2022 International Women's Day

#breakthebias

Carolyn Campbell, CEO Scouts NSW

Today, after the first two months in my new role as CEO of Scouts NSW, I feel both excited and spellbound by the opportunities ahead. I sense the nostalgic richness of Scouting's history in Australia, and the pride in the significant changes today's custodians have made to keep this Association relevant to young people in the twenty-first century.

I've been asking a lot of questions. But one question I haven't encountered is why a woman is leading Scouts. And since girls and women have been able to participate in Scouts in Australia for more years than I've been alive, that's no surprise.

This organisation has a strong, values-led culture, and with young people at its heart, there is a real commitment to diversity and inclusion.

That's not to say I don't encounter discrimination. While we have excellent diversity on our Board of Directors, within my team of employees, and across our thousands of volunteers, we still encounter bias in the communities where we work.

Infrequently, I hear apocryphal tales of earnest Boy Scouts on expeditious camps. They're outdated and funny, but modern Australians are well versed in the contemporary Scouting Association, which is one of the largest mixed youth organisations in the country. For decades, we've encouraged young people from all backgrounds and all genders to join in.

International Women's Day, celebrated annually on March 8, is the global day connecting all women around the world and inspiring them to achieve their full potential. It celebrates difference, the collective power of women and the amazing contribution they make when given equal access to life's opportunities.

Having spent much of my working life involved in sporting and active organisations, I'm determined to encourage more women to participate in outdoors sporting adventures, where we continue to be under-represented both professionally and socially.

Research has identified factors that either motivate or provide barriers to women's participation in sport. Motivation to participate is one of the major challenges in establishing and maintaining young women's involvement in sport and physical activity. Whether it's about self-esteem, social influences or enjoyment, in my view, the key is for family members - mothers, aunts, grandmothers – or community leaders – teachers, coaches, Scout leaders – to lead the way.

You can't be what you can't see.

Our job is to open the Scouting doors to young people from the age of 5 upwards. And research shows that at this age, there's no perceived difference between boys and girls when it comes to their physical participation. It's not till they reach seven years old, that girls start reporting less positive attitudes towards their enjoyment of physical activities.

As they mature, these attitudes become more entrenched, and young women miss out on the many benefits physical activity and outdoors adventures can offer.

This is an area where Scouts can help #breakthebias. We can encourage more young women to participate in life skills that aren't taught on smartphones, but in the great wide world of the outdoors. This is a world that is inclusive, equitable and free from bias.

When I meet the young women and girls who participate in Scouts, I am often in awe of their precociousness, their confidence and their unswerving belief in the power of humanity. They are wildly persuasive and determined that if the future is in their hands, they're going to make it worth the wait.

For those parents of girls who've never been involved in Scouts, I encourage you to ask questions. It might be exactly what your daughter is looking for.

And for those women who are seeking an excuse to discover camping, hiking, caving, abseiling, sailing, kayaking, flying fox, swimming or flying in a Scout plane, come and join me. There's no time like the present.