and were more open to being significantly involved in the implementation and facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities (e.g., organisation, planning and leading programs). It is important to note that this was only true if the club provided an appropriate level of support through resources (e.g., information and education) to set volunteers up for success and to alleviate their burden. When this did not occur, coaches without the appropriate level of training or knowledge claimed they could not provide the required support to athletes, and parents perceived that the club did not care or was grandstanding.

> I find that my 'job' as a volunteer is significantly easier when the club provides everything I need. Which is logical right? If there's a program and whoever is running it, they give them an in-depth run down, all the stuff, the equipment the need. Even if someone doesn't usually help out with something like coaching, the club offers to give them training or at the least a break-down of what's needed. (Zac, M, 42, AFL, volunteer coach)

These findings highlight the importance of clubs explicitly identifying the exact roles and tasks to be undertaken by volunteers and to provide appropriate support and resources that enables the implementation of inclusive and diverse, mental health and relationship related responsibilities. Research from studies such as Robertson et al. (2019) and Misener and Misener (2017) also highlights the value of and club reliance on volunteers, how they are

considered an important but scarce resource, and how misalignment of goals risks diminishing the collective capacity of volunteers, so it is crucial for clubs to consider these findings. Indeed, there are various ways clubs can support their volunteers. For instance, club leaders need to know the exact requirements of volunteers involved in the facilitation or implementation of a social responsibility; the club should be transparent about the level of tasks required; there should be plans in place if volunteers cannot fulfil a commitment; and there need to be direct channels of communication between club leaders and volunteers (Nichols et al., 2019). In addition to these, Potts et al. (2019), who explored volunteer stressors, recommended that clubs and organisational bodies focus on coping strategies during coach education programs, and to keep open channels of communications with volunteers to understand stressors and assist in problem solving. While these are some possible ways to know what volunteers require, it is important to acknowledge that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach, and support will differ based on factors such as the club's leadership team, the type of responsibility, the wider sociocultural context of that club or area, and the volunteers themselves (Egli et al., 2014; Nagel et al., 2020).

Club leaders emphasised the critical role of club guidelines, policies and the constitution, which served as a foundation and basis for basic club operations and non-negotiable factors. The rules and policies, which they noted were particularly relevant to parents and coaches, were strictly enforced to ensure members' safety. Club leaders stated that members who purposefully or repeatedly disregarded their policies may be considered unsuitable for the club, as they were striving to promote a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment. As discussed in focus groups, other common policies included codes of conduct, drug and alcohol rules, injuries guidelines, coaching accreditation policies, player rotation guidelines, media consent forms, cyber safety and social media policies, sponsorships policies, weather policies, membership protection policies, a spectators code of

conduct, and Working with Children Checks. These various policies and guidelines underpin the clubs' commitment to maintaining a safe and secure environment:

> They're there to give the club structure and safety of everyone. Some of them are legal requirements, but there are ones like the social media policy that we implemented since the club uses it a lot. (Aden, M, AFL, club leader)

From another club leader:

> And just going back to members misbehaving, there's definitely procedures and warnings that we follow, a lot of that is set by the [SPORTS ORGANISATION] and there's communication there if anything very serious, extreme happens. From what I remember [looking around to other focus group participants], I don't think we've had to deal with anything like that for the past couple of years. We've had a good run. I think that if someone is constantly causing issues with other members then it might be a question as to what's going on and how they fit in here, but regarding anything else, we've not had to ban or request someone leave or anything like that. (Scott, M, AFL, club leader)

In addition to expectations, policies, and guidelines, the clubs' morals, ethos, and messages were perceived as crucial for fostering a cohesive, welcoming, and inclusive club environment. As seen, some clubs in this study have a predetermined set of expectations, values, behaviours, and morals that members are strongly encouraged to adhere to in order to dictate the club environment and cohesiveness. The club culture and cohesiveness are considered key in presenting as a 'cohesive collective' (both internally within the club, and externally), and to set a precedent that allows for acceptance of social and cultural responsibilities. While some clubs in this study found it useful to heavily focus on the behaviours, attitudes, values and morals, and expectations of their members, this may not be a plausible solution for all clubs. Most clubs involved had established slogans, taglines, or logos, which, along with their defined ethos, morals, values, and beliefs, helped present a unified identity internally and outwardly to prospective families and volunteers. One club

member claimed that, by establishing a clear tone and precedent, the club attracted like-minded volunteers, influencing the overall club culture. However, club leaders also noted that, despite their efforts to foster a culture of inclusion, there were instances where new members chose to leave and their voluntary efforts had to be filled by others, which increased organisation stressors surrounding the facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities:

> It is unfortunate, but we have had cases where we get a new member and over the course of the season it's clear that they don't exactly fit the values or ethos that we have. Whether that be due to yelling or bad behaviour at Saturday matches or yelling at their kid. We've never had to specifically ask someone to leave the club, it's never reached that point. But I think they just begin to feel like the odd person out for acting like that, and then find a new club. (Adam, M, 40, AFL, volunteer coach)

In a similar manner:

> People often think that the coaches and players, or the president or whatever sets the tone of the club. But the ones that come here every day, the other volunteer parents that I sit next to every Saturday morning at 8 am, they're the ones that really create the atmosphere, the club. And you often hear about crazy sport parents losing their shit on the sideline, and yeah that can happen, people get frustrated. I definitely get it, trust me. I've been to lots of clubs, as a player and a parent. But not often here that happens. I think it's because, I don't know, it's the environment. Some other clubs, it's just such a norm, well not norm but like, there's always one parent on the weekend that gets riled up, and it's like "Oh, not John again, just ignore it", you know. Toxic environments definitely breed it. (Lewis, M, 48, AFL, parent volunteer)

The literature also considers how sport has been used as a vehicle for the development of values, skills, and behaviours (e.g., positive youth development) (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Hills et al., 2018; Jones, 2011); albeit with much debate about the effectiveness and methods of positive youth development in sport (Bean & Forneris, 2016; Camiré et al., 2022; Coakley, 2016; Holt et al., 2016, 2020). Whilst similar in nature, the themes that developed within this PhD do not completely align with the literature. Noteworthy, while the ethos and

values of the club were perceived as extremely important for the club to establish what is expected, participants also conceded that not many members would be aware of their club's respective ethos and values. Most parents and coaches were able to name general 'positive' attributes (such as honestly, loyalty, good sportsmanship, fun) associated with sporting clubs; however, many did not know what their specific club's values or philosophy were. This perhaps was an indication that the use and function of values and ethos needed to be re-visited and perhaps promoted and implemented throughout the club in pre-season meetings, to ensure effective utilisation as a basis for meaningfully enacting social and cultural programs.

> We do actually have a club slogan and a board that has our ethos on it, but if I'm being honest, I don't think many people actually know what ours are (laughs). I think it's important though, and after this group interview, I think the ethos needs to be made clearer visually, after talking about it now. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

The findings indicated that clubs had clear expectations about members' behaviour, involvement, attitude, and aligning with the values and ethos of the club. A senior coach described the club and its values as an 'interconnected web' – as a positive club culture results in a friendly and inclusive club setting, and a welcoming club ensures all are included and satisfied with their sporting experience, which then could have trickle-down effects. Club leaders stated that, through cultivating a group of individuals with similar values, goals, and mindsets, a community of like-minded individuals would work towards integrating social and cultural responsibilities in sport. Amongst club leaders, parents, and coaches, values such as honesty, good 'sportspersonship', accountability, belonging, fun, inclusivity, and supportiveness were emphasised. There is substantial literature that explores the expectations of the behaviour, attitudes, values and morals of sports parents (e.g., Bonavolontà et al., 2021; Coakley, 2006; Dorsch et al., 2019, 2021; Elliott & Drummond, 2015; Harwood et al., 2019; Knight, 2019; Knight, Dorsch et al., 2016; O'Donnell et al., 2022), coaches (e.g.,

Gould, 2019; Gould et al., 2006; Knight & Harwood, 2009; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Smoll et al., 2011; Van Mullem & Cole, 2015; Weiss & Fretwell, 2005), and athletes (e.g., Atkins et al., 2013; Benson & Bruner, 2018; Elliott et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2011; Merkel, 2013; Vierimaa et al., 2018). Club leaders claim these values set the tone for the club culture, which allows for expansion into exploring social and cultural responsibilities:

> I think for us [AFL club], it tends to be things [values] like passion, drive, courage, and, um, trust too, between the boys. They need to know they can rely on each other but they're also passionate and driven to do well. I do think most of the boys and some of the young blokes need it as a way to connect with other men, so that connectedness and support through that is strong. That's not really plastered around the club anywhere, or anything like that, but it really comes through the coaching and training. (Josh, M, 43, AFL, club leader)

Focus group discussions revealed that the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the membership base crucially influence the club culture and tone. Club leaders stated that when aiming to develop their club culture (over several years) one of the first steps was to develop their club values and attitudes. This occurred through leading by example, visual displays, and in membership agreements or orientation sessions. They found that this approach resulted in a more positive and inclusive club culture which assisted in facilitating openness towards exploring social and cultural responsibilities. An AFL club leader emphasised that there would be more resistance among members when implementing social and cultural responsibility if the initial steps had not been taken surrounding the expectations of members' attitudes and values. To combat well-documented apathy or resistance to operational and social change in community sporting clubs (Cunningham et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2019; Spaaij et al., 2020; Storr, 2021a), clubs sought to recruit players, volunteers and administrators with similar attitudes or values to pursue social and cultural change through sport. Clubs may decide to adopt a more liberal approach to developing their sporting program regardless of the diverse attitudes and preferences of their stakeholders in an attempt

to implement, for instance, a mental health program. Club leaders disclosed that, while the club may promote values such as openness, acceptance, and inclusivity, there are still members who hold opposing beliefs. In these circumstances, such individuals are not compelled to participate in educational sessions, activities, or other social outreach programs – and that mutual respect is a pillar in creating a diverse and inclusive setting:

> I don't think that we'd even be able to get programs or speakers up and running with people attending if no one agreed or thought it wasn't important. I think most people, like even in society, I think most are open but just don't want, like, some social things imposed on them. So, it's kind of like that, definitely have those who are passionate behind our mental health program, and it's definitely encouraged but isn't a requirement. And same with disability too, that's got a lot of support. And thinking of it, I think that social things that people are most open to are the ones that, like, they can have a direct connection to sport, so disability and mental health, inclusion. I know with the rainbow sock rounds, there's a bit less behind that, maybe since it's not directly connected to footy. (Carly, F, 46, AFL, club leader)

From an applied perspective, these approaches may lack generalisability because many clubs do not have the time, ability, or capacity to 'hand select' or turn away members. Clubs in lower-middle-class socio-economic areas may already struggle to engage volunteers and players (Schlesinger & Nagel, 2018; Storr, 2021a), especially since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (Elliott et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2023). Further, clubs presenting strong socio-political views may deter potential members who just want to be involved in sport. Club leaders' decisions about the types of social and cultural programs that should be integrated into a sporting program may lack consensus surrounding cost, delivery mode, frequency, and audience. To this end, it is important for readers to consider how they can enact their social and cultural responsibilities with regard to mental health, social relationships, and inclusion and diversity.

This study found that the cultural orientation of a club influenced implementation and facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities. When discussing club orientation, the

participants established that there are different types of clubs (e.g., clubs that are more competitive/elite based, or that are more family/community based). It was found that being more holistically orientated allowed for easier implementation and consideration of social and cultural responsibility such as mental health and social relationships and helped to reduce stakeholder resistance to change. Across all sports involved in this study, club leaders and coaches noted that, while the clubs have evolved over time to become more community focused, factors such as competition and talent development remain important. While much of the literature advocates for a holistic approach to elite athlete development (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2010; Lee, 2022; Rundio & Buning, 2022; Ryom et al., 2020), this study extends the literature by positing that youth sporting clubs can garner within-club support for facilitating learning and development through the delivery of social and cultural programs. From an AFL perspective, this shift towards a community and family orientation has made the club more accessible to the local community and has attracted more diverse members such as women (volunteers and athletes), young families, and individuals with disabilities through inclusive teams or programs. However, this orientation shift was not the same across all sports. In tennis, club leaders expressed that, while community/family orientation enhanced broader community engagement, it provided an opportunity to further increase club inclusivity:

> It does seem that since encouraging families and adding the women's team, and overall becoming involved in social or community programs, it increases the community sense and attitude around the club. We really encourage, with most things, that both parent and child are involved. Many of the parents know each other from outside the club, and have joined together, so I think that helps that too. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

This perspective was similarly reiterated:

> I have really enjoyed seeing the inclusive team come together, the disability team that is. I know [NAME] mentioned was, it was just before. But I really do, it's so touching seeing some of the older guys come in and help out the inclusive team, coaching them

> and volunteering. Even just coming over every now and then and including them through having a chat or giving footy tips. It's been really nice to see that, the community aspect. (Katy, F, 36, AFL, club leader)

Coaches across all sports noted that, similar to club leaders, they observed greater diversity among club members now, which translated into more volunteer availability. Particularly in Australian football, the family-oriented approach of the club led to increased involvement from entire families. For example, there was a perceived rise in volunteers stepping forward to coach junior teams, girls' and women's teams, and disability teams. Additionally, more females assumed voluntary roles, and with one or more parents getting involved because of their children, club activities often turned into family outings or bonding opportunities. This increase in family involvement was perceived to have contributed to the club being more community-orientated, which was argued to be one of the crucial ways that clubs were able to integrate and facilitate social and cultural responsibilities through programs:

> There's more people around willing to help out. And that's, it's volunteers in terms of voluntary coaching, sideline volunteers, help around the club. There's a lot of mums helping out and they bring the entire family, especially since the kids are out playing or training anyways. And I'm seeing a lot of dads and mums taking up coaching the girls' team. I think it's good bonding too. (Jim, M, 42, AFL, coach volunteer)

Parents within these clubs greatly appreciated the family and community orientation, experiencing many benefits from it. In both Australian football and tennis, parents perceived that their child's involvement in the club opened up more opportunities for their own participation, such as volunteering, attending club social events, and engaging in parent–child training and coaching. The club also served as a place of socialisation for parents, facilitating social interactions among like-minded individuals. Moreover, many families used club days as a family outing, contributing to a more enriching, engaging, and holistic experience:

> It's been a great experience, much better than I thought to be honest. I've felt a bit, disconnected, isolated maybe, socially since becoming a mum. It's been hard to find others, especially since mine [child] is only starting school now. It's been great to meet the other mums. I've been finding I can have a good Saturday here, even though it's early (laughs). Me and some of the others will go get lunch after … (Joanna, F, 34, AFL, parent volunteer)

While clubs may seek to mature their orientation (especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic) to align vision and actions, the themes from this study reiterate the need for sufficient time to truly assess how clubs have navigated and expanded a set of social and cultural responsibilities. Furthermore, sporting organisations may like to create a classification system for clubs to reflect on the breadth and quality of their sporting programs. If such an approach is used as an informal club development tool, it is possible that clubs may be able to generate new ideas that improve social and cultural development within sporting clubs. However, classification systems, if used in a more formal and compliance-driven manner by government or peak sporting bodies, may assist families and individuals in making decisions about joining clubs, inform the criteria for infrastructure and development funding (e.g., different funding opportunities for different categories of clubs, rather than all clubs competing with each another), and ultimately, assist clubs with the facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities (e.g., tailored support and opportunities for family/community clubs from organisations/governing bodies). Of course, this assumes that clubs more broadly prioritise social and cultural responsibilities at the heart of their programs which, of course, may not be optimal if it creates competition with other club priorities (e.g., fundraising, safeguarding, participation and retention). Therefore, it may be important to determine the appropriateness and utility of a classification system.

To conclude, expectations, values, attitudes, and morals; club policy and ethos; club culture; and club orientation are seemingly interconnected and influence one another. The participants perceived that the beliefs, values, and attitudes of those within the club dictate

the club culture, which influences the club's overall orientation. It is vital to consider that the development of a positive club culture is a part of enacting and moving towards social and cultural responsibility, not only for the athletes, but for families and members. Furthermore, the attitudes and values of the club leaders influence the expectations, values and ethos of the club, which in turn also contribute to the club culture and hence its involvement and engagement in social and cultural responsibilities.

4.7 Building reputational and organisational momentum

A culminating theme for this thesis is based on the way in which a club's specific circumstances and reputation create momentum for the sporting club that enables them to engage with social and cultural responsibilities. This theme mostly arose from the perspectives of club leaders, as the subject matter required; however, parents and coaches still had perspectives on this topic too. The particular circumstances (SES, geographical location, facilities, historical standing) of a youth sporting club can influence how a club operates, its capacity, access and opportunity, and what one may reasonably expect regarding social and cultural responsibilities. This may appear surface level or obvious; however, it is very important to recognise such factors to contextualise the youth sporting clubs involved in this study, and how the actions or processes they utilise (combined with their individual circumstances) change their social and cultural responsibility engagement.

A key idea raised in the focus groups was that youth sporting clubs can build on an established positive reputation as a valuable asset for the club's benefit. This discussion initially occurred with the club leaders in focus groups, who brought this idea to the researcher's attention; and in subsequent individual interviews with parents and coaches, this became a line of questioning. Tennis club leaders discussed that the club's reputation was built up or evolved over time and that various factors contributed to the development of this reputation. These factors included the club's long historical standing or early establishment, competitive success and talent, club culture, and interactions with opponents. These factors are discussed throughout this theme.

Within this focus group, two main facets became apparent: the initial recognition that the club had a good reputation and the subsequent development and maintenance of that reputation. The discussion focused on the initial recognition of the reputation. According to club leaders, they were able to recognise that they had a reputation that "followed them"

through word-of-mouth about their competitive success, club actions and processes (including being actively involved in the local community, and social and cultural responsibilities), and through members' interactions with other clubs or individuals. Prior to the recognition of such a reputation, it was not purposely developed, but was rather a by-product of their actions, goals, and values as a club. While these club leaders stated that some actions contributed to the club's reputation (e.g., social outreach, social and cultural responsibilities such as mental health programs), having a prior reputation actually allowed and created more opportunity for some other clubs (AFL, for example) to start being involved in social and cultural responsibilities. This was attributed to being able to 'advertise' the club to other organisations or third parties in order to work with them or have a mutually beneficial relationship (e.g., a sporting club with a large membership base or 'in popular favour' can benefit sponsors or others). This situation is essentially a paradox in which engaging with social and cultural responsibility contributes to a club's reputation, but having an existing reputation opens opportunities to engage with such responsibility.

> We've had a good run, and I think a lot of it came as a slow build up which ended up in our reputation … preceding us, I guess. Like the, I don't think anyone here or way back when purposely sought out and was like, "Oh, we need this thing about us out in the public", but just came from our actions or whatever as a club. (Aden, M, AFL, club leader)

Upholding a positive reputation also served as a method in which clubs were attempting to attract new members and funding as a means to build their organisational capacity – especially when wanting to assume social and cultural responsibilities. In the same focus group, it was added:

> Yes, the actions and just things we thought was normal or what we should do. It wasn't on purpose, but I think after realising that we're the club that's spoke about like this in other circles, it's when we wanted to keep that up. I mean, not only for that

> reason, since it was never initially for that, we want to give our members a good tennis experience … but might as well use it for good. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

Additionally,

> It's one of those things where we're very fortunate to be in the position that we're in and I'm not sure if its necessarily something that is easily replicable or, or even explainable. I know some of it comes from word of mouth from our members about our sort of, the environment in the club and the wins we get, the development of our athletes. There's that and the way, I think, we conduct ourselves at away games or with other clubs. (Claudia, F, 67, AFL, club leader)

After the initial recognition of a club's reputation, some clubs further developed, maintained, and utilised it for their benefit. The benefits of having a 'good reputation' varied between the clubs; however, common points included being able to continue engaging with the community, furthering social and cultural responsibility, greater opportunities for sponsorships and collaborations, and increasing their membership base and number of players. In order to develop and maintain a club's reputation and status, strategies were utilised (although, as mentioned, they were not always purposeful actions), such as building a social media platform, increased engagement with social and cultural responsibilities and community outreach, upgrades to facilities and services, hiring more staff and quality coaching, athlete development, positive parent and player behaviour, and even reaching out and offering other clubs advice if wanted. But clubs in this research felt significant pressure surrounding the maintenance and consistency of their 'success' and reputation surrounding social and cultural programs. The findings revealed that some club leaders perceived that it was harder to 'keep a good thing going' than the initial challenges presented in the navigating and learning stages of social responsibility. Similarly, evolving socio-political climates, leadership, and poor reputation served as stressors. It is important to consider these in the context of clubs concerned about making 'downgrades' to their sporting program (and

reputation), which may result in reluctance to explore social and cultural responsibilities due to concerns of sustainability, reputation, and adverse stakeholder reactions, as similarly found by Storr (2021a). The club leaders voiced, however, that being able to do this was 'fortunate' and almost occurred in a 'snowball manner', in that it occurred over time and each action led to more opportunities.

> It's been good to have it [reputation] but it's not necessarily something that was purposefully done. I just think the actions we've made has resulted in it. There's some things that have surely helped us, though, like we have decent on-field performance, we've got people hired in the club to help us and make it a bit more professional in that sense, we really stepped up with social media. And I don't think there's any secret to it, we've just been in a good position and it's just, snowballed sort of manner. Financially that support is obviously important. You know, I know some of the other [club leaders] at [other clubs] and I'm always happy to help out and offer support or advice. (Jed, M, AFL, club leader)

A volunteer coach stated:

> I'm not sure if it's a reputation thing or if people see and like what we do in the club, or if it's purely a sporting performance thing, but we get so many people wanting to join at the beginning of a season that we had to start waitlisting and being picky with who joins. Not for any reason other than just having a large amount of members already and the teams we've put forward are completely filled. (Zac, M, 42, AFL, volunteer coach)

A key strategy utilised among most of these clubs was social media for engagement and communication (keeping parents 'in-the-loop'). While the use of social media and online applications to communicate with parents and players, schedule teams, and view results is established within the literature (see e.g., Gould., 2019; O'Donnell et al., 2022), this study extends current understanding about youth sporting clubs directly using social media as a promotional tool for recruitment and increasing social and cultural program awareness. Creating an online presence, establishing a design concept, and posting content on a recurrent

schedule (i.e., thematically matching club logos, and post consistency) was beneficial in displaying the clubs' values, successes, and social and cultural programs to increase 'brand' awareness. These findings are supported, although in studies about non-professional sporting clubs, by Marthinus et al. (2024) and Nisar et al. (2018) who state that social media can increase customer interactivity, spectatorship, recruitment and memberships, brand awareness, sponsorships, storytelling, and information sharing. The current study indicates that clubs can further develop their capacity to support program design and delivery by using social media to retain and grow their volunteer and member base, constituting an important method for sustained club-based social responsibility.

While some clubs have had success in purposefully building a positive reputation, storytelling, and promotion via social media, there are undoubtedly implications for clubs more broadly. Firstly, club leaders may like to establish how social media content is created, and who the driver behind this is. A social media plan could be created to establish what is posted, what they would like to show of the club, and the frequency of posts. This is a feasible step that most clubs could take (i.e., timely, and cost-effective), with either club leaders or other volunteers assisting. Clubs may also feel compelled to use social media to promote their programs as they may reach a wider audience and recruit players whom they may not have previously had access to. This is especially true when considering specialised programs or teams, where potential members may be looking for a disability team, and discover it through club's social media. There are risks associated with using social media, such as online abuse and harassment (O'Donnell et al., 2022). Clubs should carefully consider who will control their social media, the frequency of use and type of posts they would like to promote, and whether certain safety measure or bounds should be put in place (e.g., private accounts/groups or pages for members only) (O'Donnell et al., 2022). There are opportunities for sporting organisations, local governing bodies, and policy makers to create

guidelines or 'tips' for clubs utilising social media. This could include general social media usage tips, how to address online abuse or critical reviews, online safety and safeguarding, and ideas for posts.

While reputation thus far has been mostly attributed to community and social engagement, sporting performance, and interactions. Many club leaders, parents, and coaches did discuss influencing factors such as SES, geographical location and access, and historical standing. The suburbs and where the clubs were located were described as "well-off", "affluent", and "wealthy". Sampling community sporting clubs in high SES areas was not a purposeful choice; rather the clubs and participants who volunteered happened to be from such areas. During the focus groups, the topics of status and wealth were raised during discussion about how, and whether, SES, opportunity, wealth, and access impact a club's ability to engage with social and cultural responsibilities. There were a range of responses; however, it was particularly interesting to hear the mix of opinions on this topic in one focus group:

> Q: I heard in an earlier answer that you mentioned that you think this area would be considered affluent. Do you think this has any impact or changes how you address social and cultural responsibilities or education? How so?
>
> Oh definitely, I mean everything is about money, isn't it? You have more opportunities when there's money, you know. I'd say there's a lot of parents with some nice incomes that are here. Not everyone is though, I do know. But just generally the facilities are kept together a bit better. In the local community, there's less sort of petty crime or youth concerns. The massive interest and amount of members helps. Since there's so many members and people willing to help and volunteer, I'd say there's, there's just a bit more development or plan even. (Alex, M, 43, AFL, club leader)

This study prompts consideration of the challenges clubs faced in implementing social and cultural responsibilities despite their socio-economic contexts and resources. It is shown

throughout the literature that associations between SES and youth sport are complex. To demonstrate complexity, it was found in a study by Eime et al. (2015) that when SES increased, physical activity also increased; however, participation in team sports increased as SES decreased. This research, however, found that even youth sporting clubs situated in affluent communities rely heavily on volunteers (and struggle with high turnover), similarly to clubs in any other socio-economic context (Robertson et al., 2019). Many clubs involved still struggled to attract, engage, and retain long-term volunteers; but were still identified as assuming social and cultural responsibilities (Schlesinger & Nagel, 2018). Whilst the struggles surrounding volunteer retainment are acknowledged, this study also found that factors such as facilities, accessibility, community orientation, and social and cultural visibility draw the interest of parents and coaches (potential volunteers), and young athletes. So, whilst many of these clubs had these types of 'attractive' features, were able to promote and develop reputation, and, in fact, a large membership base of potential volunteers, the engagement and retainment of volunteers remained an issue. A club leader from the same focus group added:

> I think there's parts of what you said that are spot on, like the public areas about being kept good or a, like, concentration of higher incomes and money to spend (laughs). But I'm not sure if that's something that actually helps us have our, like the way we value things. Like, we definitely value mental health and in young men, but I think that's something that is valued across the board. Like in any area, rich or poor. I think it's just having the time and drive to put a spotlight on those things. Like, ours are probably, like you said, maybe a bit more developed and does have some money put into them, but there's a starting point for everyone, no matter the financial situation. There's free resources out there and, even if you don't have the space or people to sit everyone down, you can always put a couple flyers around the place with hotlines or whatever, or just have a chat if someone needs it. Even if that's all you can do, it can create momentum … (Noah, M, 45, AFL, club leader)

Some parents also suggested that certain careers or jobs could be indicative of an individual's personality and values. They expressed that individuals or families with high-paying or successful careers (where high income also seemed to be a method of measuring success) were perceived as 'hard-working' or driven. This assessment was solely based on their career, income, or SES. They also mentioned that, although this was an initial perspective, and perhaps an assumption, an individual's values, goals, and attitude are truly more important than their income.

> I mean we're in a pricey area. A lot of the people who go to the club are white, middle- to upper-class people. I am of the opinion that those who do well in their jobs or careers are generally very determined or passion, no not passionate, but they can apply themselves. I don't mean that in a bad way or anything, or to sound, you know. But it's all very harmonised, it works together well. (Maria, F, 45, tennis, parent volunteer)

Additionally, some coaches and club leaders discussed the extra 'free time' of high-income families. An Australian football coach stated that in families who had a single high-income stream (i.e., one person working), other family members could, for example, dedicate more time to their children, sport, and volunteering. I shared this thought with some club leaders, who also perceived that it was possible that they had many volunteers due to the families in the area having more time outside of work. This was more of a thought, however, as they were unsure if this was the main reason, a contributing factor, or if the abundance of volunteers was due to completely other factors:

> And I know a couple mums don't have to worry about working, so they've got a bit more time to spare to spend with their kids, which a lot of the time is at the club. I don't know if that's why we maybe have a whole lot of volunteers, or if that is because of other things. (Kyle, M, 28, AFL, volunteer coach)

While volunteerism is a crucial ingredient for maintaining social and cultural-based programs, volunteerism comprises a key challenge. Clubs, therefore, require greater support

and training to ensure that mental health, diversity and inclusion, and relationship-oriented programs are not undermined by a transient volunteer work force. In practice, club leaders and volunteers placed implicit, unspoken expectations on parents to volunteer while their child was participating at the club. There were also assumptions from club leaders surrounding parents' socio-economic circumstances and careers in relation to volunteering (e.g., if higher income families have one stream of income, the other parent can spend more time at the club); and parental family set-ups (e.g., assuming young mothers are better at some volunteer roles, such as social media) (Egli et al., 2014). The expectations and assumptions made by some club leaders are seemingly reinforcing gendered and classist stereotypes; and may indeed repel parents from being long-term volunteers, or in fact, volunteering at all. This could potentially have trickle-down effects on the implementation and facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities, where the lack of casual and long-term volunteers has the potential to cause instability and inconsistency in programs being run (Schlesinger et al., 2013).

One of the other factors that was considered influential to a club's reputation and overall ability to engage in social and cultural responsibility was geographical location. A sporting club's location was considered beneficial if it was embedded within the community, near housing, and was in close proximity to public transport (e.g., bus stops and train stations), other sporting clubs, community centres, and schools. Such factors were considered important because they allowed those within the local community to easily access the club, often on foot, it creates a 'sporting centre' experience when near other clubs or facilities, and it becomes the local club of those in surrounding schools. Also, as mentioned previously, the local community and facilities were seen to be 'kept well', which in turn created an environment that felt safer, cleaner, welcoming to families and young people, and "got people

socialising out in the community more", which benefitted all surrounding places including the sporting clubs:

> With that, you know, the location of any sort of communal place is really important. I know here we've got a bunch of bus stops out on the main road. There's a tram stop not too far either. And we're surrounded by other sporting clubs too. There's a tennis club right over there (points) … there's also a couple of primary schools in close proximity, so obviously that's great, good since we've got a lot of young ones here, it's easy to get to for them. It's in general, it's just, it's very embedded amongst all these houses, we'll often see a couple of our members just walking across the oval from their house to get here (laughs), very easy trip. (Ryan, M, 46, AFL, volunteer coach)

Club legacy was discovered to be an inadvertent way in which club reputation was developed. The idea of a long historical standing or early establishment was mainly raised in the tennis and AFL clubs included in this study, with some having been established over 100 years ago. These clubs that were established early were considered impressive to some of the club leaders and parents, who appreciated that the club had history and "hard work behind it". This study found that this was used as a promotional point to positively influence outsider perceptions about the club (i.e., 'we've been doing it well for this long') as a means for recruitment and expanding voluntary capacity. Some participants felt that the historical standing and success of the club should be maintained, and they wanted to "continue the legacy". On-field or on-court success and a strong family presence (i.e., a family or community orientation) were considered a way to continue such a legacy or success.

While there is some literature that discusses the use of legacy in marketing and major-sporting events (i.e., Grix et al., 2017; Bob & Swart, 2010), it is sparsely seen throughout youth sporting literature. This current study builds upon current research in youth and community sport by considering the use of legacy as promotion in youth sporting clubs, specifically as a means for recruitment to develop capacity for social and cultural

responsibility. While some clubs in this research utilised their legacy and reputation, it is important to acknowledge that broadly, not all clubs can simply utilise this as a means for promotion (i.e., new clubs, or less-than-optimal reputation), and that this is a particular niche benefit some clubs have used for promotion and recruitment. However, it was found that club legacy and reputation was maintained through on-field or on-court success, advocating for a holistic approach to the club, and through having a strong family presence (i.e., a family or community orientation). This provides a more accessible point for clubs to begin to develop their reputation, increase recruitment efforts, and thus build capacity for social and cultural responsibility.

> We've still got generations of families who were here since the beginning. It's important to capture that, and um, almost pay respect to those who started it. There's a couple families where we'll see the grandparent, parent, and the child come in, all three generations having played, or playing here. There's not too many, not often, but … sport has that power. I think that the history, or the long standing of the club gives us legs. It's a point that we can use and say that "We've been doing it well for all this time". (Emma, F, 55, tennis, volunteer coach)

An additional perspective from a club leader:

> I think it's amazing that we recently-ish, we celebrated our 100th anniversary. We made a big club event out of it. Tennis is really, it's an older sport, right. But it's still very cool that we're a part of something that started 100 years ago, and that we've continuing on its legacy and still producing quality players. One of the points that came up in at the 100th night was that the club has had a couple of players who have gone through to Grand Slams, even winning. You know [NAME], obviously he became massive, and is still important to tennis now. (Holly, F, 40, tennis, club leader)

Similarly, the use of legacy was seen in club efforts to promote elite or professional athletes previously apart of the club. Again, while this practice may not be feasible for most clubs in youth sport, this does further the youth sporting literature about youth sporting clubs

using this as a promotional tool. This practice, while slightly differing, is very similar to what has been highlighted in the current body of literature as a champion of change (e.g., Elliott et al., 2024; Maxwell et al., 2013; Walton et al., 2022). A champion of change refers to establishing, maintaining, and reinforcing education about a particular topic (i.e., mental health, inclusion and diversity, social relationships) through an influential individual (such as, a professional athlete). Adopting such a practice in youth sporting clubs may provide a starting point for clubs to promote and develop their social and cultural responsibilities, assuming they can readily identify and provide their champion of change the prior information for educating (Elliott et al., 2024). To this point, clubs may like to collaborate with local sporting clubs to 'share' champions of change if they do not have or cannot identify an individual; or clubs may like to utilise professional athletes as champions of change by utilising prior media that displays an athlete advocating for a social issue (i.e., YouTube videos, interviews, documentaries). This comprises an opportunity for sporting organisations to create spaces for elite or professional athletes, or other types of champions of change, to visit youth sporting clubs or hold specific events for stakeholders to attend.

Throughout the individual interviews and focus groups, reputation and its influencing factors (SES, geographical location, and historical standing) were mentioned in conjunction with 'momentum'. Specifically, AFL club leaders from one club first voiced this term in a similar fashion to reputation; however, they stated that reputation created momentum for the club. Momentum, according to this focus group, drew on different factors (such as reputation, sporting success, advertising, sponsorships, quality coaches, positive club experiences, positive club interactions with outsiders) that propelled and "got the club's name out there" to bring in interest and players. It was also used as a way to increase opportunities for players, and broaden capacity to be involved in social and cultural responsibilities. This, however,

was acknowledged to differ from club to club, because of their specific circumstances (e.g., the influencing factors of SES and location):

> I know that this club, I've been to others, but this one seems to be able to create the momentum into more. It's what we've been talking about with reputation and stuff, but all of that feeds into the momentum to bring in more, or to be able to do more. Maybe it has a different name elsewhere, but it's how we've coined it. It's almost like marketing, but not always on purpose. It's just something that we pick up on and push forward more. I think our specific circumstances help that, it's probably not a one solution type thing for every club or anything. (Aden, M, AFL, club leader)

Another club leader claimed:

> It's important, important to be able to recognise what you're good at or what is being reflected publicly of the club. That needs to be recognised to then workshop how those public receptions can be favourable. Especially if you've got teams in high leagues or divisions. We've got a women's and men's state league team, but not every club in the association has got that. So, it's definitely a, like a point that's, a selling point. You never know who is looking to join a new club, and if they've got the skill and ability to play at that level, they're probably looking at clubs that can support that. (Andre, M, 47, tennis, club leader)

Momentum was also used as a term for something that started out at a smaller scale and slowly evolved into something bigger (such as social and cultural responsibilities). Club leaders explained that "there has to be a starting point", and this was specifically mentioned regarding change of image and re-orientating the clubs' values and goals. An example given was disability sport and coaching, in that having an individual coach who is knowledgeable about adaption and inclusion for one athlete meant the club could slowly build over time to a full team. Subsequently, some coaches considered that having a reputation for or public awareness about a sought-after team (e.g., disability inclusive, women's teams) contributed to the momentum and club development:

> It builds over time. It could be something small, like having a coach with experience with coaching kids with disabilities. It, um, it started with one, and then others heard about it, got involved, and now we've got a whole team and coaching dedicated for those with a disability. Or even something like, creating a club slogan or nickname or chant. It catches on over time and become the identity of the club. (Liam, M, 31, tennis, volunteer coach)

This theme clearly highlighted that the key ideas emerging from the data were reputation and momentum. Club leaders were able to identify and utilise or develop a positive reputation to create or 'kick off' momentum. Two facets of reputation were identified: initial recognition of reputation, and the subsequent development and maintenance of reputation. Coaches and club leaders recognised that reputation was spread via word of mouth, competitive success, and club actions and processes, and influenced the momentum within a club. Having momentum within a youth sporting club was associated with a general positive incline of interest from external individuals, increased finances, and opportunities to expand social and cultural responsibilities.

4.8 Limitations of this research

One of the main limitations of this study surrounded the COVID-19 pandemic and related challenges. Social distancing restrictions as enforced by South Australian state and national governments were present during the data collection phase; this impacted how the face-to-face interviews and focus groups were conducted. In these circumstances, participants were offered online interviews via Zoom or Teams; however, in doing this, field notes with observations of participant behaviour, physical expressions, and other descriptions that may not be captured over audio recordings were more difficult to obtain. Also, opportunities to fully immerse oneself in the club setting (e.g., observing how clubs function, sitting in on committee meetings) were somewhat limited.

In addition to the challenges posed by COVID-19, another potential limitation related to the criteria developed to identify sporting clubs that supported recruitment. The Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing played a crucial role in identifying 'the best' clubs based on their social and cultural programs and initiatives. However, these recommendations were based on previously identified clubs – winners of various community-based or organisational awards, and clubs with a high ranking in the STARCLUB Club Development Program. These identified clubs were all also situated in high socio-economic, thus potentially limiting a range of perspectives and considerations. While this approach to recruitment was a strength of the study, whereby clubs fulfilled specific requirements; it is possible that clubs of broader contexts not identified through this criteria are successfully navigating social and cultural responsibility.

Another limitation of this study was that it did not capture the voice of athletes and volunteers outside of parents, coaches, and club leaders. This research may have benefited from utilising the voice of the athlete to consider their perspective regarding social and cultural responsibilities. This is especially important since many programs, initiatives, and

teams are developed for young athletes with the goal of increasing personal development, inclusivity, education and awareness of social concern. Furthermore, volunteers were included in this study; however, only within the roles of parent volunteers, coaches, and club leaders – there may have been volunteers outside these roles whose experiences and perceptions could have been included in the research.

A final limitation is that there could have been greater variation of the sporting codes included in this research. While the sporting clubs involved offered Australian rules football, tennis, surf lifesaving, netball, and hockey, more participants from diverse sporting backgrounds could have been included. In addition to this, within the study itself, there were limited participants from hockey, netball, and surf-life saving compared to AFL and tennis. Meaning that there was a greater number of participant voices from AFL and tennis. Increasing participant diversity may have added additional perspectives and experiences about social and cultural responsibilities which would have resulted in potential recommendations for specific sports.

4.9 Strengths of this research

One of the key strengths of this study was that it took a unique approach to the research. This study did not take a deficit stance regarding the phenomenon at hand; it took a strengths-based approach to develop understanding. Rather than researching why youth sporting clubs struggle to facilitate and navigate social and cultural responsibilities, this study investigated the 'best' clubs which allowed for greater exploration of the mechanisms that support club capacity to deliver broader programs which enhance social and cultural responsibility. In doing so, a strengths-based approach provides the basis for developing practical recommendations for other clubs seeking to expand their youth sport program.

A strength of this research is that it strongly aligns with current South Australian state government priorities (those of the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (SA)) and provides insights into the ways in which clubs can support broader responsibilities. For instance, the *Club of the future: More than sport* framework (Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing, 2021) emphasises the broader benefits of sporting clubs, and the governing bodies' commitment to supporting clubs and their broader responsibilities. This research, therefore, has the potential to support policy and club development initiatives designed to assist clubs' exploration, navigation, and facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport.

The number of participants that were involved in this research was also a strength. From the individual interviews and focus groups, a total of 46 individuals participated. It is to be acknowledged that within the methodology chapter it was stated that having a specific number of participants for data saturation is not consistent with the values of relativist ontology or reflexive thematic analysis, as utilised in this study. But this large participant group is a strength of the research as it contributes to the robustness and methodological rigor of the findings and thesis overall.

This research makes an original contribution to the youth sporting literature more broadly. As per the literature review, very little research has specifically focused on the role of the youth sporting club in delivering 'off-field', extra-curricular activities which have been conceptualised as social and cultural responsibility. While the literature review has explored numerous examples of club-based social and cultural responsibility through the lens of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Knight, 2019; McShan & Moore, 2023; Santos et al., 2024), mental health (e.g., Breslin et al., 2022; Eather et al., 2023), and diversity and inclusion (e.g., Drummond et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2019), an explicit exploration of community-based clubs' role in delivering on these responsibilities remains an oversight in the published stock of knowledge. To this end, one of the strengths of this PhD research is that the study has

tackled a new and noteworthy topic, with the potential to make a strong contribution to the youth sporting literature and specifically, knowledge about the environmental subsystem (Dorsch et al., 2022) influencing youth sport development and participation outcomes.

4.10 Conclusion

Overall, this integrated findings and discussion chapter has explored the nuanced and multifaceted ways youth sporting clubs navigate, interpret, and enact social and cultural responsibilities. Through the six core themes, the findings demonstrate that youth sporting clubs are complex systems where various structural, cultural, social, interpersonal, and environmental factors shape how clubs understand and enact responsibility in the form of programs and initiatives. Additionally, the themes offered various insights into the practices, challenges, and capacities that can significantly affect how clubs assume social responsibility.

The findings revealed that club efforts toward assuming social responsibility surrounding inclusion and diversity, mental health, and social relationships is shaped by adequate volunteer capacity and support, leadership authenticity and approaches, perceived program relevance to sport, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement and skill acquisition, and community collaboration. Interestingly, the key findings are all mechanisms clubs are undertaking that builds organisational capacity to implement or further develop the clubs' readiness to assume responsibility. These strategies, albeit sometimes inadvertent or experimental, did not always occur at once, rather, they developed through various leaders, stakeholders, and volunteers at different periods of time. This underscores that club efforts put toward capacity building was a dynamic and evolving process that occurred through trial and error, was tailored to stakeholder needs, and initially delivered through low burden means (such as dedication rounds); which ultimately allowed clubs to assume social responsibility without compromising their core sporting focus.

In closing, this chapter has contributed new theoretical and practical knowledge surrounding sporting clubs and how they navigate and cultivate the provisions to assume social and cultural responsibility in youth sport. These original contributions to knowledge especially highlight the meaningful, context-specific, and capacity-building informed

approaches that are crucial for clubs to establish internal organisational structures and evolve beyond mere tokenistic and underdeveloped attempts at social programs and initiatives. The following chapter will explore the recommendations for practice and future research that have been derived from these findings and insights.

5. CONCLUSION

> Doctoral theses are characterised by making original contributions to knowledge. Conclusion chapters include factual, conceptual and secondary conclusions, agendas for future research, critiques of the research and, if appropriate, recommendations for action. (Trafford et al., 2014, p. 52)

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of the conclusion chapter is to wholly summarise the thesis and revisit the research objectives. The conclusion chapter of this thesis will clearly highlight and call attention to the original and significant contributions that this research has made both on its own, and in regard to the existing body of literature. Aligning with the use of an interpretive description methodology, there will be a significant focus on the practical implications of the findings and recommendations for practice and research. Overall, this research sought to develop understandings of how sporting clubs understand, perceive, and enact social and cultural responsibility and to further knowledge surrounding best practice within wider responsibilities through a thorough, rich, interpretive exploration in youth sporting clubs.

5.2 Significant findings and contributions

This thesis provides an in-depth, interpretive understanding of how youth sporting clubs perceive, engage with, and enact social and cultural responsibility in Australia. The research focuses on how these sporting club navigate initiatives related to diversity and inclusion, social relationships, and mental health – areas which have been underexplored in the literature from the perspective of club-based responsibility. While research has previously examined these lines of inquiry as disparate topics, or within the corporate social responsibility literature, this study shifts the focus to local, community-based sporting clubs, where the realities of social and cultural change are negotiated on the ground.

The significance of this research cannot be understated at a time when Australian state government bodies are actively identifying issues and needs within clubs, allowing adaption that supports the clubs' future development (e.g., *Game On* report) (Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing, 2021), and the *Inclusive Sport Framework* (Australian Sports Commission, 2018). ORSR has demonstrated interest in this research, particularly in its implications for upskilling clubs, supporting club leaders, and sustaining educational programs aimed at fostering social and cultural change.

Although this PhD thesis focused on leading youth sporting clubs – those considered to be the models of best practice – it offers a foundation for clubs at all stages of development. By examining the actions, process, capacities, and challenges involved in successfully navigating social and cultural initiatives, this study comprises a blueprint for clubs seeking to initiate, develop, or sustain such programs. While the findings and subsequent recommendations offer a 'roadmap' for aspirational change, they also highlight the complexities involved, including potential resistance clubs may face when attempting to broaden to their social responsibilities.

A key finding of this research was that even the most successful clubs experience difficulties in navigating, maintaining, or facilitating social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport. While it is well-established within the literature that Australian youth sport is largely driven by volunteers who operate within not-for-profit structures (Robertson, 2019; Misener & Doherty, 2014), this study found that the increasing pressure to assume broader responsibilities caused uncertainty and resistance among club leaders and volunteers. Although the clubs in this study successfully navigated many of these challenges, their ability to do so was often influenced by their socio-cultural and political contexts. Notably, all clubs involved in this study were situated in higher socio-economic areas, where stronger financial foundations, funding opportunities, and access to resources and facilities helped mitigate

some of the stressors associated with manage social responsibility. It is worth highlighting that results may have differed if this research was conducted in various club contexts, such low socioeconomic metropolitan areas, regional, or rural and remote areas.

An additional key finding of this research relates to the central role of volunteers in the delivery of social and cultural programs. While club leaders were responsible for decision-making, the successful implementation of these initiatives relied heavily on parents and coaches acting as volunteers. As such, the effectiveness and sustainability of these programs was largely dependent on the ability, education, motivation, and organisational capacity of these volunteers. Clubs that provided appropriate training, information, resources, and recognition created an engaged and capable volunteer base, which was crucial for program sustainability. Conversely, volunteers became apathetic towards the facilitation of social and cultural programs if clubs lacked structured volunteer support.

Overall, the themes developed, and the subsequent discussion provide useful suggestions for clubs (and more broadly sporting organisations and governing bodies) to consider surrounding policy and governance; the production of guides, suggestions, education, and resources; and clarity about expectations, to ensure that social and cultural responsibilities are not left to chance or wholly disregarded.

5.3 Recommendations for practice – sporting clubs

The following recommendations for practice are based on the interpretive work contained in this thesis. While it is acknowledged that community sporting clubs may display differential levels of readiness (Elliott et al., 2024) for social and cultural change, the following recommendations may usefully be applied as starting points for club consideration or as markers for aspirational change. The following recommendations for practice have been

sorted thematically to best match the outcomes and original contribution to knowledge made in this thesis, as well as provide readers with sections that may be more applicable to them.

5.3.1 Volunteer support, retention, and recognition to build organisational capacity

1. To address club and volunteer capacity, clubs need to be aware of not 'overloading' volunteers. Leaders should provide volunteers with the appropriate resources (e.g., sporting equipment, coaching tools); information and knowledge about the task/role prior to involvement; be transparent about the commitment required; and provide responsive channels of communication between club leaders and volunteers – as this is crucial in setting up volunteers for success and to alleviate burden. To achieve this, resources and advice is readily available via the Australian Sports Commission's National Volunteer Action Plan (Australian Sports Commission, 2022) which can assist club leaders in supporting their volunteer's involvement at the club.
2. To sustain social and cultural responsibilities, clubs must address volunteer burnout and dropout and recognise the intrinsic value of volunteers. Visible and appreciative recognition and acknowledgement of volunteers' efforts, contributions, value, burdens and boundaries is crucial in developing and maintaining positive relations between the club and volunteers. The Australia Sports Commission National Volunteer Action Plan (Australian Sports Commission, 2022) will assist in developing leadership that provides clear directions, honesty, and trust that fosters healthy volunteer cultures which minimise burdens and stressors regarding social and cultural responsibility. The National Volunteer Action Plan provides an important rationale for celebrating volunteerism, which may catalyse club-based activities to acknowledge their efforts.
3. To recognise and maintain volunteer efforts specific to facilitating social and cultural responsibilities, it is important that clubs create opportunities for volunteers to socialise and form relationships, as well as being heard and appreciated. Clubs should consider

providing opportunities such as presentation nights (volunteer awards/thanks), volunteer raffles and gifts, volunteer social nights, and physical/visible presentations of gratitude (e.g., certificates or cards), and support athlete involvement in recognising and celebrating volunteer efforts.

4. Club leaders need to prioritise and invest time in engaging their volunteer workforce. Understanding the volunteers' lives, children/families, jobs, passions, and skills and goals may assist in matching volunteers with opportunities that support the delivery of mental health, inclusion and diversity, or interpersonal relationships training and education. This should be considered when clubs want to build loyal, strong relationships with volunteers who assist with undertaking social and cultural responsibilities.
5. To optimise the skills of volunteers, clubs might consider surveying volunteers to learn more about their skills and experiences which would be ideally suited to specific volunteer roles. Clubs can utilise generative AI technology as a means for creating a basic survey for this purpose; using such technology is also timely and low-cost. Alternatively, clubs may reach out to other clubs and organisations and request access to an established survey which has been used for capturing information about their respective volunteers.
6. Clubs may choose to develop the skills of volunteers in current roles by providing the necessary training or information. This could occur through periodic meetings with club leaders that provide volunteers with role-specific knowledge (via presentations, videos, booklets, toolkits).

5.3.2 Club culture, values, and orientation

1. To move towards a cohesive, positive, and healthy club culture (and to respond to social responsibility), clubs should have clear expectations of members' behaviour, involvement, and attitudes, and strive to ensure stakeholders embody the values and ethos of the club. To improve members' attitudes and to re-frame expectations, clubs should

consider what their club values, morals, expectations, and ethos are. It is important to display and reinforce these in instances such as at beginning and mid-season meetings, in membership forms and agreements, club social events and nights, and through slogans or ethos statements presented visibly within the club. This visible representation of club beliefs or philosophy was associated with positive club environments that were more open to the introduction and facilitation of social and cultural responsibilities.

2. Clubs wanting to increase acceptance of (or reduce resistance to) social and cultural responsibilities should consider developing or shifting their club orientation. A shift of orientation can be facilitated by revisiting and displaying club values, beliefs, mission statements, policies, and making club-based decisions in line with such changes. Community or family-based orientations allow for more holistic understandings within the club environment, which assists in the integration of various social and cultural responsibilities.
3. Clubs may like to expand their promotional materials and celebrate the social and cultural activities embedded within their sporting program. There is potential for recruitment of new members as a result, which can increase organisational capacity to adopt or integrate social change.

5.3.3 Club capacity assessment, planning, building, and sustainability

1. Sporting organisations should undertake a club-based assessment to identify their current capacity (e.g., volunteer capacity, coach skills, facilities) to support the implementation of social or cultural programs. Such a framework may like to consider factors such as facilities, volunteers, coaches, finances, and skills, which will assist in directing clubs about what broader responsibilities they have the capacity to explore within the club, alongside their core focus.

2. For clubs who have limited capacity, club leaders should be selective about their social and cultural involvement and what they can offer to their stakeholders. So, to establish a program of social and cultural growth within a youth sporting club, leaders may seek to evaluate what type of social issues/topics would be most relevant to their stakeholders. This evaluation may occur through a whole club voting process, an anonymous opinions drop-box, or through dedication rounds for a cause (e.g., to gauge participant attitudes and responses). The 'trialling' programs and initiatives through dedication rounds can be low-cost, timely, and scalable; and may include Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, or disability perspectives.
3. While many clubs navigate increasing expectations to support a range of broader social and cultural responsibilities, clubs should only commit to programs, initiatives, or activities that can be sustained. In this regard, clubs should not feel compelled to deliver every possible program or activity. Rather, clubs may choose to only assume responsibility if they are passionate about an issue, there are supporting government initiatives or programs, or if they believe it is pertinent to their club.
4. To increase the consistency, reliability, and sustainability of programs and initiatives, clubs should be able to be flexible, adaptive, and responsive in how social and cultural programs are facilitated. Rather than volunteers being organisers, facilitators, and leaders of programs, clubs may need to allocate a team of individuals who specifically work on the development and implementation of social and cultural responsibilities. If a team of individuals are not readily available, clubs might consider other opportunities to collaboratively share the responsibility (e.g., via school or university placements). This will decrease the burden of responsibility on the volunteers and thus increase interest and participation of volunteers in social and cultural responsibilities.

5.3.4 Community engagement and local collaboration

1. To increase capacity and resources for social and cultural responsibilities and programs, clubs should utilise a community-centred approach to form connections with and collaborate with other sporting clubs, schools, and organisations. When clubs build their communication and collaboration with neighbouring entities, this can increase their organisational capacity, resources, knowledge, connections, and social cohesion, and this can assist them to successfully manage their responsibilities.
2. Similarly, sporting organisations and governing bodies should support cross-club collaboration to create a local ecosystem of support to sustain social and cultural responsibility. Sporting organisations or local governing bodies can create a list of clubs, schools, or organisations open to collaboration to create connections between clubs.
3. To address concerns surrounding lack of knowledge, education, and club direction, club leaders may like to seek out academic resources from events such as sport networking events, conferences, and industry information translation sessions. These sessions will assist in providing much needed knowledge and direction for the club regarding responsibilities. It is also useful in the sense that there are opportunities for networking and collaboration. While many in-person conferences and networking events are associated with a fee, club leaders may like to explore free knowledge resources such as podcasts (e.g., Beyond the Club), and government websites that are frequently updated and provide resources and actions plans (e.g., Australian Sports Commission - National Volunteer Action Plan (2022). Alternatively, clubs may also consider introducing a new budget line to support conference attendance.

5.3.5 Leadership strategies and agents of change

1. To dispel doubts or concerns surrounding social and cultural programs or initiatives, it is important for club leaders or coaches to be genuine and passionate about the social issue being addressed. A suitably qualified individual may be found through club leaders actively seeking facilitators/volunteers with previous experience in the area, known personal connections, or who are educated about a given topic. Furthermore, if such recruitment efforts fall short, club leaders may choose to provide a run-down sheet, guide, and basic knowledge about the issue or the program to be conducted; or there may be opportunities for clubs to outsource it to third party providers (e.g., the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, Ahead of the Game, the Sammy D Foundation, or Active Inclusion).
2. To increase awareness or acceptance of social and cultural responsibilities, clubs may like to recruit a 'champion of change' in the form of a professional athlete within their sport. While it need be highlighted not all sporting clubs will have access to a professional or elite 'champion-of-change', clubs may like to consider local collaboration with other sporting clubs, contacting state or national sporting organisations for assistance, or sourcing local community or state athletes.
3. To alleviate concerns surrounding sudden change or instability in leadership, clubs should consider utilising a succession plan to minimise significant disruption to youth sporting programs. Succession plan templates can be found online; for example, the Australian Government (2024) (via the business.gov.au website) provides a template to assist the development of such plan.
4. Club leaders may like to implement a polling system for club members to understand what their participants want and need, and what is the best fit for the club. Polling could occur either online (via a website such as Survey Monkey or social media) or in-person paper-based polling. These are both timely and low-cost options for clubs. In addition to

this, clubs could provide an anonymous drop-box for opinions, thoughts, suggestions, and concerns regarding general club operations and social and cultural responsibilities.

5.4 Recommendations for research

Although this research and its methodological choices warrant practical recommendations, this study also offers useful recommendations or points of consideration for future research. The following recommendations build on this current research about navigating social and cultural responsibility in Australian youth sporting clubs and address new considerations or gaps in the literature.

1. While this research contributed to the current stock of knowledge by placing a focus on youth sporting clubs and building organisational capacity to implement social and cultural responsibilities; researchers may like to consider a wider examination of clubs (e.g., clubs of various contexts). It is important to explore how other club contexts navigate the management of organisational capacity for social and cultural responsibilities, stakeholder expectations, and transient volunteer involvement.
2. Future research should consider the usefulness of academic resources such as sport networking events, conferences, and industry information translation sessions as mechanisms for building club capacity. It should also be investigated whether clubs themselves are able to implement or adopt the recommendations made at events such as these. Industry and academic events could be crucial in breaking down the barriers between research and knowledge translation, and provide alternative avenues for information to be communicated to youth sporting clubs or club leaders.
3. While there is literature about 'paid volunteers', the findings in this current research show that there is much utility in hiring specific roles only (such as an administrator) to expand organisational capacity. This is key, as organisational capacity, whether broadened by

paid positions, ensure clubs have the resources and ability to assume social and cultural responsibility. While this is not feasible for all clubs, it is worth understanding to what extent such roles elevate clubs' internal organisation and expand capacity.

4. Future researchers could investigate the approach of purposefully turning over volunteers in social and cultural responsibilities, as adopted by a successful club in this study. This approach did not occur in any other club, so there was not enough data to understand the specific mechanisms or reasoning behind doing this or to be able to recommend this to other clubs or organisations. It may be worth examining whether this is a new approach to 'bringing new life' and ideas to a sporting club, or whether it just happens to be a product of a very fortunate sporting club that has an abundance of volunteers and not enough positions.
5. While this study initially focused on the areas of inclusion and diversity, mental health, and social relationships, based on key social fields within the literature, future researchers may like to consider what other social and cultural responsibilities are of importance and demand from parents, coaches, and athletes, especially given the current politicisation of various social issues. Reevaluating these priorities are vital, as stakeholders' expectations and demands are ever-evolving, as seen within the corporate social responsibility literature. Doing this may assist in providing clubs and state organisations clarity about what 'matters most' or where their focus should be. It may be important to consider whether different sporting codes, genders, age groups have different preferences for programs and initiatives (e.g., programs surrounding drug and alcohol safety in Australian rules football were often discussed).

5.5 Conclusion

This thesis has presented a critical, nuanced, and interpretive exploration of how Australian youth sporting clubs navigate, perceive, and enact social and cultural responsibilities. Through its original findings and contribution to knowledge, this research advances the current understanding of sporting clubs and repositions the club as a site for broader social and cultural reach. It was discovered that clubs are more than merely providers of sport participation – they are vital settings with the potential to develop their organisational capacity to foster inclusion and diversity, mental health and wellbeing, and social relationships.

Through examining the role of leading clubs, this research provides both theoretical and practical knowledge about how clubs develop their capacity, navigate challenges, and implement social and cultural change. It was found that a sporting clubs' ability to assume social and cultural responsibilities, in the format of programs and initiatives, was grown through strategies that develop their organisational capacity. These key strategies include having adequate volunteer capacity and support, authentic leadership and targeted approaches, program connection or relevance to sport, strategic resource allocation, positive stakeholder engagement and skill acquisition, and community collaboration. The findings do also underscore the complexity of implementing change and developing capacity – as even leading, well-resourced clubs had to navigate challenges such as volunteer burnout and dropout, stakeholder resistance to change, and internal conflict and misaligned goals. But, these clubs traversed and mitigated such challenges through actions such as organised and intentional internal leadership, community collaboration, stakeholder involvement and support, and program trialling.

To conclude, this research contributes to and advances the growing discourse surrounding the role and purpose of youth sporting clubs. As expectations about the role of

sporting clubs continue to evolve, this thesis provides a timely contribution to the landscape of youth sport in Australia. Through adopting a strengths-based approach, a series of thematically organised recommendations for both practice and future research have been developed. These recommendations provide a necessary roadmap and are designed to support clubs and their stakeholders, governing bodies, and policy makers in enhancing the capacity for social impact in youth sporting environments.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Recruitment flyer

Appendix B: Research information sheet

Flinders UNIVERSITY
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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Title: Understanding how the 'best' sporting clubs navigate their social and cultural responsibilities in youth sport.

Chief Investigator
Miss Kayleigh O'Donnell
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
Email: kayleigh.odonnell@flinders.edu.au

Supervisor
Dr Sam Elliott
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
Tel: +61 8 8201 3495

Description of the study
Currently, sporting clubs are a multifaceted site that provide; a place of participation and opportunity in organised sport and physical activity, social cohesion and capital, and shared community health goals and outcomes (Robertson, Eime, & Westerbeek, 2019). However, clubs have evolved into settings with greater social and cultural responsibilities (Dagkas, 2018; Orr, Tamminen, Sweet, & Tomasone, 2018; Robertson et al., 2019), and are experiencing increasing demands surrounding their social and cultural responsibilities (Geidne et al., 2019; Milner & Kelly, 2007) But, many clubs struggle with and resist policy change and education surrounding social and cultural issues. This research project wants to understand, identify, and explore the social and cultural responsibilities of community sporting clubs. This project is supported by Flinders University, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work.

Purpose of the study
- **Understand** the actions, processes, ideologies, and conditions associated with navigating social and cultural responsibility in youth sporting clubs;
- **Identify** how youth sporting clubs evolve and enact their social and cultural responsibility;
- **Explore** the perceived challenges and opportunities with fulfilling current and potential future social and cultural responsibilities

Benefits of the study
Your involvement in this study will directly contribute to assisting sporting clubs in understanding, developing, implementing and furthering the extent of their social and cultural responsibilities. This study may result in and assist in developing evidence-based, educational initiatives, resources, or guides for strengthening club practises to aid in increasing social and cultural awareness and responsibilities to improve factors such as inclusivity, mental health programs, and social relationships. This study will also

be the first kind to value the potential burdens and challenges that volunteers readily take on in contemporary community sport.

Participant involvement and potential risks
If you agree to participate in the research study, you will be asked to:

- attend a one-on-one interview (parents and coaches) or a focus group (club leaders) with a researcher that will be audio recorded
- respond to questions regarding your views about social and cultural factors surrounding sporting clubs in South Australia.

The interviews will take approximately 30-45 minutes, focus groups will take around 45-120 minutes and participation is entirely voluntary.

There are no risks or discomforts if you are involved. However, there are some burdens including:

1. Time burden - As interviews can last for up to an hour, participants will be verbally reminded that they can withdraw from the interview at any time.
2. Lack of anonymity - For convenience, a sign will be provided to participants before the interview to print and attach to doors or windows if they are located in a workspace. Participants will also be encouraged to consider participating in the study at 'low peak' times to reduce burden of incidental people and if possible, suggest using quiet space at home or in a booked space to reduce burden of incidental people.

The researchers do not expect the questions to cause any harm or discomfort to you. However, if you experience feelings of distress as a result of participation in this study, please let the research team know immediately. You can also contact the following services for support:

- Lifeline – 13 11 14, www.lifeline.org.au
- Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636, www.beyondblue.org.au

Withdrawal Rights
You may, without any penalty, decline to take part in this research study. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you may, without any penalty, withdraw at any time without providing an explanation. To withdraw, please contact the Chief Investigator or you may just refuse to answer any questions. Any data collected up to the point of your withdrawal will be securely destroyed.

Confidentiality and Privacy
Only researchers listed on this form have access to the individual information provided by you. Privacy and confidentiality will be assured at all times. The research outcomes may be presented at conferences, written up for publication or used for other research purposes as described in this information form. However, the privacy and confidentiality of individuals will be protected at all times. You will not be named, and your individual information will not be identifiable in any research products without your explicit consent.

No data, including identifiable, non-identifiable and de-identified datasets, will be shared or used in future research projects without your explicit consent.

Data Storage
The information collected may be stored securely on a password protected computer and/or Flinders University server throughout the study. Any identifiable data will be de-identified for data storage

purposes unless indicated otherwise. All data will be securely transferred to and stored at Flinders University for five years after publication of the results. Following the required data storage period, all data will be securely destroyed according to university protocols.

How will I receive feedback?
On project completion, feedback will be provided to participants if requested, through a short summary of the outcomes via email.
Anonymous feedback will be provided to the sports club, provided through written documents of a summary of the outcomes or on the completion of a thesis.

Ethics Committee Approval
The project has been approved by Flinders University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Project number 5090)

Queries and Concerns
Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the research team. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office team via telephone 08 8201 2543 or email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet which is yours to keep. If you accept our invitation to be involved, please sign the enclosed Consent Form.

Appendix C: Individual interview consent form

CONSENT FORM

Consent Statement

☐ I have read and understood the information about the research, and I understand I am being asked to provide informed consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I can contact the research team if I have further questions about this research study.

☐ I am not aware of any condition that would prevent my participation, and I agree to participate in this project.

☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study.

☐ I understand that I can contact Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office if I have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study.

☐ I understand that my involvement is confidential, and that the information collected may be published. I understand that I will not be identified in any research products.

I further consent to:

☐ participating in an individual interview
☐ having my information audio recorded
☐ my data and information being used in this project and other related projects for an extended period of time (no more than 5 years after publication of the data)
☐ being contacted about other research projects

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix D: Focus group consent form

CONSENT FORM

Consent Statement

☐ I have read and understood the information about the research, and I understand I am being asked to provide informed consent to participate in this research study. I understand that I can contact the research team if I have further questions about this research study.

☐ I am not aware of any condition that would prevent my participation, and I agree to participate in this project.

☐ I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study.

☐ I understand that I can contact Flinders University's Research Ethics & Compliance Office if I have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this study.

☐ I understand that my involvement is confidential, and that the information collected may be published. I understand that I will not be identified in any research products.

I further consent to:

☐ participating in a focus group
☐ having my information audio recorded
☐ my data and information being used in this project and other related projects for an extended period of time (no more than 5 years after publication of the data)
☐ being contacted about other research projects

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix E: Individual interview question guide

Opening questions:

1. I must remind you that you don't have to answer any question you don't want to, you can leave at any point in time, and if you want to stop the interview and take a break you are able to do that.
2. For the interview, tell me about yourself
    a. Name…
    b. How are you?
    c. What you do for a living?
    d. What role do come to this interview as?
    e. How long have you been at the club (as a parent or coach)?
3. What does social and cultural responsibility mean to you? Why?

Main questions:

4. How did you get involved in this club? Why did you pick this one?
5. How would you describe your general participation, and relationship with this club?
6. What aspects of your sports club are the most important you? Why?
7. What do you perceive to be important elements of building a successful sporting club?
8. What does this club do differently from others?
9. What level of involvement does the club have 'outside of sport'? If so, what is it?
10. Has the club ever run any education or information programs?
11. What do you think about a club have greater responsibility outside of competition, sport, membership etc…?
12. What methods or strategies can sports clubs implement to increase/improve PYD/mental health/relationships/inclusivity in youth sport?
13. When is too much? What falls outside the club's responsibility?
14. In what ways could the club or club culture be improved?
15. How would you describe the communication between the club and its members?
16. When disagreements occur at this club, how is it dealt with, navigated, and communicated?
17. What role does the club and environment play in nurturing social relationships?
18. What have been your favourite moments/experiences being at this club? Why?
19. What have been your least favourite moments/experiences being at this club? Why?

Closing questions:

20. If you could choose, what would you like the club to do differently or implement?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix F: Focus group question guide

Opening questions:

1. Tell me about yourself
    a. Name…
    b. How are you?
    c. What you do for a living?
    d. What role do come to this interview as?
    e. How long have you been at the club? (As a club leader)
    f. What other roles do you play here? (Parent? Coach?)
2. What does social and cultural responsibility mean to you? Why?

Main questions:

3. How would you describe your general participation, and relationship with this club?
4. Questions about the roles and structure of the club. How is the club currently structured? Why have you chosen this? How long?

5. What aspects of your sports club are the most important you and why?
6. What do you perceive to be important elements of building a successful sporting club?
7. What does this club do differently from others?

8. Should a sports club have greater responsibility outside of sport etc?
9. What level of involvement does the club have 'outside of sport'? If so, what is it?
10. Has the club ever run any education or information programs?
11. How does the club manage to run these? Why can you and not others?
12. When is too much? What falls outside the club's responsibility?

13. What methods or strategies do you implement to increase/improve social awareness/responsibility in youth sport?
14. In what ways could the club or club culture be improved?
15. Tell me about your club culture? What are your values?
16. What role does the club and environment play in nurturing social relationships?

17. How would you describe the communication between the club and its members?
18. When disagreements occur at this club, how is it dealt with, navigated, and communicated?

19. What have been your favourite moments/experiences being at this club? Why?
20. What have been your least favourite moments/experiences being at this club? Why?

Closing questions:

21. If you could choose, what would you like the club to do differently or implement?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix G: Ethics approval

17 February 2022

HUMAN ETHICS LOW RISK PANEL

APPROVAL NOTICE

Dear Miss Kayleigh O'Donnell,

The below proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application and its attachments.

Project No:	5090
Project Title:	An ethnography of social and cultural responsibility in Australian community sporting clubs
Primary Researcher:	Miss Kayleigh O'Donnell
Approval Date:	17/02/2022
Expiry Date:	01/01/2024

Please note: *Due to the current COVID-19 situation, researchers are strongly advised to develop a research design that aligns with the University's COVID-19 research protocol involving human studies. Where possible, avoid face-to-face testing and consider rescheduling face-to-face testing or undertaking alternative distance/online data or interview collection means. For further information, please go to* https://staff.flinders.edu.au/coronavirus-information/research-updates.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

1. **Participant Documentation**

   Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of student projects, to ensure that:

   - all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and formatting errors. The Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above mentioned errors.
   - the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction. The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and documentation should contain international dialing codes for all telephone and fax numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.

2. **Annual Progress / Final Reports**

   In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (updated 2018)* an annual progress report must be submitted each year on the approval anniversary date for the duration of the ethics approval using the HREC Annual/Final Report Form available online via the ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety system.

   Please note that no data collection can be undertaken after the ethics approval expiry date listed at the top of this notice. If data is collected after expiry, it will not be covered in terms of ethics. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that annual progress reports are submitted on time; and that no data is collected after ethics has expired.

   If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please either submit (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request (using the HREC Modification Form).

   For student projects, the Low Risk Panel recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, assessed and finalised. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend that additional data be collected from participants.

3. **Modifications to Project**

   Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include:

- change of project title;
- change to research team (e.g., additions, removals, researchers and supervisors)
- changes to research objectives;
- changes to research protocol;
- changes to participant recruitment methods;
- changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
- changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
- changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
- changes to information / documents to be given to potential participants;
- changes to research tools (e.g., survey, interview questions, focus group questions etc);
- extensions of time (i.e. to extend the period of ethics approval past current expiry date).

To notify the Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please submit a Modification Request Form available online via the ResearchNow Ethics & Biosafety system. Please note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

4. Adverse Events and/or Complaints

Researchers should advise the Executive Officer of the Human Research Ethics Committee on at human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au immediately if:

- any complaints regarding the research are received;
- a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that effects participants;
- an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

Yours sincerely,

Hendryk Flaegel

on behalf of

Human Ethics Low Risk Panel
Research Development and Support
human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Flinders University
Sturt Road, Bedford Park, South Australia, 5042
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, South Australia, 5001

http://www.flinders.edu.au/research/researcher-support/ebi/human-ethics/human-ethics_home.cfm

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Proactively supporting our Research