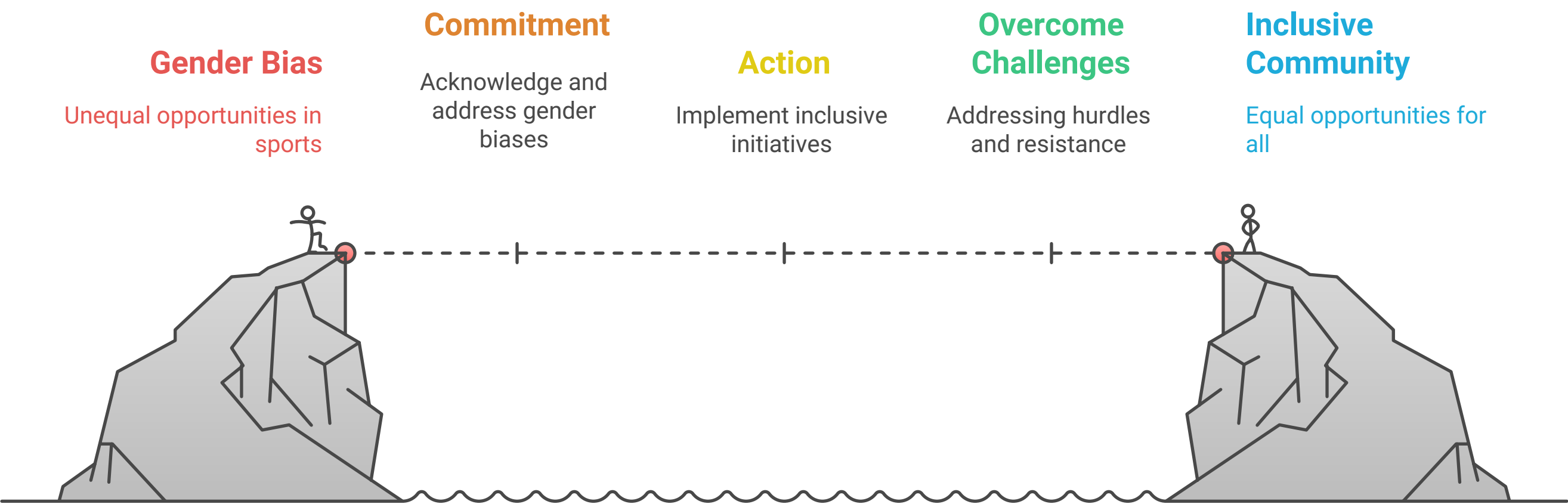




# Case Study: Changing the Game – Imperial Football Netball Club’s Gender Equity Journey

This document explores the transformative journey of the Imperial Football Netball Club (IFNC) as it undertakes significant steps towards gender equity in sports. Beginning with a commitment to address entrenched gender biases, IFNC has evolved into a leading example of inclusive community sport. The case study outlines the phases of this journey, highlighting key actions, challenges faced, and the impact of their initiatives on the club

## IFNC's Journey to Gender Equity



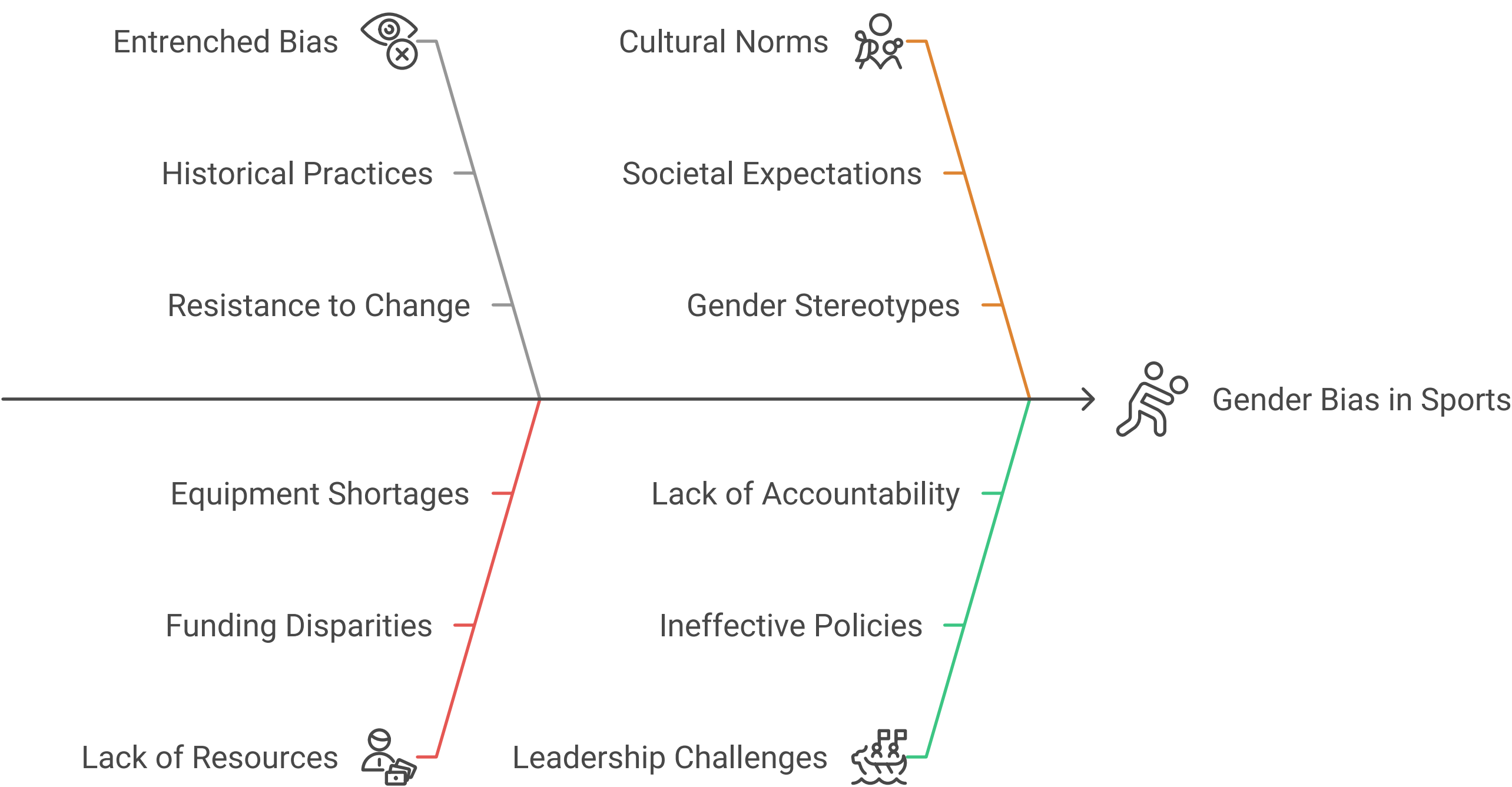
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## Overview

In May 2023, the Imperial Football Netball Club (IFNC) signed up to Mildura Rural City Council's Gendering in a New Era in Mildura Sports project. Their aim: “To create more equality between the football and netball departments of the club for the benefit of all genders.” What followed was a remarkable transformation—from a club grappling with entrenched gender bias to one leading the way in inclusive, intersectional community

# Overcoming Gender Bias in Sports



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## Phase One: Revealing the Inequity – The Gender Audit

With support from Women’s Health Loddon Mallee (WHLM), IFNC undertook a Gender Audit, which included:

- A Committee Checklist exploring leadership, policies, culture, and facilities.
- A Member Experience Survey, highlighting deep-rooted inequalities and cultural issues.

### Key Findings:

- Senior male footballers received a minimum \$50 per game; netballers received none.
- Male footballs were provided every home game; netballers were issued one ball per season.
- The club mascot only represented male footballers.
- The committee lacked gender diversity.
- Sexist remarks and exclusionary attitudes were common.

## Highlighting Gender Disparities in Sports



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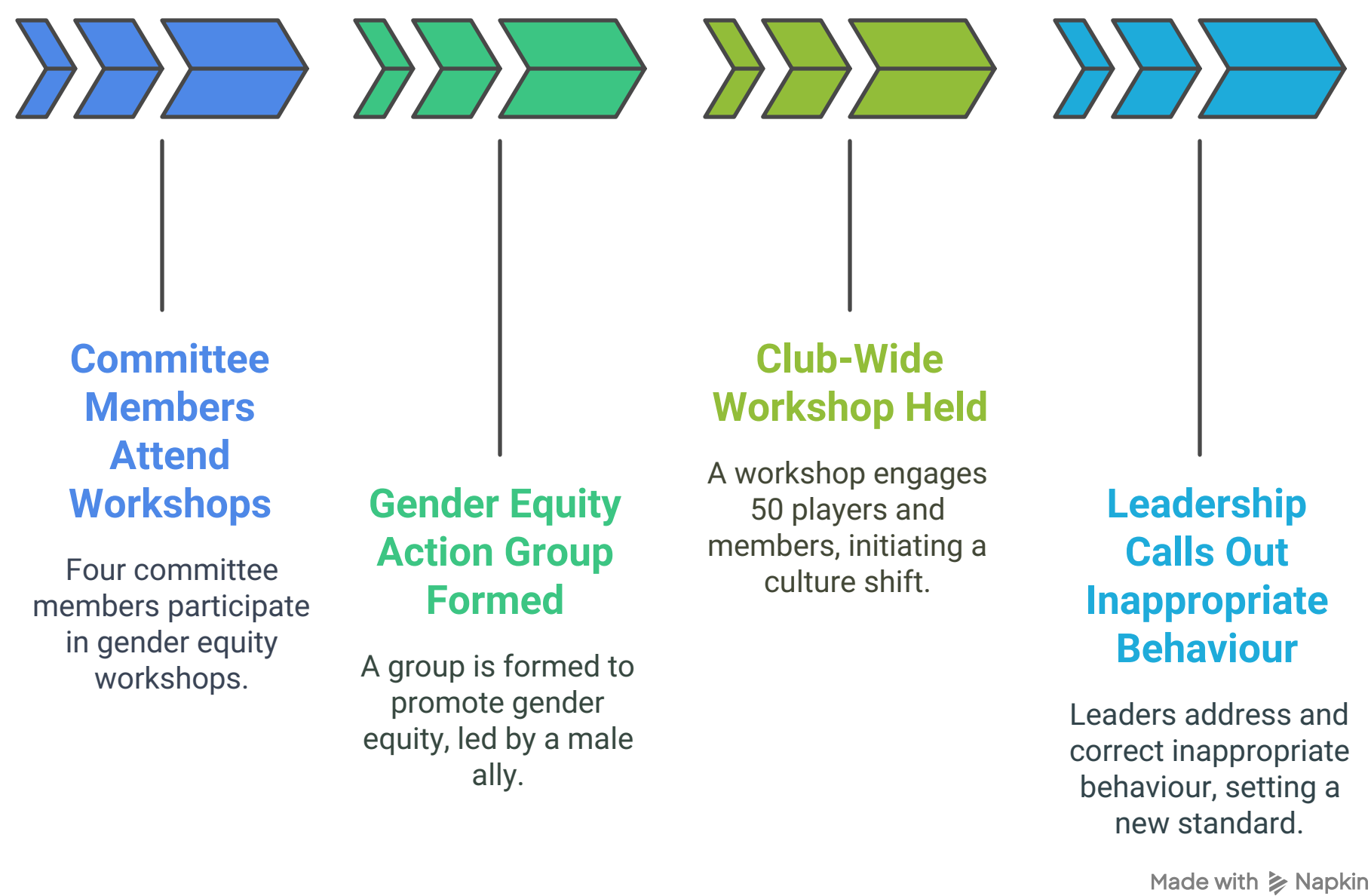
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## Phase Two: Facing Resistance – Breaking the ‘Old School’ Mentality

Initially, the leadership team resisted change. There was scepticism about initiatives that "only benefitted netball," and equity discussions sparked tension. But key actions created a turning point:

- **Four committee members attended gender equity workshops.**
- **A Gender Equity Action Group formed, led by a male ally and netball parent.**
- **A club-wide Gender Equity Workshop drew 50 players and members, sparking a culture shift.**
- **Leadership began calling out inappropriate behaviour, modelling change.**

Gender Equity Initiatives in a Sports Club












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## Phase Three: Structural Change – Turning Commitment into Action

Guided by the Gender Audit and community input, the club:

- **Introduced pay equity:** In September 2023, A-Grade netballers were granted \$50 per game from 2024.
- **Updated the Code of Conduct**, with expectations clearly communicated.
- **Hosted mandatory bystander training** for senior players in April 2024.
- **Rebranded the club**, adopting a unified identity: “The Imperials Club”.
- **Developed a new inclusive logo**, combined training sessions, and gender-balanced promotional materials.
- **Planned a digital honour board** to recognise women previously excluded from life memberships.
- **Provided netball electronic scoreboards.**
- **Supplied training tops** for all participants.
- **Increased committee representation** to 11 members, with 10 being female participants (including juniors) and 5 women on the board.

# Imperials Club achievements

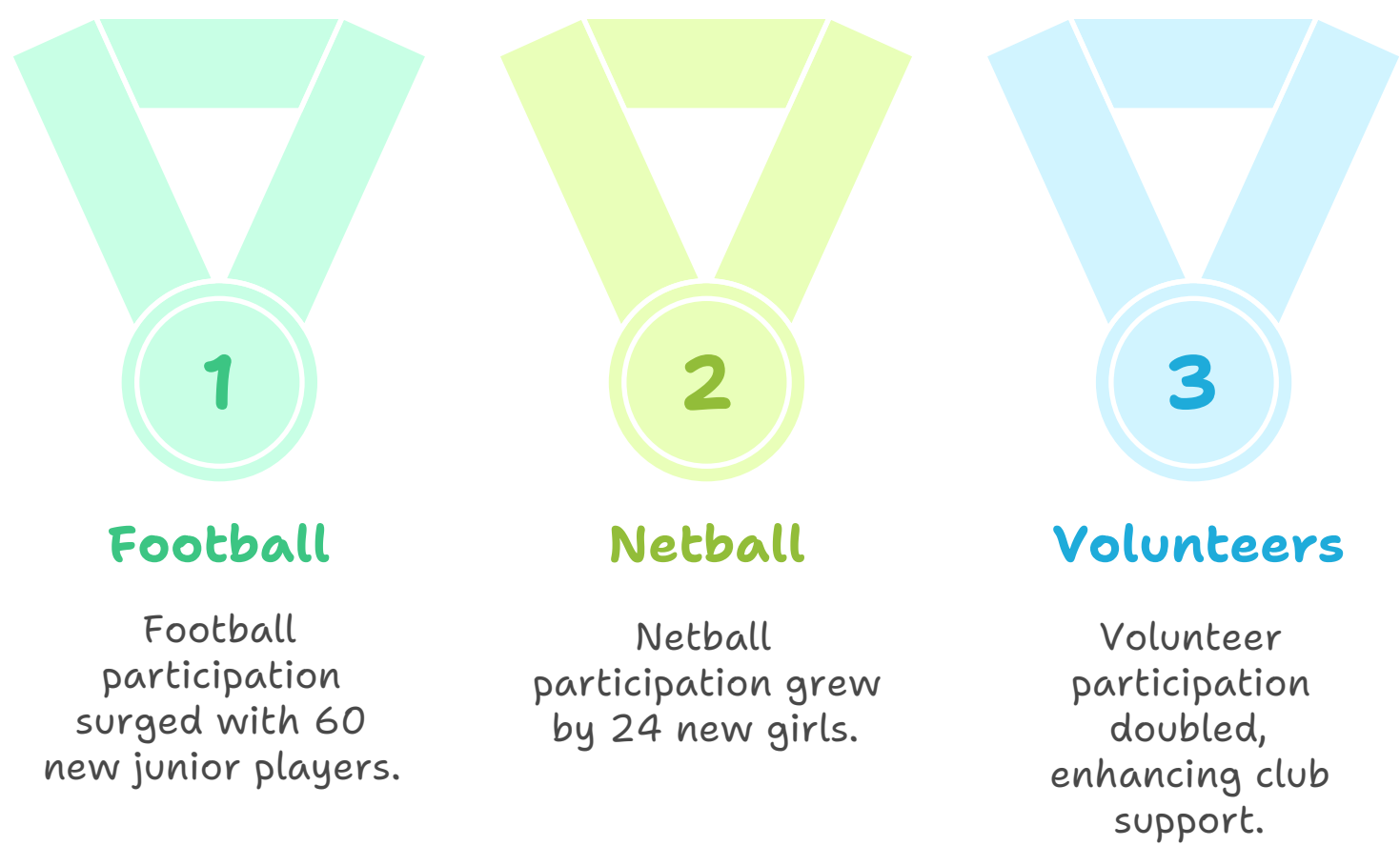
Characteristic	Achievement
 <b>Pay equity</b>	\$50 per game from 2024
 <b>Code of conduct</b>	Expectations clearly communicated
 <b>Training</b>	Mandatory bystander training
 <b>Club Identity</b>	Unified identity: “The Imperials Club”
 <b>Inclusivity</b>	Inclusive logo, combined training, gender-balanced promotions
 <b>Recognition</b>	Digital honour board planned
 <b>Equipment</b>	Netball electronic scoreboards
 <b>Apparel</b>	Training tops for all
 <b>Representation</b>	Increased committee representation

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## The Result?

- Netball participation increased by 24 new girls.
- Football gained 60 new junior players, including many female Auskick participants.
- Volunteer participation doubled.

# 2024 Imperial Football Netball Club's Participation Growth



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## Phase Four: Walking the Talk – Accountability and Cultural Safety

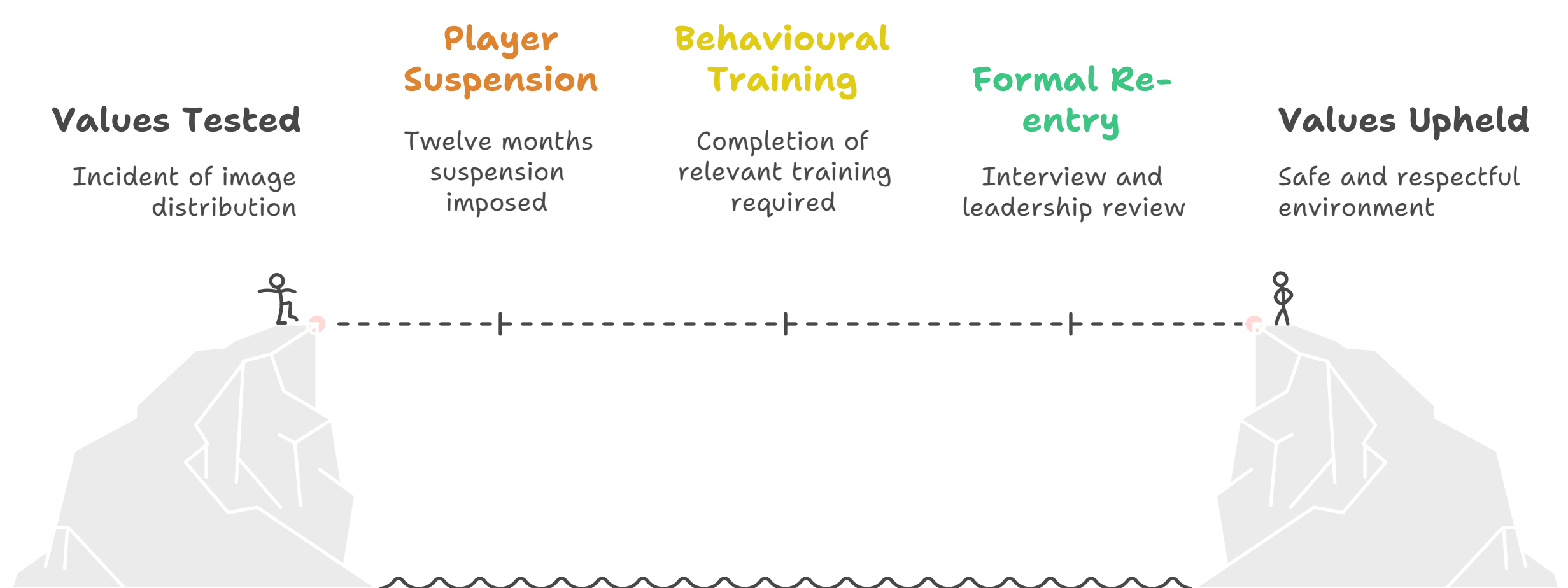
As IFNC deepened its commitment to gender equity, it faced a defining moment in late 2024 when a reserve football player was found guilty of distributing non-consensual intimate images. This incident tested the club's values.

The club took decisive action:

- The player was suspended for 12 months.
- He was required to complete relevant behavioural change training before being considered for re-entry to the club.
- A formal re-entry process was established, requiring an interview and review by club leadership to ensure accountability and understanding.

This decision reflected the club's commitment to a safe and respectful environment for all members. They ensured transparency by informing relevant governing bodies while balancing care for the individual with firm accountability.

# IFNC's Commitment to Gender Equity

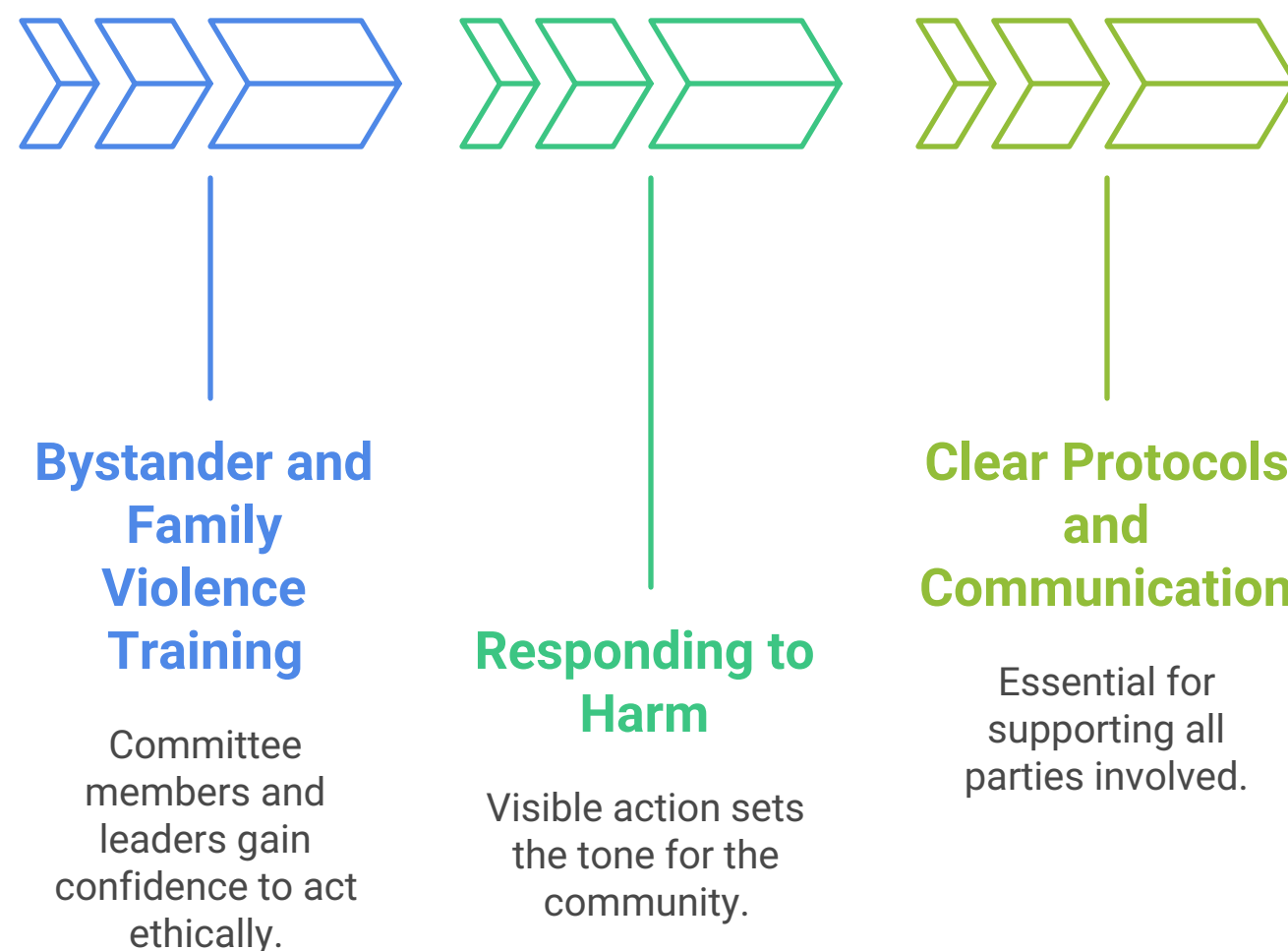


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## What They Learned:

- Bystander and Family Violence Training gave committee members and leaders the confidence to act swiftly and ethically.
- Responding to harm is part of prevention; visible, values-aligned action sets the tone for the community.
- Clear protocols and communication with governing bodies are essential for supporting all parties involved.

## Implementing Gender Equity in Sports Club



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## Phase Five: The Next Step – Intersectional Inclusion and Junior Girls Football

In 2025, IFNC launched Under 13s and Under 15s girls' football teams, focusing on intersectionality. The first challenge was recruitment, which involved engaging local schools and inviting girls to join.

### Meeting Real Needs – Supporting Participation

The club quickly realised they were underprepared for the new cohort, which required practical and cultural support:

- Many players needed basics like uniforms, shoes, or footballs.
- The club reallocated funds to provide socks and shorts.
- They consulted players about uniform fit, offering options tailored to female bodies.
- Engaged Hannah Priest (St Kilda) for consultation on messaging to girls and women.
- Sourced female playing jumpers for comfort and dignity.
- Planned workshops with AFLW players from similar cultural backgrounds.
- Hired a paid person to run their girl's program.



# Addressing Underpreparedness



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## More Than a Game – A Cultural Shift

The first match day was a breakthrough:

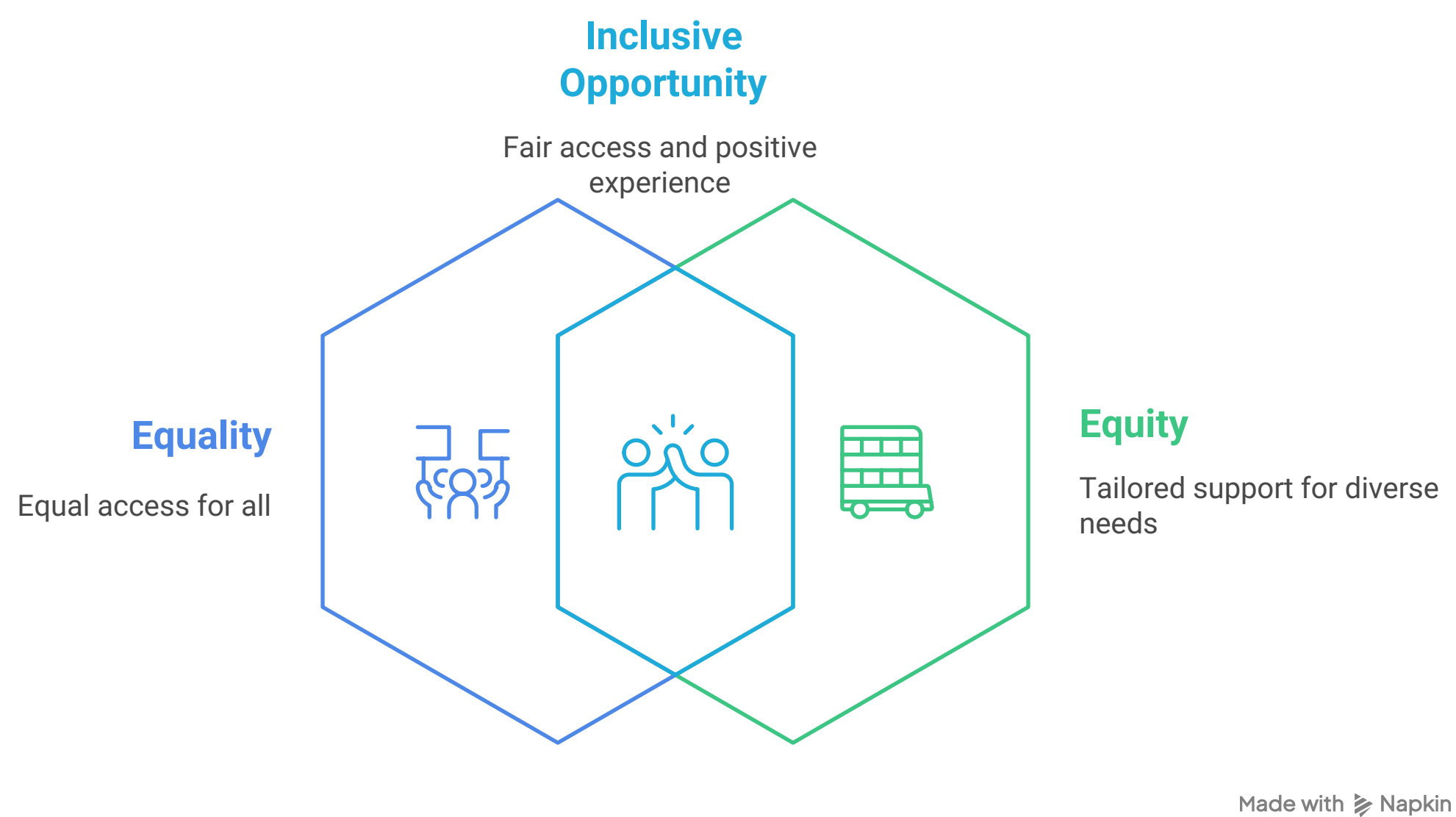
- A significant increase in family spectators demonstrated a welcoming environment.
- The club president noticed larger family groups feeling safe and included.
- Fees were heavily subsidised to ensure cost wasn't a barrier to participation.

## Removing the Next Barrier – Transport Equity

The second game posed a new hurdle due to transportation issues. The club funded a bus to transport the team, ensuring a safe and positive experience.

This moment marked a transformational shift—from equality to equity, and from gender-focused change to an intersectional approach that accounted for socio-economic status, cultural background, and systemic access barriers.

# From Equality to Equity: A Transformative Shift



## The Result?

Imperial Football & Netball Club has officially been recognised as a Women & Girls Chartered Club.

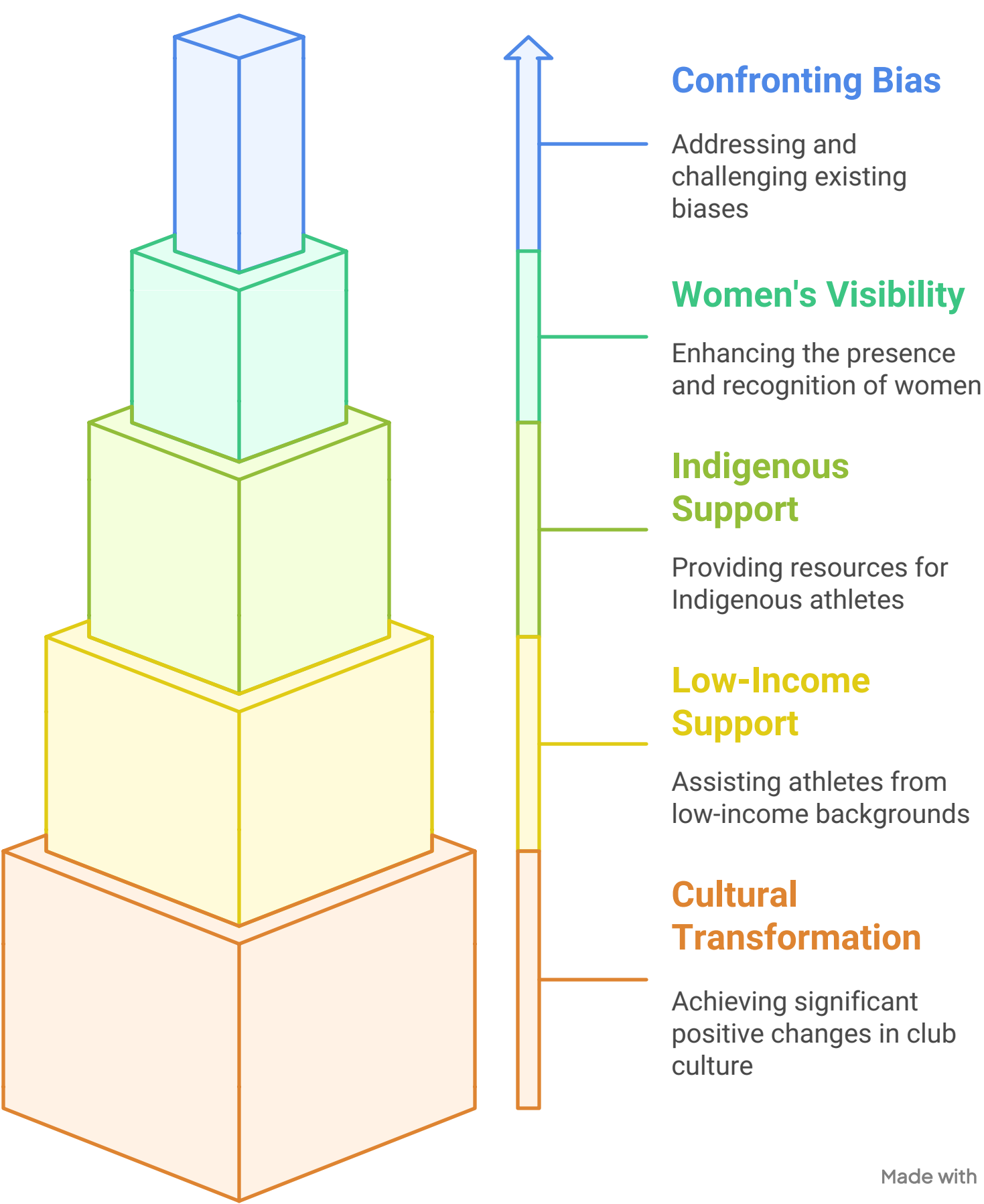
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## Conclusion: The Power of Inclusive Leadership

Imperial Football Netball Club's story is more than a checklist of actions. It's a blueprint for cultural transformation. From confronting bias and lifting women's visibility to supporting Indigenous and low-income girls to thrive in sport, IFNC has shown what's possible when a club commits to being truly inclusive.

They haven't just added teams. They've changed who feels welcome. They've changed how leadership leads. And they've changed what it means to be "one club."

# Inclusive Leadership Pyramid



**Significant Quotes:**

“The old school male mentality really annoyed me and was something I needed to change for my daughters” – M Kelly – Current Vice President

“After the workshop, there were a couple of comments made by an old man near the bar. The current president made a point of walking over to them and telling them to stop and that it was not funny. It was at this point where I actually believed the intentions were genuine. The response was done to make change and not to grandstand or anything like that.” – Playing member and parent.