

ADVANCING GIRLS SOCCER INITIATIVE



July 2025

Recommendations for Vancouver United FC

Advancing GIRLS Soccer Initiative

Authors

Suzanne Chiasson has been coaching at Vancouver United FC for ten years—with her daughter's team in earlier years, then in the BCSPL stream, and most recently as head coach for the 2009 Div 1 girls' team. She has additional coaching experience in girls' senior school soccer and in the Metro Women's Soccer League and holds a national C License. Her son also played at VanU through U18. Suzanne's background includes work in communications, women's advocacy and the arts. Away from the pitch, she works as a writer.

Carlie Condon grew up playing soccer at Burnaby Girls Soccer Club, a year behind Canadian legend Christine Sinclair. Carlie has coached girls' soccer with Vancouver United since 2019, acting as head coach for the Division 3 girls' team, The Blizzards, for three fun and growth-filled seasons. Carlie trained at the University of Toronto as a mindfulness and meditation teacher and is passionate about bringing the benefits of mindfulness to youth sports.

Beth Hirsh has been a volunteer coach at VUFC for nearly a decade, serving as a head coach for her daughters' teams (2011 and 2014 girls) over the years and helping with her son's teams (2008 boys) early on. She is currently an assistant coach with the 2011G BCSPL team and the 2014G Div 1 team. Beth grew up playing youth soccer in Washington and university soccer in California, before moving to Vancouver in 2010. When not on the pitch, she is a professor of sociology at UBC, where she studies organizations, workplace equity, and statistics.

Sarah Johns is a former head coach and technical lead of goalkeeping at VUFC. Drawing on her experience as a varsity athlete at UBC, she passionately advocates for the empowerment of women in sport at all levels. Sarah is dedicated to promoting female coaching representation and girls' advocacy at VUFC to inspire the next generation of young players. Currently, she is pursuing her medical degree in Calgary, AB, and looks forward to seeing the impact of this report in the coming years.

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Statement of the Issue.....	1
1.2 Committee Mandate	2
1.3 Purpose and Scope	2
1.4 Our Approach.....	2
1.4.1 Connecting Intent, Implementation, and Feedback	2
1.4.2 Organization of the Report	3
1.4.3 Use of Evidence	3
1.4.4 Intended Audiences and Beneficiaries	3
2. ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS	4
2.1 Administrative – Immediate Priorities.....	4
2.1.1 Appointment of Health and Safety Officer (Urgent)	4
2.1.2 Formation of Complaint Resolution Committee (Urgent)	5
2.1.3 Decision-Making Regarding Girls’ Programming	5
2.2 Administrative – Short Term Priorities	6
2.2.1 Policy Creation and Accessibility	6
2.2.2 Standardization and Streamlining of Club Communications	6
2.2.3 Kit Suitability	8
2.2.4 Social Media	8
2.2.5 Land Acknowledgment.....	9
2.3 Administrative – Long Term Priorities	9
2.3.1 Female Leadership: Board, Directors, Technical Leads.....	9
2.3.2 Female Staff Coaches	10
2.3.3 Annual Club Feedback Forms	11
2.3.4 Translation Services.....	11
2.3.5 Website Redesign.....	11
3. RECRUITMENT RECOMMENDATIONS	12
3.1 Recruitment – Immediate Priorities	12
3.1.1 Relationship with UBC Women’s Soccer	12
3.2 Recruitment – Short Term Priorities.....	13
3.2.1 Offer Second Kicks Fall-only Cycle.....	13
3.2.2 Bring Your Bestie to Soccer Week.....	13
3.2.3 Come Try Soccer Community Outreach and Recruitment Events	14
3.3 Recruitment – Long Term Priorities.....	14
3.3.1 Girls' Goalkeeper Clinics.....	14
3.3.2 School and After-School Soccer Programs.....	15
4. RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS.....	15
4.1 Retention – Immediate Priorities	16
4.1.1 BCSPL Retention (Urgent)	16

4.1.2 Evaluations and Team Formation (Urgent)	17
4.1.3 Female Representation in Team Formation Meeting (Urgent)	19
4.1.4 Girls Retention Officer (Urgent)	19
4.1.5 VanU Technical Support (VTS) Session Tracking	19
4.2 Retention – Short Term Priorities	20
4.2.1 Building Connections Across Teams, Divisions and Age Groups	20
4.2.2 Recruiting and Supporting Volunteer Female Coaches	22
4.2.3 Keeping Girls in Sport Required Certification for All Coaches of Female Teams	26
4.2.4 Enhance VanU Identity	26
4.3 Retention – Long Term Priorities	27
4.3.1 Be a Mentor Program for Youth Players	27
4.3.2 Spring League U14-U18	27
4.3.3 Skills and Tactics for U13-U18 Girls	28
4.3.4 Welcoming Process for New Players	29
4.3.5 Focus Groups with Girls in the Club	29
4.3.6 Re-designing How We Train Coaches	30
5. ACCOUNTABILITY AND FOLLOW UP	30
5.1 Advancing Girls Soccer Initiative Follow-up	30
5.2 Future of AGSI Committee	31
6. FUTURE VISION	31
6.1 Commitment to Transformation	31
6.2 Closing the Loop	32
APPENDIX	33
Examples of Macron and Adidas kit in women’s and men’s/unisex fit	33

Advancing Girls Soccer Initiative

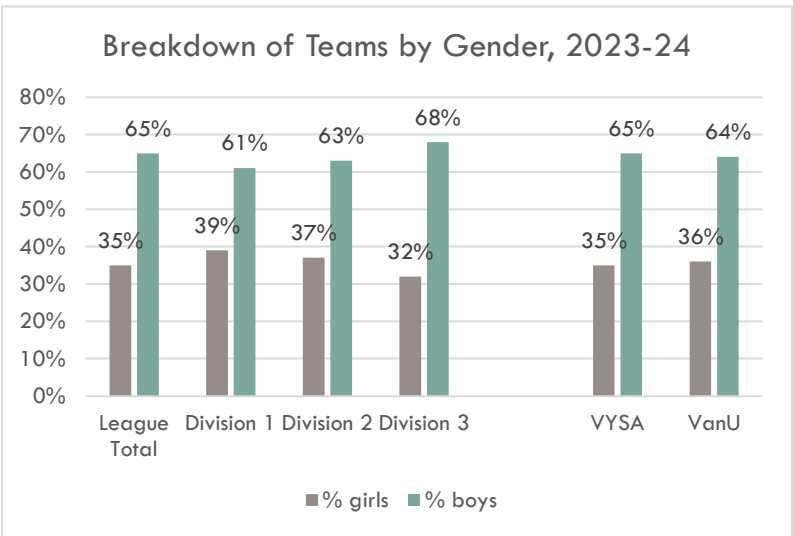
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VANCOUVER UNITED FC

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Issue

The recruitment and retention of girls in soccer is an ongoing challenge faced by many clubs and organizations, including the Vancouver United Football Club (VUFC/VanU). Across various age groups and divisions, participation rates among girls are consistently lower than those of boys, and recent years have seen a troubling decline in the number of girls who join and stay involved in soccer programs, especially through their teen years.

In the 2023-2024 season, VanU had only 34 girls' teams registered from U11 to U18 compared to 61 teams



on the boys' side. Participation rates across the Vancouver Youth Soccer Association (VYSA) and BC Coastal Soccer League (BCCSL) are similar, with only 35% of all VYSA teams and 35% of BCCSL teams on the girls' side.¹

This gender gap in participation points to a complex issue influenced by a range of factors, from limited access to female mentors and role models to a lack of tailored programming and coaching that meets girls' specific needs and interests.

Understanding and addressing these barriers is essential not only to foster gender equity in sports but also to build a diverse soccer community that develops the interest and potential of all young athletes. Without targeted efforts to recruit and retain young female players, clubs risk missing out on the benefits of balanced gender representation, but more importantly, girls lose out on opportunities for physical activity, team-building, and personal growth. Moreover, research consistently shows that the skills, traits, and experiences that girls acquire through participation in sport shape them for a lifetime. By developing confidence, resilience, and the capacity to comfortably withstand pressure, sports play a key role in socializing girls to be leaders in their schools, workplaces, and communities.² Thus, enhancing access to

soccer and keeping girls playing is about much more than simply development on the field—it's about developing confidence, resilience, and leadership capacity for girls and women over a lifetime.

“There is a dire need for all girls to participate in sports because it helps them develop the critical building blocks that will propel them to lead throughout their lives. Simply put: when girls play, they go on to become leaders — in sports and beyond....”

– Danette Leighton, CEO Women's Sports Foundation

1.2 Committee Mandate

In February of 2024, the Executive Director (ED) of Vancouver United FC, Gregor Young, assembled a committee of experienced female staff and volunteer coaches in the club to collaboratively address the challenges facing girls in soccer at VanU. The ED's mandate to the committee was twofold: first, to create a plan aimed at reversing declining participation rates among girls and promote a more engaging and supportive environment for young female players at VanU; and second, to support implementation of the plan.

Through a series of meetings, consultations, and research-driven sessions over the spring and summer of 2024, the committee crafted a plan to tackle these issues, now called the 'Advancing Girls Soccer Initiative' or AGSI.³ This report forms the backbone of the Advancing Girls in Soccer Initiative and satisfies the committee's first mandate. To meet the second mandate, the AGSI committee has been engaged in ongoing meetings with the VanU Executive Director and Board members to discuss implementation and oversight of the recommendations developed in this report, as we elaborate on in the conclusion.

1.3 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations on how to increase the recruitment and retention of girls at Vancouver United Football Club and promote positive experiences for girls in soccer, both at VanU and in the local soccer community. It offers VanU a series of action items that can be implemented immediately, in the short, and long term, and includes recommendations for further strategizing by the AGSI committee and/or others in the club and community, including players, coaches, staff and board members. The strategizing component of the project should be woven together with implementation and measurement in an ongoing process that does not restrict it to a specific timeframe. In this way, we hope to promote longevity and to create a dynamic mechanism for continued development.

1.4 Our Approach

1.4.1 Connecting Intent, Implementation, and Feedback

When we first started working on this project and were brainstorming ideas, we kept finding ourselves circling back to issues that at first glance did not seem related to girls' retention and recruitment. It became increasingly apparent that some of the work that VanU was doing to support girls in the club, and its

players in general, was being undermined by gaps in systems. The gaps were directly or indirectly having a negative impact on the soccer experience of many girls. It is for this reason that we include a series of administrative and organizational recommendations that aim to fill some of these system gaps and support the recommendations related to programming, outreach and club community. By addressing retention and recruitment issues in conjunction with administrative and organizational issues, we believe that VanU will increase the probability of keeping girls playing soccer. Ensuring that there is a continuous thread linking the intent of an initiative, the implementation of the initiative, and feedback on the initiative will help to 'close the loop', reduce gaps, and provide an improved experience overall.

1.4.2 Organization of the Report

We have divided our recommendations into three categories: Administrative and Organizational; Recruitment; and Retention. In each category, we have further divided the recommendations according to priority: Immediate; Short Term; Long Term. Some of the items under Immediate have been placed there because we deem them urgent and have marked them as such. Others have been placed under Immediate because we believe that they are achievable in a very short period, with a high return of positive impact on players, or because their timing vis-à-vis the soccer season would benefit from immediate attention.

In formulating the recommendations in this report, we have drawn on our knowledge and understanding of VanU programs and policies, as well as our experience and knowledge related to the general soccer community and youth sports. We acknowledge that VanU is continually evolving, and that there may be programs and policies (past, present or future) that we are not aware of and which may cross-reference with our recommendations.

1.4.3 Use of Evidence

We use evidence from a variety of sources. We draw on data and resources from Vancouver Youth Soccer Association (VYSA), BC Soccer, and Canada Soccer. We look to other clubs, sports organizations, and sports advocacy groups for information on best practices in sport administration, and the recruitment, treatment, and retention of girls in sport. Finally, we draw on examples and anecdotal evidence from our own experiences in VanU soccer as coaches and parents, as well as the experiences of other trusted coaches and volunteers that we gathered through wide consultation. We cite evidence where appropriate using footnotes and provide in-text information on VanU anecdotes in ways that sufficiently convey examples but protect the confidentiality of individuals.

1.4.4 Intended Audiences and Beneficiaries

Our primary audience is the VanU Board of Directors, Executive Director, Technical Director, Assistant Technical Director, Director of Operations and Technical Program Staff, as these are the parties who can make changes in policy and technical programming.

Our secondary audience is the VanU membership and the broader youth soccer and sports community in British Columbia and beyond. We hope that the recommendations in this report will be shared with the families of VanU to demonstrate the real work that the club is doing to improve the soccer experience of

girls in the club. While several of our action items are specific to current administrative and technical practices at VanU, the majority of our recommendations about recruitment and retention could be tailored to and implemented at clubs throughout BC and Canada. Vancouver United is one of many football clubs struggling with keeping girls in sport. We hope that VanU can be a leader in this regard.

Our intended beneficiaries are girls involved in soccer at Vancouver United FC and programs throughout BC. Our recommendations centre the experiences of girls in soccer, with the intent of keeping girls playing soccer in positive environments that enhance their physical, social, and emotional wellbeing throughout their youth years and beyond.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The administrative practices of an organization have direct impacts on the experiences of individual members. When organizational practices and decision-making are perceived as well-managed, fair, and transparent, members will have a more favourable view of the organization. To ensure positive experiences for girls in soccer, the club should prioritize communication, representation in decision-making, transparency, and fairness. This will enhance players' and families' (especially girls') trust in the organization and confidence in its decision-making processes—both of which will promote recruitment and retention. Below, we make several immediate, short and long-term recommendations to enhance organizational trust and confidence in decision-making.

2.1 Administrative – Immediate Priorities

2.1.1 Appointment of Health and Safety Officer (Urgent)

We recommend that a Health and Safety Officer (HSO) be appointed as the first point of contact for Vancouver United FC staff, players, volunteers, and parents/guardians for all complaints and concerns relating to the safety and wellbeing of individuals and groups under VanU. The VanU membership and staff will be notified of the appointment through newsletters and other means of communication, and the position of HSO (their purpose and contact information) will be posted prominently on the club's website under Club Staff & Office, and Health & Safety.

Individuals who fill the role of HSO should be at 'arm's length' from the people involved in a complaint, and from the staff and volunteers who are in authority positions in relation to the people involved in the complaint. The Executive Director and the Technical Director should not be appointed to this role. It can be very difficult to come forward with complaints for fear of not being heard, of 'gaslighting,' or of retribution, so it is essential that the person acting as HSO have as much impartiality as possible. We suggest that a board member fill the position of HSO, or that the board recruit a suitable individual from the membership. It is further recommended that two individuals share this role to ensure coverage and provide backup in the case of a conflict of interest.

The HSO will assess complaints, and, if the HSO believes the complaint to fall under the jurisdiction of BC Soccer as outlined under their Discipline, Complaints, and Appeals Operational Procedures, the HSO will follow required procedures in reporting to BC Soccer.⁴ The HSO will be responsible for enacting Risk Assessment Procedures for VanU as outlined and recommended in BC Soccer's Risk Assessment Policy.⁵

The Health and Safety Officer shall ensure all on-field officials have completed Criminal Record Checks (CRCs) in accordance with BC Soccer Rule 17 and shall submit a CRC Compliance Report to BC Soccer and to the board of directors seasonally, or as deemed appropriate by the board.

The HSO will further be responsible for ensuring compliance of all volunteers in certification of Respect in Sport, Concussion Protocol and other certifications VanU deems required. The Health and Safety Officer shall be responsible for oversight of VanU compliance to Safe Sport Policy.

The appointment of this position is in line with the standard of multiple peer youth football club organizations, provides a clear point of contact for all VanU affiliates, and establishes a system of receiving and appropriately responding to complaints in a timely manner adherent to all BC Soccer governing rules and regulations. All this results in increased levels of safety in female player environments.

Recommendation 1: Appoint an independent Health & Safety Officer who is at 'arm's length' from those involved in complaints.

2.1.2 Formation of Complaint Resolution Committee (Urgent)

Where a complaint has been filed with the HSO and does not meet the requirements to be brought before BC Soccer for adjudication, it is our recommendation that a system of arbitration be established within VanU through the formation of a Complaint Resolution Committee.

The committee, consisting of a minimum of three (3) members, including at least one (1) board member, will establish a formal complaint process for members to follow, will establish policy and procedures for assessing and responding to complaints, and will report action taken in accordance with the oversight of the board.

It is further recommended that a Complaint Resolution Policy document be generated and made available on the VanU website clearly outlining the formal complaint procedure and club response. An excellent peer example of discipline and resolution policy is available on the North Shore Girls Soccer Club website.⁶

Recommendation 2: Create a formal complaint resolution policy and committee to establish a clear system of complaint arbitration and mediation within VanU.

2.1.3 Decision-Making Regarding Girls' Programming

To promote effective decision-making, it is crucial to ensure it is thorough, consultative, and transparent. For VanU, we understand that final decision-making authority regarding programming, scheduling, team formation, and player placement rests with the Technical Director. However, we recommend that VanU review internal decision-making processes around girls' programming to ensure that those most familiar

with on-the-field sessions, teams, and players—such as technical leads, age group leads, relevant staff coaches and volunteer coaches—are at the table when decisions involving girls’ programming are made.

Among the technical staff, the Technical Director may be familiar with all girls’ programming and teams but not all individual players. Technical leads may be familiar with individual players and age groups but not necessarily all girls’ programming. Staff and volunteer coaches may be familiar with individual players and their families but not necessarily the entire age group or girls’ side. Thus, different staff and coaches provide different vantage points. Receiving input from all when making decisions surrounding programming on the girls’ side—including scheduling, training load, session format, team formation, and player assignment—ensures that all relevant knowledge is harnessed and that decisions are made with girls’ needs and interests in mind.

Recommendation 3: Adopt a collaborative approach to decision-making regarding girls' programming, such that technical leads, age group leads, staff coaches, and volunteer coaches are consulted; that processes for consultation are clear and followed; and that decisions and programs are clearly communicated to players and families.

2.2 Administrative – Short Term Priorities

2.2.1 Policy Creation and Accessibility

We recommend that Vancouver United FC prioritize the creation and public posting of critical policies to ensure transparency, accountability, and accessibility for all members. Policies in key areas such as executive limitations, financial expenditures, and oversight should be clearly defined to safeguard the club’s operations and ensure responsible decision-making. Procurement guidelines would help streamline purchasing processes while maintaining ethical standards. Additionally, formalizing and posting policies related to discipline and complaints, safe sport, and impairment-free environments will protect players and staff, promoting a positive and safe atmosphere. Policies related to image consent, and membership terms and conditions, should be readily available to provide clarity on member rights and responsibilities. The player code of conduct is also essential for setting behavioral expectations, fostering mutual respect and sportsmanship. Making these policies easily accessible on the club’s website will build trust within the community and demonstrate the club’s commitment to maintaining a safe, fair, and well-governed organization.

Recommendation 4: Generate and make accessible comprehensive club policy documents in key areas such as financial expenditures, discipline and complaints, executive limitation, and safe sport.

2.2.2 Standardization and Streamlining of Club Communications

It is recommended that a system of intra-club communication standards and policy be established by VanU that governs communication between the club and its members. Standardization of communication, which we recommend including type, style, frequency, and content standards, ensures the greatest likelihood that important information will be received, club ‘voice’ will be clear and consistent, and VanU members and volunteers will understand where to access information when needed.

2.2.2.1 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN VANU AND PLAYERS, PARENTS, GUARDIANS

We recommend that when VanU must communicate important and/or time-sensitive information, that it be communicated not only by mass direct email to parents, players and guardians, but also disseminated through team managers. It is our observation that families are more likely to read emails sent from their specific team officials.

We further recommend that a 'Who to contact' page be added to the VanU website clearly directing members to the correct person to contact for their issue. North Shore Girls Soccer Club has an excellent example of what this committee feels will benefit VanU communication.⁷ A VanU contact page will decrease inefficiencies when member communications are directed to the wrong VanU staff member and decrease response times to members.

Recommendation 5: Create a 'Who to contact' page on the club website with specific directions on who to contact with what inquiries.

2.2.2.2 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN VANU AND VOLUNTEER TEAM OFFICIALS

We recommend that clear 'Who to contact' information be provided to team officials on a regular basis. An example where this has been implemented well for the 2024-25 season is the weekly pre-game emails sent by the Operations Manager to team officials, listing, among other things, contact information for game day issues regarding referees and equipment. A contact list has also been included in the U15-U18 Manager Manual. We recommend that contact lists are made readily available to volunteer team officials of all age groups, managers and coaches.

We recommend that a PDF of the Manager Manual be posted to the VanU website. We further recommend that the content of the manual be amended to cover all age groups. We recommend the creation of a Coach's Handbook to supplement the Coach Information Video Sessions provided for the 2024-25 season. Unlike video, a downloadable and searchable PDF can be quickly referenced and printed easily. The Handbook should be sent to volunteer coaches prior to the start of the fall/winter season and posted on the VanU website.

Recommendation 6: Create downloadable and searchable Coaches' and Managers' Handbooks and provide easily accessible 'Who to contact' information.

2.2.2.3 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN VOLUNTEER OFFICIALS AND PLAYER/PARENT/GUARDIANS

Standards of behaviour surrounding communication on apps used by team officials and VanU members—including PowerUp and TeamSnap—as well as informal group chats on WhatsApp should be clearly defined by VanU, including parent chats and player chats. Expectations set by the club can be referenced by members if behaviour does not match. This decreases the likelihood of bullying, intimidating, exclusionary, or otherwise inappropriate communications.

Recommendation 7: Establish and publicize standards of communication for group chats on team apps (e.g., PowerUp, TeamSnap) and other platforms (e.g., WhatsApp).

2.2.3 Kit Suitability

It is crucial for girls in sport to have proper fitting, well-designed kit. Girls need to feel comfortable in their kit and proud to wear it both on the field and off. Girls should have the opportunity to participate in individual fittings and replace their kit as needed. As girls' bodies change earlier and much more dramatically than boys at ages 10 and up, kit provided to girls' teams U11 and up should be designed for and sized for girls' bodies.

Options for women's sized kit are currently available for divisional players through VanU's online kit ordering interface that is part of registration. We recommend that VanU review the ordering instructions to ensure that they clearly communicate gender, style, and sizing options so that all girls who prefer women-sized kit can order and receive it.

To our knowledge, ordering options for BCSPL players are not gender specific. Kit offerings should be expanded at the BCSPL level to ensure girls have access to women-sized and styled kit. A review of Macron and Adidas team catalogues suggests that there are many options for girl and women-sized kit with our current vendors (see Appendix A for examples of girls and boys sized options).

Recommendation 8: Improve ordering options for girls and women-sized kit for ages U11 and up, with styles and cuts specifically designed to fit girls' bodies and preferences. Order only dark shorts for girls to ensure they always feel confident on the field.

Girls' teams should have the opportunity to try on kit before committing to sizing. Having items too small or too large can be detrimental to girls, whose bodies are generally subject to more scrutiny, stereotypes, and expectations, as compared to boys. We recommend that the club provide players the option to buy replacement kit at any time to ensure proper sizing as girls grow, as well as the opportunity to opt out of kit replacement and to donate kit for secondhand use to minimize the environmental impact of textile waste.

Recommendation 9: Host indoor team 'Kit Fit' nights in the spring as a fun social activity and respectful way to get proper kit sizing; host 'Kit Swap' nights where older girls can 'hand me down' kit to younger girls to further facilitate proper sizing and minimize waste. Provide an easy-to-order kit replacement form through the VanU website so that families can access this service directly at any time of the year.

2.2.4 Social Media

Social media is a fantastic way to showcase the achievements, teamwork, and dedication of VanU athletes. We recommend that the club make a conscious effort to ensure balanced coverage and visibility of girls' and boys' teams. The VanU communications staff should create a content calendar that tracks social media posts for both genders, as well as all division and age groups, and monitors coverage of training, games, community engagement, and individual athlete highlight features. Staff could then use the content calendar to ensure that girls' teams and athletes are receiving coverage that equally celebrates their athletic achievements and prowess rather than reinforces gender stereotypes by disproportionately focusing on appearance, team building, or community service. If the content calendar suggests that

coverage of the girls' side is lacking, we recommend that VanU identify specific coaches or parents to be 'content providers' and ask that they post and/or tag VanU content for girls.

Recommendation 10: Create a content calendar to track social media posts by frequency and content and adjust to ensure balanced coverage and visibility of girls' teams/athletes.

2.2.5 Land Acknowledgment

We recommend that a land acknowledgement be added to the Vancouver United FC website. Absent of direct Provincial recommendation, we further recommend that VanU follow the recommendation of UBC.⁸

Recommendation 11: Add a land acknowledgement to the VanU website.

“Equality focuses on creating the same starting line for everyone. Equity has the goal of providing everyone with a full range of opportunities and benefits. . . the same finish line.” – Dr. Bruce Kidd, *Actively Engaging Women and Girls – A Supplement to Canadian Sport for Life*

2.3 Administrative – Long Term Priorities

2.3.1 Female Leadership: Board, Directors, Technical Leads

Increasing the representation of women in club leadership is crucial for fostering inclusivity and enhancing decision-making as it pertains to girls' programming. First, having women in leadership positions ensures that club leadership reflects the player pool and that female athletes (and their families) see themselves reflected at the top of the club. Second, enhancing the representation of women among club leadership ensures that unique experiences, viewpoints, knowledge, and backgrounds—particularly as they relate to girls'/women's experiences in sport—are included in pivotal conversations and decisions. Finally, research shows that diversity in leadership improves group decision-making and outcomes. Diverse leadership groups have been found to show deeper engagement with issues, ask/answer more relevant questions while problem-solving, and more closely scrutinize alternative options; in other words, diversity makes individuals and groups perform and lead better.⁹ Thus, ensuring the presence of women among club leaders is not only a matter of representation but also stands to improve club decision-making and performance, especially with respect to outcomes that affect female athletes.

Recommendation 12: Increase the representation of women in leadership positions in the club, including among Board Members and Directors (Executive and Technical).

Research on diversity in leadership also shows that setting diversity goals and drawing up timelines for meeting them is one of the most effective ways to increase the representation of a target group.¹⁰ We recommend that VanU set specific goals for hiring and promoting women into leadership positions at the Board, Director, and Technical Lead levels, and specify clear and realistic timelines for meeting them. For

instance, we recommend that VanU set a goal to hire a female Technical Director or Assistant Technical Director (possibly through the creation of a new position) in the next two years to create gender balance among leadership and enhance decision-making and authority.

Recommendation 13: Set specific goals for hiring and promoting women into leadership positions at the Technical Director and Technical Lead levels, and specify realistic timelines for meeting them.

We recognize that there are many challenges associated with finding qualified female applicants for such positions. We recommend taking proactive steps to identify, develop, and promote female candidates for leadership positions. This might include creating partnerships with accrediting agencies (i.e., BC Soccer) and community and university groups (e.g., UBC/SFU women's soccer), offering internships, mentoring programs, maternity and parental leave policies, and career development initiatives to nurture talent and make promotion into leadership both more accessible and attractive for potential female candidates, including current technical leads and staff coaches.

Recommendation 14: Take proactive steps to identify, develop, and promote female candidates for leadership positions through career development initiatives.

During the time in which AGSI was preparing this report, VanU hired a Girls Technical Lead for U11-U13 Girls Div 2 and 3 and U14 to U18 Girls (non-BCSPL). This is a fantastic step and is in keeping with the goal of expanding the representation of women among club technical leadership. It is important, however, to distinguish between hiring women into senior positions and hiring women into technical lead positions specific to girls programming. AGSI recommends that in setting goals and timelines in this domain, there is a clear understanding of the difference and how that difference implicates the goals of enhanced representation and decision-making.

2.3.2 Female Staff Coaches

In addition to the rationale outlined above for female leadership, having female coaches on the field with youth athletes, especially girls but also boys, communicates that sport is a domain for women and girls. Taking technical and tactical direction from women on the pitch can enhance gender equity by challenging traditional stereotypes and signal to both girls and boys that sports knowledge and prowess is not restricted to one gender.¹¹

Female coaches serve as role models, demonstrating that women can excel in all technical and tactical aspects of the game, which can inspire and motivate female athletes to pursue their own goals with confidence. Female coaches also possess unique insights into the specific challenges faced by female athletes, enabling them to provide tailored guidance and mentorship. Female coaches can create a safe space where athletes feel comfortable discussing issues related to performance, mental health, and personal/physical development. This connection can enhance team cohesion and promote a culture of respect and empowerment, ultimately contributing to the overall growth and success of athletes.

Recommendation 15: Set a goal to have one third of its staff coach positions and billed hours filled by women by the beginning of the 2026-27 season. This percentage roughly represents the percentage of girls playing at VanU.

2.3.3 Annual Club Feedback Forms

We suggest that a short digital feedback form (with fewer than ten questions) be sent to the membership at the end of each fall/winter season, asking for a rating on player's overall season enjoyment, team's coaches, staff coaches, extra programs offered by the club, evaluations process, and club communications, with an open-ended question about suggestions for improvement.

Recommendation 16: Create an annual feedback form to collect data, measure progress, promote improvement, and give a voice to the membership.

2.3.4 Translation Services

Rationale: Based on the 2021 Census, 42% of the population of Vancouver is foreign-born, and nearly half (49.3%) of its residents are not native English speakers.¹² This means that many current and potential members may not have the language skills to sufficiently interpret information provided to them by the club. We recommend that the club offer translation services for critical information that is distributed to members and potential members. The most spoken languages in Vancouver, other than English, include Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi, Tagalog, and Korean.¹³ Club members who are fluent in these languages could offer translation services to any members or potential members who need them. Volunteers could be solicited via a webform. This would not only ensure that important information adequately reaches members who are English language learners but would provide an extra opportunity for those members with non-English language capabilities to get involved with club activities.

Recommendation 17: Recruit a 'translation team' from current members to provide translation services to members and potential members who are English language learners.

2.3.5 Website Redesign

A comprehensive website redesign would elevate VanU's digital presence, increase potential player engagement, and better serve the current community. The proposed new website would feature an intuitive, streamlined interface optimized for both desktop and mobile devices, ensuring seamless access to vital information regardless of how families connect.

The modernized platform should prioritize quick access to time-sensitive information such as game schedules, practice updates, and weather-related notifications. An integrated online payment system would streamline the registration process, while a robust search function would help visitors quickly locate specific information.

To enhance transparency and communication, the redesign would prominently feature easily accessible club policies, a clearly outlined grievance procedure, and a detailed organizational directory with specific contact information for various inquiries.

Visual elements would showcase club achievements, team highlights, and community impact through high-quality photos and graphics, helping build stronger connections with current members while attracting prospective families. Clean, professional design elements and clear call-to-action buttons would guide visitors efficiently through the site.

Recommendation 18: Enhance member experience and elevate digital presence through website redesign that prioritizes clear, comprehensive and accessible communication.

3. RECRUITMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The recruitment of girls to play soccer is essential to the development of the sport in Canada and to the health of our club. In a community where youth have access to so many different activities, what's going to attract them to soccer? What's going to attract them to play at VanU? And if a player has dropped out of soccer, what might bring them back?

As women's professional leagues grow in many parts of the world, including in Canada, we hope that there will be an increase in girls' enthusiasm for soccer. Having prominent, elite role models can go a long way to fostering popularity in the sport. Female role models in general—coaches, mentors, technical directors—provide an important draw for many girls. Some of the recommendations AGSI has made under Administrative and Organizational, and Retention, as well as the first recommendation in this Recruitment section, address this need.

Other recommendations below invite girls to try soccer in environments designed to be easy and approachable, with no commitment, and with no or low cost. While it makes sense to run most initiatives for younger players (ages U6-U13), when kids are just starting to play soccer, we recommend that at least one initiative be run for older girls (ages U14- U18). It can be very intimidating for players to join a team when they haven't played soccer much, or at all, especially at a later age. Because we see attrition in the older teams due to increased school commitments and demands from competing activities, this would be a good opportunity to encourage new players to try soccer. We also recommend that outreach to former players could be done at U16-U18. Please see #4.1.4 'Girls Retention Officer' under Retention.

3.1 Recruitment – Immediate Priorities

3.1.1 Relationship with UBC Women's Soccer

The University of British Columbia (UBC) is home to VanU, hosting many of our games and training sessions. This proximity offers the club a prime opportunity to liaise with UBC Soccer to enhance the soccer experience of its own members. Over the years, there have been several cooperation initiatives between VanU and UBC Soccer, but the relationship remains an area that could be substantially developed, facilitating a more consistent engagement of VanU youth players with UBC Soccer.

Specifically, we recommend that VanU, in conjunction with AGSI members or a Technical Lead for girls, liaise with the women's UBC soccer team to explore how the relationship could benefit the girls at VanU, and vice versa.

It is important for girls to have role models in their sport, including role models of the same gender. A university team is ideal for this. AGSI recommends that in liaising with the UBC women's team, and developing initiatives for cooperation and collaboration, that simplicity, consistency and value be considered. Are we able to establish an annual event for girls at VanU? A UBC game night? Can we pick a couple of age groups where we would like to focus our engagement? Can we take some of the other areas of player development that we have identified (e.g., tactical education, technical skill-building, mentorship, social events), and incorporate them into these initiatives? Can we bring UBC players into our programming in a way that provides mutual benefits?

Engaging girls in soccer more globally, beyond their team environment, as well as providing role models, can increase their interest in the sport and lead to greater retention. AGSI has chosen to include this item under Recruitment because a relationship between VanU and UBC Soccer can be an incentive for players to join the club.

Recommendation 19: Actively liaise with UBC Soccer to further develop the relationship, plan one or two initiatives to implement during the upcoming year and promote these initiatives in the VanU community.

3.2 Recruitment – Short Term Priorities

3.2.1 Offer Second Kicks Fall-only Cycle

For young players, First Kicks (U4-U8) currently offers a fall-only registration option (Sept-Dec) while the Second Kicks registration cycle follows a fall-winter season from September to March to match the Divisional season. Second Kicks also offers a stand-alone spring program (April-June). The single-season registration approach offered through First Kicks (and during the spring for Second Kicks) means that young players can try soccer for 2-3 months rather than committing to a full 6-month season. We recommend offering a fall-only registration option for Second Kicks players to allow families to commit to a smaller period of fall play. Teams could remain largely the same across the fall and winter seasons, but allow for some fluctuation due to families' schedules, multi-sport programming, and the desire for some to switch to indoor programming during the winter.

Recommendation 20: Offer a fall-only Second Kicks registration option.

3.2.2 Bring Your Bestie to Soccer Week

To enhance recruitment reach, AGSI recommends that for U8-U13 players, VanU hold a Bring Your Bestie to a soccer practice during a designated week in which training sessions are specifically tailored to welcoming potential new players into a fun environment. Coaches should be supplied with session plans, informational material from the club to hand out to attending guest players, and where available, staff coach support and/or older VanU player support. This initiative offers a direct, low-barrier recruitment opportunity. Bring

Your Bestie to soccer week also allows for current players to deepen their identification and connection with the club by sharing it with peers.

Recommendation 21: Enact Bring Your Bestie week to welcome potential new players to VanU.

3.2.3 Come Try Soccer Community Outreach and Recruitment Events

Offer free, girls-only community events to introduce new players of varying age groups to soccer at VanU. We recommend these be run in the spring and summer to take advantage of better weather and give the opportunity for new players to register for the fall/winter season. These events serve as prime female recruitment opportunities with no-cost, low barrier opportunities for girls in the community. They also invite volunteer opportunities for current female players, strengthening club identity and female player retention.

Recommendation 22: Offer free, girls-only Come Try Soccer events to introduce potential new female players to soccer at VanU.

3.3 Recruitment – Long Term Priorities

3.3.1 Girls' Goalkeeper Clinics

Based on our discussions with players and anecdotal evidence as coaches and team officials, we note that being 'forced' to play in goal can be a real turnoff to the sport for young female players. In the absence of volunteers, the standard practice of rotating players through the goalie position often invites anxiety for timid players, especially those who are new to the game and do not understand the responsibilities and rules specific to goalkeeping.

To increase girls' confidence in net and to recruit players for the position, we recommend hosting goalkeeping clinics at training from Second Kicks through U18. While the VanU goalkeeping academy works well for some players, it does not attract/produce enough female goalies. In addition, teaching correct goalie technique will help to reduce the risk of injuries, especially to the hands and wrists.

For Second Kicks, we recommend hosting a pull-out Goalkeeping Clinic bi-monthly during Second Kicks training sessions with goalkeeping staff coaches. For each pull-out session, groups of 2-3 players from each team could join a goalkeeping staff coach on the field for training in net. Players could rotate through each week so that every player has a chance to attend the Goalkeeper Clinic once or twice each season. It is crucial for this to be held at the same time and on the same field as regularly scheduled team training, without any additional cost or transportation requirements, to maximize access. We recommend piloting this program with the Second Kicks girls' teams and expanding to boys if staffing permits.

We also recommend that in-training Goalkeeping Clinics be offered to girls' divisional teams through U18 to encourage more girls to play in goal, and to support those who are willing to give it a try. In the 2024-25 season, this model was tested with the U16 Div 1, 2 and 3 teams, who shared a practice time and field. The staff goalkeeping coach provided several pull-out sessions for players from the three teams. We further recommend that VanU solicit volunteer coaches who have goalkeeping experience to run clinics, especially

when we do not have sufficient staff resources to do so. Quite often there are parents/guardians with soccer experience who do not have the time to commit to coaching full-time but would be interested in helping out with occasional 'clinic model' training.

In addition to changing the way we deliver goalie training for girls at VanU, we should consider other methods of promoting and celebrating our goalies, including the formation of an all-ages goalie club and mentorship program, and a Save of the Month spot on social media.

Recommendation 23: Hold pull-out Goalkeeping Clinics during training sessions from Second Kicks through U18 to expand access to, interest in, and knowledge of goalkeeping; and design ways to promote and celebrate our goalies.

3.3.2 School and After-School Soccer Programs

To reach young players whose families may not seek out club soccer, and to reach teens who might want to try soccer for the first time or go back to soccer, VanU could offer programs through public schools in the area. VanU could start by reaching out to school administrators, PE teachers, or Parent Action Committee (PAC) Chairs or Sports Coordinators to discuss the potential for lunchtime, class-time, or after-school soccer programs for young students. Through a school or PAC partnership, the club could offer accessible programming that encourages active participation and promotes soccer in a familiar school environment. Sessions could be free single-session offerings during PE classes, recess, or lunch, as a Come Try Soccer initiative, or could be multi-session programming during lunchtime or after school at a modest rate for families. Many school administrators and PACs already partner with extracurricular clubs in this manner, and families benefit from the convenience of having activities offered at the school site. VanU may also consider presenting at monthly PAC meetings, specifically explaining the benefits of girls in team sports to parents, principals, and teachers.¹⁴

To specifically encourage the participation of girls, the club should design programs with female coaches and mentors, create all-girls sessions, and offer free sessions for girls. Marketing materials could highlight these inclusive, girl-focused aspects, emphasizing a welcoming atmosphere that fosters confidence and teamwork. By offering school-based programs, the club could reach a larger number of young girls, introducing them to soccer in a supportive, accessible setting.

Recommendation 24: Connect with school administrators, PE teachers, and PAC Chairs to offer girl-focused programming on site at school during class, lunchtime, or after school.

4. RETENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Retention of girls at VanU is critical for fostering long-term team building on the girls' side, skill development, and program success. On an individual level, girls who stay engaged in soccer over time are more likely to build confidence, leadership, and teamwork skills, which are valuable both on and off the

field. Consistent involvement in sports helps develop physical fitness, resilience, and a lifelong habit of physical activity.

Ensuring that girls remain engaged at VanU requires creating an inclusive, supportive environment where girls feel valued, are treated fairly, and are offered positive role models. It also means addressing barriers such as unequal access to resources, frequent turnover of coaches and teams, and uneven opportunities for advancement. Below we offer several strategies for how VanU could support players, coaches, and families on the girls' side to strengthen teams and retain players, both in the club and in the sport.

4.1 Retention – Immediate Priorities

4.1.1 BC SPL Retention (Urgent)

In the preparation of this report, we have taken into consideration all age groups and divisions. While there are a few recommendations that are limited to particular groups, most of the recommendations should benefit all girls in the club, and many of them should benefit the boys in the club as well. We would like to note that there are retention and recruitment factors specific to girls in the BC SPL program, which has a unique set of parameters and challenges.

Before VanU had a BC SPL designation, the club saw attrition of players to clubs that did have a BC SPL designation—players U13-U18 who wanted to play at a level higher than what VanU offered at the time. Now that the club does have BC SPL teams, it is important to nurture these teams. If they are not viable, the club risks losing players to other BC SPL clubs. The absence of a quality BC SPL team in any given age group has a trickle-down effect on the divisional teams in that age group, restricting the pathway for advancement within the club.¹⁵

We suggest that the BC SPL Lead / Assistant Technical Director collaborate with parties such as the BC SPL Head Coaches, BC SPL Assistant Coaches, the BC SPL parent committee, the AGSI committee, and the Technical Director to explore opportunities to enhance the profile and quality of teams at the BC SPL level. Collaboration should include input from women and girls in the club. This is an initial step to building recommendations specific to girls in the BC SPL program.

Recommendation 25: Identify strategies to improve the profile and quality of the girls' BC SPL program.

Improving the experience of girls (and their families) in our BC SPL program should not only improve retention but serve as a significant recruitment tool. A strong, quality program will attract players from other clubs. Additional recruitment measures that fall within the rules of BC Soccer can be explored separately. In the meantime, let's make this program one that girls in our soccer community want to be part of.

While the BC SPL teams comprise a small fraction of the teams at VanU, they are an important part of the club, with an opportunity to demonstrate excellence in sport, on and off the pitch. A healthy BC SPL program will inspire and benefit the rest of the club. What happens with the BC SPL teams affects what

happens with the divisional teams, directly and indirectly, and the integration between the two programs should be respected and fostered.

4.1.2 Evaluations and Team Formation (Urgent)

At the U11-U18 level, evaluations and team assignment are perhaps the most difficult tasks that club staff perform yet also the most impactful for player retention, team viability, and players' overall experience. Players, especially on the girls' side, will more likely stay with soccer if they feel they have been evaluated fairly, placed on a team commensurate with their skill level, and have opportunities for advancement, whether on their assigned team or in the future.

To this end, we strongly recommend that VanU improve transparency and clarity around the evaluation process, explore how to provide players with more coordinated feedback, and ensure that decision-making in team formation is balanced and comprehensive. While these recommendations are put forward with girls in mind, we believe that they would also benefit the boys at VanU.

VanU uses a variety of metrics and criteria to evaluate players throughout the season and leading up to the Phase 4 team formation. (Please refer to the evaluations page on the VanU website for a breakdown of the phases). This comprehensive approach helps to provide a thorough and layered evaluation of each player, with input from team coaches and technical staff.

While these assessments are designed to provide information for the Technical Director and inform team formation, they do not to provide direct feedback to the players and families.

4.1.2.1 MID-SEASON FEEDBACK

The primary means for providing feedback to players are the individual check-ins that team coaches do with their players twice during the season. While the check-ins are a valuable tool to help players understand their strengths and weaknesses and what they can do to improve, they are not well-integrated with the rest of the evaluations, sometimes resulting in a disconnect between the information players receive from their coaches and their final placement at the end of evaluations.

AGSI recommends that VanU alter or expand its method of giving mid-season feedback so that it is more connected to the evaluations process as a whole, is based on standardized criteria that is clear to players and their families, and is appropriate for each age group.

For example, if the key areas in U11-U12 Phase 1 and Phase 3 assessments are tactical, technical, physical, psychological, then coaches could provide midterm progress reports structured around these criteria. For younger players in First and Second Kicks, feedback could be translated into more easily understood terms, such as 'glows' (positives) and 'grows' (areas for improvement). Midterm progress reports could be provided to players in written form using a simple template. Many clubs, both in soccer and in other team sports, provide such evaluative summaries or mid-season 'report cards' to inform players of areas of strength and areas for growth, and to substantiate assignments to divisions and teams.¹⁶

AGSI recommends that VanU standardize this process across divisional teams and modify criteria to be consistent with those that staff coaches use for Phase 1 and Phase 3 evaluations.

Recommendation 26: Provide players with midseason progress reports that are based on standardized criteria and are well-integrated with the evaluations.

4.1.2.2 FEEDBACK FOLLOWING PHASE 3 AND 4 EVALUATIONS

The evaluation process and team formation are enormously impactful for player retention. When there is transparency, clarity and effective communication, players and their families are much more likely to understand selection decisions. Ensuring transparency and clarity in the evaluation process will increase the chances that players continue to play soccer and continue to play at the club. On the girls' side, even a handful of players leaving can eliminate an entire division, thus it is crucial to ensure transparency and fairness.

One of the ways to bolster confidence in the evaluations process is to provide individual feedback following Phase 3 and 4 evaluations so that players have a clear understanding of where they have and have not met the evaluations criteria. The nature of the current Phase 3 on-field evaluations and Phase 4 team formation preclude the sharing of results and reasoning around placement decisions with players and families. While confidentiality around player assessment in Phases 3 and 4 is important to the integrity of the evaluations process, could there be a means of providing individual feedback that does not compromise integrity but enhances it?

It is recommended that VanU explore mechanisms for providing automatic feedback, based on standardized criteria, following Phase 3 and 4 evaluations, especially at the critical ages (U13-U17), when girls are most likely to drop out of sports.¹⁷ Offering clear, actionable feedback fosters a growth mindset, encouraging players to view setbacks as opportunities for growth rather than failures. This can boost their confidence and motivation, helping them to stay engaged in the sport and club. Consider including a brief, personalized comment for each player highlighting a 'strength'.

Recommendation 27: Explore how to offer automatic, standardized feedback after team formation and pilot it with a select age group of girls.

4.1.2.3 RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES FOLLOWING PHASE 4 TEAM FORMATION

Following Phase 4 team formation, families sometimes reach out to the VanU technical staff seeking clarity on their child's evaluation results and team assignment, especially if they are unsatisfied with the outcome. There should be a means by which such inquiries are answered, especially for girls beyond age 12, when there is the greatest risk of attrition (see footnote 17). In addition to the Technical Director, other technical staff, including the Girls Retention Officer (see #4.1.4), could be considered for answering inquiries.

Replying to inquiries in a timely manner demonstrates that we value our members and care about the players and their experience at VanU. Providing information that could help families understand team placement can promote trust in the evaluations process and encourage players to stay engaged.

Recommendation 28: Establish a mechanism by which inquiries regarding team assignment can be answered in a timely fashion, with the goal of providing clarity, increasing trust and encouraging players in their soccer journey.

4.1.3 Female Representation in Team Formation Meeting (Urgent)

The participation of women in team formation provides important balance, adding valuable gender-based perspective. Women can challenge stereotypes and assumptions about body type, development and athleticism.

Ideally a female coach (volunteer or staff) or technical staff member with knowledge of the players would be present during team formation so that they can contribute fully to the evaluations process. If not possible, another female coach or board member could substitute.

Recommendation 29: Include input and oversight from a relevant female representative in the team formation meetings of all girls' teams.

4.1.4 Girls Retention Officer (Urgent)

Assign a Girls Retention Officer to do outreach and communication with girls who are leaving soccer or leaving the club. Publicize with both volunteer and staff coaches so all know who to contact when players or teams are in flux.

Girls and families leave the club and the sport for a variety of reasons. Discussing, tracking, and attempting to remedy cases of departure would help the club more deeply understand reasons for departure and could prevent departure in some cases. The Girls Retention Officer role should be assigned to a senior female technical lead, who can do outreach with girls considering leaving and make case-specific retention offers. The name and contact of the Girls Retention Officer should be distributed to all coaches on the girls' side so that coaches can refer cases.

The Retention Officer could also cull through divisional registration data over the summer and identify previous players on the girls' side who have not re-registered for the upcoming fall season. The officer could then individually contact families and enquire about reasons for leaving, share information about appropriate programs, attempt to address any barriers to re-registration, such as divisional/team placement, multi-sport issues, scheduling conflicts, etc.

Recommendation 30: Assign a Girls Retention Officer to meet with girls who are considering leaving the club or leaving the sport, discuss reasons for departure, and offer retention support.

4.1.5 VanU Technical Support (VTS) Session Tracking

The VTS sessions at VanU provided to U14-U18 divisional teams are a valuable tool in team development. VanU aims to provide each team with a prescribed minimum of sessions within each fall/winter season (three sessions within the 2024-25 year). Even a small number of sessions can have a significant positive impact on the players' and coaches' training experience, and we highly encourage VanU to continue with

this model. However, through anecdotal reports from volunteer coaches and a staff coach, it is our understanding that the VTS sessions have not been delivered as anticipated, especially in the 2023-24 season, and to some degree in the 2024-25 season.

We recommend that VanU streamline the administration of the VTS sessions to ensure they are being delivered consistently (with an understanding that there will be exceptions where it is not possible to deliver sessions for various reasons) and that VanU create a system in which VTS sessions can be better tracked. This should include a process by which staff coaches and the teams' head coaches can confirm the completion of each VTS session, and by which the Technical Director can ensure that the girls' teams are receiving all their sessions.

Recommendation 31: Improve the tracking of the VTS sessions, including adding a confirmation mechanism for volunteer coaches, to ensure maximum delivery to all teams.

It is highly important that girls are supported in their technical and tactical development. Girls are less likely than boys to challenge themselves technically inside and outside of their training environment, and therefore benefit from skill-building that is integrated into their regular training sessions. Any opportunity to provide them with extra instruction and practice time in this area will further their technical development and increase their confidence in their own abilities. Girls are also less likely than boys to watch soccer, discuss soccer or play FIFA or sports video games,¹⁸ which help build knowledge of the sport and increase an understanding of tactics. Training sessions that include tactical instruction can help girls gain a better understanding of the game. While technical and tactical training are provided by team coaches throughout the season, the VTS sessions offer a chance to bring different expertise and fresh perspective into a team's training environment.

Also, the additional support given by staff coaches sends a message to players, and their parents, that they are valued. This can increase the players' confidence, as well as their sense of belonging, and in turn promote greater retention.

For further recommendations on technical and tactical support, please refer to #3.3.1 'Girls' Goalkeeper Clinics' under Recruitment and #4.3.3 'Skills and Tactics for U13-U18 Girls' under Retention.

4.2 Retention – Short Term Priorities

4.2.1 Building Connections Across Teams, Divisions and Age Groups

Deeper connections among players enhance player experience, insulate players against feelings of isolation in the event of new team placement, and help foster a larger 'VanU identity'. Establishing strong, meaningful social connections and identities is even more important for female players.

Also, creating a healthy environment of player movement (or player pools) allows individual players to develop at their own pace. It allows them to challenge themselves at a higher level or gain confidence and playing time at a lower level. It provides an umbrella for a youth player's soccer journey, allowing for movement between levels based on physical development, mental and emotional development, health issues, commitment issues, etc. It sends a message to players that above all, there is a place for them.

Sometimes girls quit soccer when they are moved to a team in a lower division. If the concept of moving between divisions is normalized, it can make the transition easier and more acceptable to players, promoting greater retention. It can also benefit girls who are hesitant to challenge themselves at a higher level.

We tend to see an increase in girls dropping out of soccer in their later teenage years. One of the main contributing factors is the commitment required, especially if soccer is a player's 'secondary' sport or activity. Players may be more inclined to keep playing soccer by moving to a lower division with less commitment if they know some of the players already and are used to the concept of player pools. (Also, see #4.3.2 'Spring U14-U18 League' under Retention.)

We recommend that VanU enhance opportunities for cross-team, cross-division and cross-age interactions, collaboration, and competition in the following ways:

- Continue to schedule teams that are in the same age group (in the same or different divisions) to practice at the same time and field when possible.
- Offer multi-age pre-season training camps to divisional players (as is provided to the VanPlus and BC SPL players).
- Proactively create tournament teams with mixed age groups based on interest and availability.

The Skills Centre program provides a case in point for this model and philosophy. The Skills Centre program currently includes invited players and opt-in players. Consider the experience of the 2013-2015 girls over the 2023-2024 fall/winter and spring seasons. The Technical Lead built out teams each week to compete in VYSA games and local tournaments. Teams varied from week to week and included a variety of invited and opt-in players, and often combined players from various age groups (e.g., a few 2014s would play with 2013s, or 2015s would join 2014s). These varied pairings created social connections across invited and opt-in players, across players from different age groups, and blurred the lines between those who were invited and those who were opt-in. It also allowed girls to forge friendships across the multi-age training group as a whole, such that when it came time for evaluations and team formation, girls were familiar with many players, had wider friendship networks, and faced less disappointment if not placed with previous teammates or friends. In other words, the wide connections forced through multi-age and multi-level training and competition allowed players to weather the storm and occasional upset of team (re)formation.

While it may not be practical for the divisional side to adopt the Skills Centre model outright, there are ways in which the philosophy of the model can be incorporated.

Recommendation 32: Enhance opportunities for cross-team, cross-division, and cross-age group interactions, collaboration, and competition to create wider social connections, a normalization of fluidity and a deeper VanU identity.

The BC Coastal Soccer League (BCCSL) changed its fluid roster process (FRP) for the 2023-24 season, opening it up to allow greater fluidity. It then reversed this change for the 2024-25 season, greatly

restricting player movement. The more open version of the FRP in 2023-24 fostered the concept of player pools and cross-divisional connections.

Recommendation 33: Advocate for the BCCSL to re-examine its FRP policy for the following year.

4.2.2 Recruiting and Supporting Volunteer Female Coaches

It is crucial that women are well-represented among volunteer coaches for all the reasons stated in the sections #2.3.1 'Female Leadership: Board, Directors, Technical Leads' and #2.3.2 'Female Staff Coaches' (under Administrative and Organizational). Female coaches can challenge stereotypes about gender and leadership, offer different perspectives and insight to athletes, and provide role models for girls in sport.

VanU currently has a requirement, following BC Soccer, that at least one team official for girls' teams must be a woman. It is important to note that having a female manager on a team with only male coaches can reinforce stereotypes about gender roles (i.e., men on the field; women on administrative tasks). Relying on the manager role to fulfill the requirement to have a female official does not advance progress toward the goal of increasing the representation of women among coaches, and we urge VanU to closely examine their practice of appointing team officials with a view to including at least one female coach on all girls' teams.

Recommendation 34: Actively recruit and encourage women in the club to volunteer to coach with a goal of having at least one coach on all girls' teams be female.

“Diverse women leaders in sport are critical in creating a welcoming and safe space for girls in sport.” – Canada Soccer

There are many reasons why we don't have more women coaching at VanU and generally in the community, including:

- Soccer coaching has traditionally been a male domain that can be difficult for women to break into, navigate and thrive in.
- Discrimination based on gender, including unconscious bias, expressed by team officials, referees, parents, and club and association leadership.
- Lack of respect and support from male counterparts, including questioning and challenging women's competency.
- Negative experiences (as players, parents or coaches) that force women out of the sport (e.g., lack of accountability, lack of transparency, bullying, harassment, abuse and assault).
- Childcare responsibilities that impede commitment.

We recommend several simple steps that VanU can take to encourage women to coach, and to support and celebrate them in their coaching journey. Our recommendations are divided into five sections below. While some of the action items are long term, we have grouped them together here under short term so that the

topic of volunteer female coaches can be addressed as a whole. It should be noted that some of the strategies outlined below could be applied to the recruitment and retention of staff coaches as well.

4.2.2.1 DATABASE OF VOLUNTEER FEMALE COACHES

Recommendation 35: Create and maintain a database of women in the club who are coaching or interested in coaching.

A database will provide a tool for communicating events, news and resources relevant to women in the club who coach or who are interested in coaching. It can provide a basis for networking. And it can offer the club a means of tracking their data on volunteer female coaches.

AGSI suggests that the database track the names and contact information of women who are currently coaching and those in the club who are interested in coaching. This distinction will allow us to communicate more efficiently.

To create this database, we suggest VanU take the following steps:

- 1) Record the names of all the women coaches (head coaches and assistant coaches) assigned to teams for the current season, including coaches volunteering in the BCSPL environment.
- 2) Solicit additional names of women who may be interested in coaching from the Technical Director, Assistant Technical Director and the Technical Lead for girls.
- 3) Include a gender box on the coach application form so that we can identify which applicants are women. (This information can be added to the database, can provide a source of data to track the number of female applicants, and can offer an indicator that may contribute to coach selection.)
- 4) Establish a system by which, over the course of a season, staff coaches can identify female volunteers who may be candidates for further coaching and provide their names to the staff in charge of girls programming as well as the Technical Director and Assistant Technical Director. This is especially important in the early age groups to get women into the coaching loop so that they can get accreditation and gain experience. However, it can also be applicable later on. As children move into the higher age categories, mothers who may not otherwise have had the time to coach early on may now be able to. Candidates can be informally encouraged to try coaching or to keep coaching. Sometimes this is all that's needed to have them continue. And by adding them to the database, we have a means of reaching out to them for recruitment and retention efforts. The system by which staff identify potential female coaches does not need to be complicated. We suggest that at the beginning of the season and then after the winter break, staff coaches are reminded to inform the Technical Staff of potential candidates.
- 5) Ahead of any recruitment event, a message can be sent to the general membership inviting women interested in coaching to attend.

4.2.2.2 EVENTS

Recommendation 36: Host annual events for volunteer female coaches.

There are a number of different forms that coaching events can take, with focusses on recruitment, education, guest speakers, networking, club-building, mentorship opportunities, etc., and it is possible that events could be multi-purposed. While one-off events are worthwhile, we believe that the establishment of an annual event or annual events would provide important continuity and momentum.

We propose that a senior female technical staff member meet with the AGSI committee to initiate the overall planning of women's coaching events, and to plan one event to take place before the on-field evaluations for the 2025-26 season. Primary considerations for the first event would include a) Concept, b) Cost/funding, c) Implementation.

The main goal of the first event should be to engage the female coaches at VanU, to offer a community, and to inspire women in their coaching journey.

4.2.2.3 NETWORKING FOR VOLUNTEER FEMALE COACHES

Recommendation 37: Facilitate peer-to-peer networking amongst volunteer female coaches in the club.

Creating a database for communications and holding events (in the two sections above) are means by which networking amongst female coaches can occur. Networking, or peer-to-peer support, happens somewhat organically, but there are ways to help facilitate it. And bringing people together is one of the first steps. Networking can dovetail with mentorship, which we cover below.

We recommend that in planning events, the technical staff person and AGSI keep networking in mind even if it's not the main focus of an event.

Peer-to-peer support is a significant factor in determining whether women continue to coach. Peers can be an important source of knowledge and encouragement. Having this support can be crucial in times of adversity, when coaches are facing difficulties involving their team, players, parents, coaching staff, the club staff or board members. Rather than dealing with issues in isolation, coaches can consult with others. It can make the difference between quitting or not. Ultimately, it's about being part of a community.

4.2.2.4 TECHNICAL STAFF SUPPORT OF VOLUNTEER FEMALE COACHES

Recommendation 38: Enhance communication between female volunteer coaches and technical staff.

One of the most impactful ways to support our female coaches is to provide them with a communication line to the technical staff. AGSI recommends that the club's technical staff establish regular check-ins with the female coaches. This could be the Technical Director, the Assistant Technical Director or Technical Lead for Girls, and we suggest that the communications with the coaches do not all reside with one individual.

Providing coaches with access to regular communications with technical staff allows them to a) feel supported in their work, b) discuss concerns, c) gain technical information or knowledge, d) network.

While this kind of communication may be occurring already in an ad hoc way, we recommend that it be conducted more systematically to ensure that all female coaches are provided this important communication line.

4.2.2.5 MENTORSHIP OF VOLUNTEER FEMALE COACHES

Recommendation 39: Provide more mentorship opportunities for female volunteer coaches.

We recommend that VanU offer mentorship opportunities to women coaches within the club environment, both as mentees and mentors, working with other women or with men. While there have been instances of this in the club, we encourage VanU to develop a broader mentorship practice. A mentee could be joining the staff of a team as an assistant coach or shadowing a coach on field occasionally or for a limited period. During their check-ins with technical staff (as described above), coaches could be asked whether they'd be interested in providing or accessing mentoring. The women coaching events and networking provide additional avenues for coaches to explore mentorship opportunities.

VanU should consider outside programs and resources for developing women coaches. *TELUS She CAN Coach*, for example, is a national coach recruitment, development, and training project designed for women to address the challenges they face regarding soccer participation.¹⁹ Perhaps there are opportunities for the club to access some of these programs and resources.

Mentorship can provide female mentees with knowledge, experience, different perspectives and community. It can address some of the issues that often hinder women from coaching, helping them to build confidence in their coaching abilities and giving them further coaching experience. It can help them navigate what traditionally has been a male domain, perhaps feel more included. And if they're working with male mentors, the mentorship can provide a two-way educational exchange, where the male mentors benefit from working with women, adding to their own work experience and receiving different perspectives.

Mentorship can provide female mentors with opportunities to share their knowledge and experience with others, and further their own coaching development.

4.2.2.6 VOLUNTEERS FROM OUTSIDE THE CLUB

Recommendation 40: Recruit female volunteer coaches from outside the club.

There are female soccer players in the community who would like to volunteer to coach. AGSI recommends that VanU strategize on how to reach these individuals and what kind of opportunities could be provided for them.

4.2.3 Keeping Girls in Sport Required Certification for All Coaches of Female Teams

Under the Respect in Sport umbrella, the Keeping Girls in Sport program was created to help everyone who coaches girls, including parents, understand how girls develop physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. Program elements include: Why girls aren't participating in sports and activity; mechanic, energetic and relationship injuries and prevention; how to create safe, strong, supportive environments; why girls quit sport; keeping girls healthy; key themes for keeping girls in sport; coaching elements and keeping sport fun and engaging.

Recommendation 41: All VanU staff, coaches, assistant coaches, and managers be required to gain certification in Keeping Girls in Sport at the cost of VanU. It is also recommended that VanU encourages all parents to take the program at their own cost.

The program addresses, based on sound research, the key elements for providing an optimal sport environment. Educating staff and members on these elements is likely to increase female player retention.

"When we understand how and why girls play, we can help every young athlete stay in sport, reach their potential, and remain active long after the competitions end."

– Respect Group Inc., *Keeping Girls in Sport*

4.2.4 Enhance VanU Identity

Club identity can be a powerful retention and recruitment tool. When players feel a connection to their club, and pride in their club, they are much more likely to join, and to stay. We recommend that VanU enhance its identity in the following three areas:

- **Merchandising:** Increase the VanU merchandise options and expand to include streetwear (hoodies, T-shirts, etc.). Create a focus group with 8-10 girls in the club in the U14-U18 age group to help guide what merchandise, styles, and sizes to offer.
- **Celebration of successes:** Explore different and more consistent ways in which to highlight the successes of teams and individual players throughout the club to build club community and celebrate our players. Ensure that there is gender parity, and that girls' successes aren't disproportionately in areas of charity work or social events. (See #2.2.4 'Social Media' under Administrative and Organizational for more details.) Use multiple platforms simultaneously (e.g., newsletter, social media) for each item that is highlighted to reach as many members as possible. Redesign the awards night ceremony so that there is greater emphasis on the substance of the achievements—this will provide a more meaningful experience for the players and their families. Consider separating the player awards night from the coach awards night or separating out the graduating teams.
- **Club events and programming:** Identify club events (or create club events) that can bring more players together. The awards night mentioned above is one example, and there is an opportunity to

make it more expansive and inclusive. Are there events that are already planned that can include more players? Can we invite volunteers to participate, thus creating more of a community? In several sections of this report, we have suggested initiatives that promote cross-team and cross-age community-building that can help foster a greater sense of VanU identity: #3.1.1 'Relationship with UBC Women's Soccer', #4.2.1 'Building Connections Across, Teams, Divisions and Age Groups', and #4.3.1 'Be a Mentor Program for Youth Players'.

Recommendation 42: Explore ways to build club identity by expanding its club merchandise, celebrating more regularly and widely the successes of its teams and players, and using club events and programming to build community.

4.3 Retention – Long Term Priorities

4.3.1 Be a Mentor Program for Youth Players

Recommendation 43: Create a mentoring program for older girls to mentor younger girls. VanU should pilot this program with the girls' teams, and if successful, do it with the boys' teams.

While this is being done already on an ad hoc basis, we think that by formalizing it, we would open up the possibility for more widespread mentoring. While the primary model here is for girls to mentor girls, we suggest that older girls can equally mentor younger boys, and that older boys can mentor younger girls. The important thing is to find the right fit.

AGSI suggests that a senior female technical staff member monitor the program. Notices can be sent to all U15-U18 girls' teams (Divisional and BCSPL) several times during the season inviting individual players to sign up as mentors. The technical staff member can then look to match them with appropriate teams. The mentors can work out details with the coaches, including the level of commitment, frequency, duration. We suggest that each mentorship situation be tailored to the mentor and the team involved. Mentors can also be encouraged to work in pairs or small groups, attending training sessions and/or games together.

Older players can offer younger players inspiration, attention and feedback. They can be role models. They can bring extra technical experience and knowledge, which can motivate players to develop. They can provide assistance to coaches. Mentorship can be a powerful retention tool—it can make the difference in a younger player's soccer experience. And older kids usually make training more fun!

There are benefits for the mentors as well. They are challenged to develop communication and interpersonal skills. They gain work experience and volunteer hours, and if they are interested in pursuing coaching, it provides them with an entry point.

4.3.2 Spring League U14-U18

Many teams don't enter the Cascadia spring league, leaving interested players without a spring games option. In addition, some girls who would like to play soccer in the spring find Cascadia difficult to balance

with other school activities, including school soccer. What if there were a fun, low-commitment option that allowed girls of different age groups to play together in a game-focused house league?

Recommendation 44: Consider piloting a spring house league for girls as an alternative to Cascadia.

We propose a game-focused model with 7-aside games, divided into two age groups—U14-U15 and U16-U18, with games held either on Sundays or on a weeknight. One mixed-age skills-based training session could be held during the week, run by a staff coach. Options for coaching support could be explored, including having existing volunteer coaches come out to assist with training and/or manage the teams on game day.

Please see #4.2.1 'Building Connections Across, Teams, Divisions and Age Groups' for the benefits of providing mixed options.

For those players interested in Cascadia but without a team, we suggest that VanU facilitate individual registrations.

Recommendation 45: Explore how to better facilitate the organization of Cascadia teams and include individual registration so that players without a team can be matched with a suitable team.

4.3.3 Skills and Tactics for U13-U18 Girls

Recommendation 46: Strategize on how to provide greater support for girls U13-U18 in the areas of technical skill-building and tactical understanding.

Once the players move into this age category, they move away from a skills-centre and academy-based training model, giving them less instruction and practice in technical skill-building. Girls are less likely than boys to challenge themselves to use technical skills they're not comfortable with (including foot skills, 1v1 moves, receiving balls from the air, crossing and finishing, shooting, heading). They are also less likely to practice these skills outside of practice. The format of regular team training often precludes focus on these elements. Girls also tend to be behind boys in soccer knowledge and tactical understanding. Though gender gaps are converging, it is still less common for girls to explore tactics through watching professional soccer and playing video games.²⁰ (Note: This is a generalization and does not apply to all individual girls, many of whom practice technical skills independently and/or are highly invested in the game of soccer separate from their own team experience.)

In coming up with suggestions to address this issue, we recommend exploring ideas that are low risk, with low barriers. How are we able to provide this support without a lot of extra commitment and cost? How are we able to provide it in an encouraging, inclusive environment? Can it be integrated into regular training sessions or VTS sessions? Are we able to modify the academy model program and tailor it to this specific age group of girls? Are we able to offer short academy seasons (e.g., one month) so that the commitment is not as onerous? Is there a model that has worked for other clubs?

AGSI recommends that technical staff who have experience and knowledge that might inform this issue come together to strategize in conjunction with members of the AGSI committee or other female volunteer coaches.

We also suggest that this topic could be explored in a player focus group. Technically, what do girls wish they could do better? What skills would they like to work on? In what kind of environment? When it comes to tactics, what interests them? Do they have any ideas about activities that may engage them?

4.3.4 Welcoming Process for New Players

To strengthen Vancouver United FC's commitment to inclusivity and player retention, we recommend implementing a New Female Player Welcoming Process. This process should focus on creating a supportive and engaging environment for female players, ensuring they feel valued from the moment they join the club. The onboarding should include a welcome package with essential information, club information, and details about available support, such as mentorship programs and wellness resources. Additionally, hosting a dedicated orientation session or Welcome Day with female role models from the club or community can help foster connections and build confidence. Clear communication about the club's commitment to diversity and providing a safe, positive space for female athletes would further solidify Vancouver United FC's reputation as an organization that champions equal opportunities and growth for all players.

Recommendation 47: Generate and make available to all officials of female teams a New Female Player Welcoming Process resource document. Generate and send a welcome document to all new female players.

4.3.5 Focus Groups with Girls in the Club

Since the inception of AGSI, we've thought that it would be worthwhile to create player focus groups that ask questions about what's important to girls in soccer. While preparing this report, there was neither time nor resources to organize such focus groups. We suggest that VanU look to do this in the near future.

We advise that VanU does not hire an outside company to facilitate focus groups. We believe that there are enough internal resources to do an excellent job. If it is deemed that an outside facilitator is required, however, we highly recommend that she be familiar with youth sport and preferably youth soccer.

It is useful to hear from the girls about what they want and need in their soccer life. AGSI has used feedback from girls and parents of girls in the club to inform our recommendations throughout the creation of this report. Focus groups would be an added source of information that helps shape future initiatives.

A potential bonus for participants in focus groups is the sense of recognition they feel when they're listened to, which in turn can promote retention.

While we've classified this focus group recommendation under long term, we see opportunities for the club to use focus groups in the short term and have made suggestions to this effect in a couple of places in the report: #4.2.4 'Enhance VanU Identity' (merchandising) and #4.3.3 'Skills and Tactics for U13-U18 Girls'.

Recommendation 48: Use player focus groups to gain more information on why girls want to play soccer and what kinds of things may enhance their experience at VanU. Also, recognize opportunities to use focus groups to support and inform girls' initiatives generally.

4.3.6 Re-designing How We Train Coaches

In order to better support the development of our female players and female coaches, it is important to take a fresh look at how we design our coaching training and resources.

We have included a recommendation in #4.2.3 '*Keeping Girls in Sport* Required Certification for All Coaches of Female Teams' as an initial step to provide more education on coaching girls' teams. Are there other resources that VanU could utilize to further this education? Would it be worthwhile to hold coaching training sessions specifically for coaches (male and female) of girls' teams?

We also recommend that VanU initiate the collection of coaching resources that can supplement the ones currently offered by the club (the Coach Information Video sessions and the training session plans), as well as the Coaching Handbook that we recommend be written (see #2.2.2 'Standardization and Streamlining of Club Communications' under Administrative and Organizational). Resources could cover topics such as communication techniques, team building, player development, leadership principles, as well as technical information, and could be pulled from trusted sources outside of the club in the form of articles, blogs, TED talks, podcasts, etc.

Is there an opportunity to include material in our coaching education that speaks to 'how to support female coaches'? Could we extend this concept to include other marginalized groups?

To support and empower our female coaches, we could provide resources that highlight mentorship opportunities and pathways for career progression; provide guidance on handling gender-specific challenges, such as bias or lack of representation in coaching; incorporate testimonials from successful female coaches and practical tips for navigating the soccer landscape. A 'handbook' or collection of resources, perhaps included under a larger umbrella of resources, as suggested above, could empower female coaches to thrive and further Vancouver United FC's mission of gender inclusivity at all levels of the sport.

Recommendation 49: Strategize how to train our coaches beyond the basic mandate of BC Soccer to include specific consideration in coaching girls, as well as supporting and empowering female coaches.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY AND FOLLOW UP

5.1 Advancing Girls Soccer Initiative Follow-up

The recommendations and goals presented in this report satisfy the first mandate of the committee, which was to devise a plan for enhancing participation in soccer for girls and improving their experience at VanU.

The second mandate of the committee was to assist VanU leadership with implementation and oversight of the plan. To that end, we have presented this report to the full Board of Directors and have engaged in a series of small-group discussions with the Executive Director and two Board members, who volunteered to serve as liaisons between AGSI and the Board. Going forward, we suggest ongoing quarterly or semi-annual meetings between the AGSI committee and VanU leadership, including the Executive Director, Technical Director(s), and/or Board members, to assess progress on the recommendations and goals advanced in this report.

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupery

We encourage VanU to share this report with various stakeholders in the club and community (technical staff, coaches, players, parents, partners in the soccer community, etc.) and to facilitate further exchange of ideas. We believe that establishing a regular exchange of ideas will promote the advancement of girls in soccer, and specifically at VanU.

5.2 Future of AGSI Committee

AGSI recommends that the committee continue after the delivery of this report to provide consultation on action items, the implementation of some of the action items, and further strategizing. Given that many of the recommendations are designed with long-term implementation in mind, we hope that the committee can continue to operate over an extended period, in collaboration with VanU leadership, to ensure continuity, guidance, and sustained progress toward AGSI’s goals. We suggest that AGSI members who leave the committee be replaced with new individuals to provide continuity. We also propose that the committee expand to include representatives from VanU Technical Leads, Staff Coaches, and/or Board members who have experience with girls’ programming.

Recommendation 50: Continue the AGSI committee over long term, with regular meetings between committee and VanU leadership, replace departing members, and expand committee to include representatives from the technical staff and Board.

6. FUTURE VISION

6.1 Commitment to Transformation

We envision a future where Vancouver United FC is a bold leader in the advancement of girls in soccer and in the promotion of diversity and inclusivity. We believe that progress in these areas will enrich our club as a whole and create new paths to achieving excellence, on and off the field.

With a commitment to openness, to listening and learning, to inviting different perspectives, and to transformation, VanU will have significant potential to challenge norms and progress with courage and creativity.

"As leaders, managers, and change-makers we have a great opportunity to infuse confidence, inspiration and unity within team spaces. Together is better." – Andrea Neil

6.2 Closing the Loop

This report offers actionable strategies for reversing the declining number of girls in soccer and sets the groundwork for further exploration and innovation. It promotes a model for VanU to work proactively in creating an environment for girls that is welcoming and supportive.

A key to realizing our goals is the link between intent, implementation and feedback. Is the intent of a program or initiative being fulfilled as imagined, as designed? How do we know? How do we measure it? Just as there needs to be a link between the 'elements' of an initiative, there needs to be a link between the 'people'. Greater connection across all layers of the organization—players, families, team officials, staff, board of directors—will reduce gaps that can impede the achievement of our goals.

Through transparent decision-making, focused programming, supportive mentorship and increased connection, we believe that VanU can enhance the experiences of young female players and inspire a new generation of lifelong participants in the sport.

APPENDIX

Examples of Macron and Adidas kit in women's and men's/unisex fit.



Panel 1a. Macron skat jersey, women's

Panel 1b. Tureis jersey men's/unisex



Panel 2a. Odette Hero shorts, women's

Panel 2b. Mesa Hero shorts, men's



Panel 3a. Adidas Tiro 23 short, women's

Panel 3b. Adidas Tiro 23 short, men's

¹ Team submission data from 2023-2024 suggest that gender disparities are increasingly large down the divisions; girls teams represent 39% of all teams at Division 1/Metro, 37% of all teams at Division 2, and only 32% of all teams at Division 3 (based on analysis of VYSA data provided by VanU ED). This is consistent with research showing that girls' dropout rates are higher for "recreational" as compared to "competitive" soccer; see Smith, Kristy L., and Patricia L. Weir. 2022. "An Examination of Relative Age and Athlete Dropout in Female Developmental Soccer" *Sports* 10, no. 5: 79. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sports10050079>.

² Women's Sports Foundation, "Play to Lead: The Generational Impact of Sports on Women's Leadership" (2024): <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Play-to-Lead-Report-Executive-Summary-2024.pdf>.

³ The AGSI committee met regularly in person, virtually, and over the phone throughout the spring, summer and fall of 2024; held conversations with current and past coaches of VanU girls' teams; discussed issues related to girls programming with parents; and reviewed material related to girls' soccer/sports programming in BC, Canada, and internationally.

⁴ <https://www.bcsoccer.net/membership/discipline-complaints-appeals/>.

⁵ <https://www.bcsoccer.net/media/otalpgmk/risk-management-procedures-june-2023.pdf>.

⁶ See https://www.nsgsc.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2760/2024/04/NSGSC-POLICY-Discipline-Complaints_24.pdf.

⁷ See <https://www.nsgsc.com/contact/>.

⁸ See UBC land acknowledgement guide: <https://guides.library.ubc.ca/distance-research-xwi7xwa/landacknowledgements>.

⁹ See Katherine, Philips. [How Diversity Makes Us Smarter](#), *Scientific American*.

¹⁰ Kaley, A. and F. Dobbin. "How Companies Should Set and Report DEI goals," *Harvard Business Review*, 2022: <https://hbr.org/2022/09/how-companies-should-set-and-report-dei-goals>.

¹¹ Whitley, M. A., & Dykes, J. (2020). "The role of women coaches in youth sports: A qualitative study." *Sport, Education and Society*, 25(7), 823-836.

¹² Statistics Canada, Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/Page.cfm?lang=E&topic=9&dguid=2021S0503933>

¹³ Statistics Canada, "Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population Vancouver, City (CY) British Columbia [Census subdivision] Visible minority".

¹⁴ See "Keeping Girls in Sport Overview," for a discussion of the benefits of keeping girls in sport, <https://www.respectgroupinc.com/keeping-girls-in-sport/>.

¹⁵ Indeed, due to retention issues among BCSPL players, the 2011 girls' age group no longer has a division 1 team.

¹⁶ See the "4 Factors Model" pg. 8 of Blueprint for Development, TSS Rovers: https://www.tssfc.ca/files/ugd/d74df6_b68ab94ec8304ca99183b93f9dea5dae.pdf.

¹⁷ Based on data from Canadian Women and Sport, girls' participation rates in sports drop after age 12 and fall dramatically throughout their teen years; see Canadian Women and Sport, *Rally Report 2024*: https://womenandsport.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Rally-Report-2024_Canadian-Women-Sport.pdf.

¹⁸ Ogletree, S.M., Drake, R. College Students' Video Game Participation and Perceptions: Gender Differences and Implications. *Sex Roles* **56**, 537–542 (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9193-5>.

¹⁹ <https://canadasoccer.com/coach/she-can-coach/>.

²⁰ See Sports Fans by Gender US 2023, Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1018814/sports-fans-usa-gender/> on gender breakdowns of sports fans; see <https://www.gamesindustry.biz/how-fifas-the-journey-changed-the-way-ea-approached-diversity> for a discussion of gender trends in FIFA (and other sports) video gaming.