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| In Conversation – Change Our Game ChampionsJohn Ballis, CEO RecLink Australia  |
| Video transcript |

**[Change Our Game Logo]**

**[In Conversation – Change Our Game Champion. John Ballis, CEO RecLink Australia**

**John Ballis:**
I'm John Ballis. I'm the CEO of Reclink Australia. I'm a 'Change Our Game Champion'.

**Interviewer:**
John, congratulations on being a 'Change Our Game Champion'. Tell us a little bit about Reclink.

**John Ballis:**
Well, David [inaudible 00:00:18], firstly, thank you for that. You know, I'm delighted personally to have been invited to be part of the 'Change Our Game' champions. It's a fantastic initiative by the Victorian government to bring about change in leadership for women in sport.

Of course, Reclink is an organization, in terms of its DNA, that has sport and recreation embedded into the way in which we work with disadvantaged communities. So we're a national organization, we have services and programs that we deliver right across Australia, currently about 40 different locations. We're funded by both state and federal governments, and state governments as well. So our mission is to engage people who have ... whose life's experiences have been affected or damaged by mental health, or long-term unemployment, social isolation, or have been sick because of personal life circumstances have been significantly isolated.

So, using sport and recreation programs and arts, we also have arts as well, we engage the people in what appears to be the soft door of engaging, disengaged people. In so doing, what we found through some of our research undertaken by La Trobe University is that it's made significant life changes in the person. Getting back to the question about being champions of change, of course all of our programs that we've been delivering over many, many years have included all genders, and by that we refer to people not only male and female but people of course who identify with all genders in our society.

All of our programs that we structure and deliver, make sure that when people participate, they participate as individuals not based on male or female. So that's probably one area where not only are we an organization based and focused on social inclusion but we're also an organization that's open in the way in which we provide access and accessibility to all people.

**Interviewer:**

I'd imagine it's a very different approach, very similar in many ways, but different because you're not a traditional sporting organization. Many of the 'Change Our Game Champions' are AFL clubs and these traditional structures of sport... Reclink is a little bit more organic than that, do you find that the similar philosophies of the 'Change our Game' program are going to apply to Reclink?

**John Ballis:**

Yeah look, all of those great organizations and great sports that you've mentioned are partners. So, we partner with all of those in all states, so the AFL ... We've got a soccer program which we're developing currently with the South Sudanese community. We've got basketball programs that we deliver, we've got touch footy up in Queensland so all the state sporting programs that you've mentioned are all part of our 60+ different sports and rec programs that we deliver. What I think is really exciting about this initiative is that we're all going through the same journey. So, Reclink is looking at how we can create and sustain leadership opportunities in a systemized way within our organization, for women.

Creating that conversation within the organization, both at board level, at senior management and of course a grassroots level with all our partner organizations.

**Interviewer:**

What sort of road blocks are you finding for the involvement of women and girls in your program? At all levels, participant and as leaders, in what you're doing?

**John Ballis:**

I think what we've identified is that in some communities, there are cultural blocks. That is particularly women from cultures where women's participation in sport hasn't been strongly supported. Now what we are looking at doing is enabling that by creating women's-only programs. So that's a relatively new initiative that we've had, given that previously all of our philosophy was about having mixed gender participating in programs. That's been an affirmative program that we've had particularly with women from the Somali community and some of the Sudanese communities as well.

In terms of our constituents, many of those are people who, as I've previously mentioned are looking for a life change because of their personal circumstances and the programs that we've offered, and we offer within our community, are programs which enable people to take those pathways to enable them to move towards training, or gaining employment or moving out of the level of disadvantage that they might be experiencing. So, it's a little bit different to a person coming in through Clubland where they might be participating in a program or sport of their choice, that they love the sport, they want to take some next steps in maybe representing the sport at a state level or national level.

So, those pathways are different to the people that we engage, as opposed to the ones that I know that are being engaged by state sporting associations and the like. That's one area that we're conscious of, however a way that we've been able to bridge that gap is whenever we've increased our footprint through growth opportunities, we've opened those positions up to our participants, to gain employment. One of the virtues that we're trying to build into our recruitment programs is the opportunity for people who have been unemployed, who have been long-term disengaged, to come in and become one of our staff.

That's become a very powerful means of being able to create that pathway that I mentioned, which is so obvious in some of the other sports but not quite as obvious in a social inclusion organization like Reclink.

**Interviewer:**

You're going go on a journey over the next 12 months of being involved in the 'Change Our Game' program. What do you hope to gain out of it? If we have this conversation in 12 months time, what do you think will be the key outcomes for Reclink?

**John Ballis:**

Well, from I hear and what I understand, I'm going to be challenged. As a male CEO in an organization seeking to push women's participation at an executive level, it is about listening, it's about understanding what their requirements are and there's also creating the culture within the organization to say that it's important, not just okay, to have women in leadership.

I'm John Ballis, I'm the CEO of Reclink Australia. I'm a 'Change Our Game Champion'.

**[Change our Game logo]**

**[State Government of Victoria logo]**

[Authorised by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 50 Lonsdale St Melbourne. Spoken by D. Culbert and J. Ballis]

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