

25 January 2022

PROGRAM GIVES KIDS WITH DISABILITIES A SENSE OF MAINSTREAM SPORT

WHAT: Sense Rugby Come and Try Day sessions for kids with disabilities
WHEN: Tuesday February 1: 4-8 Years: 3.30–4pm and 8-12 years 4.15–5pm
WHERE: Pioneer Park

Local kids living with disabilities have a chance to experience the benefits of playing a community-based sport and meet Australian Rugby Sevens Olympian, Jesse Parahi at Sense Rugby's Come and Try Day at Pioneer Park on February 1.

There will be 30 to 45 minute sessions for kids aged between four and 12 to try out the program which is running in Dubbo in 2022 thanks to a grant from the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation.

Dubbo program co-ordinator and Marathon Health occupational therapist, Mandy Colless, said the rugby-based occupational therapy program is a first for Dubbo. Ms Colless said Sense Rugby gives kids the skills needed to play sport and ultimately transition into a mainstream sporting team. She said kids with disabilities often find it difficult and lack the confidence to be part of a sports team.

"The program gives kids new sporting, communication and social skills plus they get to experience a team atmosphere and make new friends," Ms Colless said.

"We're grateful to Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation for recognising the importance of programs like Sense Rugby for kids with disabilities, especially for kids in regional NSW who often miss out on such opportunities," she said.

She said all kids like to run, kick, throw and push and with Sense Rugby they get to do this in an appropriate rugby setting with support from a certified occupational therapist, allied health assistant and volunteer rugby players.

"This allows kids to be regulated enough to concentrate on what we're teaching them without getting frustrated."

Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation chair Jennifer Leslie will be at the sessions and said another benefit of the program is that it brings families managing similar issues together as a support network for one another.

"We're about supporting and creating strong communities and sport is a great way to bring everyone in a community together," Ms Leslie said.

“One of the added benefits of this program is that it provides an opportunity for families of kids with disabilities to come together, to get to know each other and share experiences. It’s a wonderful program,” she said.

[Sense Rugby](#) was founded in 2015 by paediatric occupational therapist Carlien Parahi and her husband Jesse Parahi. Jesse Parahi played rugby sevens for Australia for the better part of a decade. He played more than 50 World Series tournaments, was part of the 2016 Australian Rio Olympics team and captained the Australian side at the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

The program will run every week in Term 2. Those who can’t get to the Come and Try Day can still enrol in the program. Contact Mandy Colless on 6826 5200.

In Dubbo, the program is run with Marathon Health, a not-for-profit, registered charity with a vision of enabling country communities to thrive through improved health and wellbeing. The Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation has previously funded Marathon Health for a vehicle and facility fit outs for headspace services in Orange and Bathurst, and this project takes its total funding from the Charitable Foundation to \$140,000.

Marathon Health was one of 15 charities to share in \$930,000 in funding from the May 2021 round of Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation grants. The Foundation has now provided more than \$24 million to more than 500 projects across NSW. The next round of grants will open in March. Visit www.newcastlepermanent.com.au/charitable-foundation