

Case Study 3



Victorian Institute of Sport Flexible Work Arrangements

Objective

To support a female coach to take maternity leave, support her return to coaching, and maintain balance of family and coaching commitments.

Description

Stacia Strain started at the VIS as Head Coach of the VIS Women's Hockey Program in 2016 following a successful playing career with the Hockeyroos. In 2017 Stacia had her first child. The VIS worked with Stacia to figure out what was needed to support her to be able to manage starting a family and maintain her career in HP coaching.

VIS brought on an assistant coach to support Stacia's return to work and enabled her to be flexible with her hours. Stacia retained her position as Head Coach of the VIS Hockey Program.

From the VIS perspective it was imperative to retain the quality coach that Stacia was. It was a case of asking 'What do you need?' and working out how it can be facilitated. Whilst the VIS managers were key facilitators in working out a solution with Stacia, there was a consistent approach from the organisation to support Stacia and the outcome was not dependant or reliant on an individual approach/attitude.

In 2020 Stacia had her second child – this was followed by her appointment as Head Coach for the U21 Women's Hockey Squad, Jillaroos in 2021. Hockey Australia and the VIS worked with Stacia to put in place a work plan to manage the commitments of the VIS and Jillaroo programs and family life. Stacia currently works three days with the VIS Program, one day with the Jillaroo's program and supported by her assistant coach at the VIS.

“Always felt valued at the VIS, especially when I returned back from maternity leave. I was feeling low on confidence (after both babies) and had an assumption that VIS (like so many other organisations) would be dismissive of me and what I needed...they were the opposite. I was always the 'head coach' of the program and they talked about fitting the 'pieces' around me. This made me feel valued and confident that I could do it.”



“I felt at times I caused ‘extra work’ for VIS (getting assistant coach, being part time, re-writing contracts etc) but I was never made to feel like it was extra work. Dave and my managers always reassured me – that was their job, to support me. Again, this made me feel really valued and instilled confidence in me that I could do the job.”



“They actually listen to what your roadblocks are and then are not afraid to forge a new path (i.e., having a part time assistant coach in my program since I had both my babies even when no other NAPP hockey program has had this in the past).”

Stacia Strain, *Head Coach Women’s Hockey*, Victorian Institute of Sport

Impacts / Outputs

- Retention of a highly valued coach
- Coach feels supported and confident to ask for support without judgement or repercussions.
- Opportunity to develop an upcoming coach through a part-time assistant role.
- Inspire other female coaches that coaching, and motherhood is a possibility. Since Stacia, the VIS has had two other female coaches return from Maternity Leave into part-time roles.

Recommendations for others

- Recognise the role of the organisation to support coaches and enable them to fulfill their coaching role.
- Ask the question – “What do you need?”
- **Listen** to the coach and don’t be afraid to forge a new path

“We are really glad that the approach taken with Stacia is working out – for the VIS, the approach fits in with a couple of our values “Simplicity” – i.e. asking the simple question ‘what needs to be done?’ and “Community” – i.e. valuing and supporting one of our staff as they go through a key stage in life to continue doing the thing they love. In my opinion, this is a logical approach for any organisation that values their staff.”

Dave Crosbee, *Director High Performance*, Victorian Institute of Sport

Links

[Balancing motherhood and elite coaching — Victorian Institute of Sport \(vis.org.au\)](https://www.vis.org.au/balancing-motherhood-and-elite-coaching)

[Stacia Strain appointed Jillaroos Head Coach — Victorian Institute of Sport \(vis.org.au\)](https://www.vis.org.au/stacia-strain-appointed-jillaroos-head-coach)

[International Women’s Day 2022 – “Breaking the Bias” — Victorian Institute of Sport \(vis.org.au\)](https://www.vis.org.au/international-womens-day-2022-breaking-the-bias)

