PHOENIX FC: BUILDING A PATHWAY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS TO RISE

CLUB SNAPSHOT

Phoenix FC is a community-based, non-profit soccer club in Sherwood Park, Alberta, established in 1976. Today, the club serves more than 1,500 children across 130+ teams, with programming from age four through adulthood.

With a focus on lifelong soccer, community connection, innovation and inclusivity, Phoenix FC aims to spread joy through the game while inspiring the next generation of leaders.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

She Can RISE is a leadership and community initiative designed to create more opportunities for women and girls to **participate**, **develop** and **lead** in soccer.

The initiative began with an internal look at female representation across the club and a focus on understanding what women need to feel confident, supported and valued as leaders. From there, She Can RISE grew into a broader approach focused on **removing barriers, building confidence, developing skills and creating a strong network of support and mentorship**.

THE SHE CAN RISE APPROACH

1. **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES**
   - Create leadership opportunities at different stages of the soccer pathway.
   - The Junior Coach program has engaged 40+ young coaches, most of them female, helping them build leadership skills while still playing.
   - Create pathways for young women to stay involved in soccer in ways that fit their schedules and commitment level.
   - Support progression through education, mentorship and coaching opportunities.
2. **MAKE LEADERSHIP VISIBLE**
   - Connect women and girls with leaders in soccer, sport, business and the broader community through events, networking and partnerships.
   - In 2026, the She Can RISE 3v3 brought together 160+ athletes with female coaches, leaders and officials.
   - The International Women's Day Luncheon welcomed 80+ community members and featured Afghan-Canadian professional footballer Farkhunda Muhtaj as keynote speaker.
3. **SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT**
   - Support women through coach education, mentorship, networking and financial assistance.
   - A female coach education scholarship helps reduce barriers to continuing along the coaching pathway.
   - The She Can RISE network builds connections, shares experiences and supports women as they develop.
   - Create learning opportunities beyond formal coach education to build confidence and skills.

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

Phoenix FC has seen meaningful growth in female representation across its coaching staff:

- Female head coaches on boys' teams increased by 12 percentage points, quadrupling representation.
- Female head coaches on girls' teams increased by 11 percentage points, bringing representation close to half of all teams.
- Female assistant coaches on boys' teams increased by 19 percentage points, nearly five times the previous year.

The club is also seeing more young women step into leadership through Junior Coach, alongside increased participation in female-focused events, education and community initiatives.

The goal is to create a culture where female leadership is **visible, supported and expected – not exceptional.**

WHAT OTHER CLUBS CAN TAKE AWAY

Phoenix FC's experience shows that building female leadership doesn't require a perfect program or a large budget. It starts with being intentional.

- **Start with the women already in your community.** Ask what they need, listen and respond.
- **Remove one barrier.** Fund a coaching course, create a leadership opportunity or make it easier to take that first step.
- **Start young.** Give girls opportunities to develop leadership skills while they are still playing.
- **Focus on retention, not just recruitment**. Education matters, but so do mentorship, relationships and an environment where women feel supported.
- **Look beyond soccer.** Connecting women in sport with women in business and community leadership can expand networks and strengthen impact.

"The goal isn't for female leadership to remain remarkable. The goal is for it to become normal."

– Colleen Skitsko, Phoenix FC

BUILDING THE CYCLE

Phoenix FC is building a pathway where **visibility leads to opportunity, opportunity leads to development, and development leads to leadership and mentorship**. As more women and girls step into leadership, they become the role models who help the next generation see themselves in those same roles.

For more information, visit https://www.phoenixfcsoccer.ca/scr