

## **Sport Access Foundation 2020-21 pre-budget submission - our case for support**

Sport Access Foundation (SAF) was founded in 2017 by Australian Para-triathlete and 2016 Rio Paralympics Gold Medalist Katie Kelly, OAM.

### **Vision:**

Be Australia's leading sports organisation connecting young Australians with a disability to sport.

### **Mission:**

Sport Access Foundation aims to improve the quality of lives of children living with a disability through the opportunity to play sport.

SAF's objectives are consistent with the Australian Government's Sport 2030 National Sport Plan commitment, that 'Every Australian, at all stages of their life regardless of gender, ability or ethnicity, and no matter where they live, are able to undertake the exercise they need and want in a safe, fun and inclusive way, whether it is through sport or other types of activity'.<sup>1</sup>

SAF's work supports Sport Australia's position on physical literacy, namely 'developing knowledge and behaviours that give children the motivation and confidence to enjoy active lifestyles. Establishing active habits in children sets them on the path to happier and healthier lives paving the way for a more productive Australia'.<sup>2</sup>

SAF is also set within with the compelling vision of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 for 'an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens'.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sport Access Foundation Grants**

The goal of SAF is to ensure that young Australians living with a disability can be active and imagine and achieve their sporting goals. To this end Sport Access Foundation provides annual grants for children and young people with a disability.

The grants help provide products or services to enable children with a disability better access to participate in sport through their local sporting club or to participate in community programs. In particular, grants are given to help children with a disability to participate in sporting activities that are otherwise beyond their financial means, including to provide financial assistance for:

- travelling to and from sporting events and training;
- taking part in sporting events including participation, entry or enrolment fees;
- purchasing specialist sport equipment or clothing;
- purchasing protective or adaptive equipment;
- consulting with health professionals to develop an appropriate sporting program;
- engaging and coordinating with institutions to provide support and access to appropriate sporting programs and activities, and other resources to help children achieve their goals in sport (particularly in their local communities);

In 2019, SAF completed its third annual grants program:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sportaus.gov.au/nationalsportplan/home>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.sportaus.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/714414/Physical-Literacy-Framework\\_Position-statement.pdf](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/714414/Physical-Literacy-Framework_Position-statement.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> National Disability Strategy 2010-2020

**Individual grants:**

- 10 x \$250 grants to assist towards cost to be involved in a local sporting club
- 4 x \$2000 grants to purchase equipment
- 2 x \$2000 'Pathway to Paralympics' grants

**Club/program grants:**

- 2 x \$2000 grants to a registered sporting club to purchase equipment
- 2 x \$2000 grants to a registered sporting club
- \* club is affiliated with a National Sporting Organisation (as recognised by Sport Australia)

**SAF grants make a difference**

SAF monitors the impact of the grants to ensure its strategy is achieving the Foundation's objectives. It is clear the grants make a profound – and often immediate – difference to recipients. Some examples include:

- Of the three 2017 recipients, two have reached selection for Australia in their sports of para rowing and para swimming, and both are earmarked for the Paris 2024 Paralympics.
- Two out of four 2018 recipients are in contention to be selected for the Tokyo Paralympic team in wheelchair tennis and wheelchair table tennis.
- One 2019 recipient has already secured qualification in wheelchair basketball for the Tokyo Paralympics.
- In all cases recipients have used the grant to either upgrade existing equipment or for financial support to compete at national and international competitions.
- One recipient has used the grant to upgrade their sports wheelchair for Basketball, another has purchased a modified scull and oar to accelerate their success and subsequently represent Australia at the 2019 Global Games and the 2019 University Games.
- Feedback from parents and carers of grant recipients consistently indicate how new equipment or coaching in their child's sport has helped boost the child's confidence, independence and willingness to play and compete in sport.

**Challenge and opportunity:**

Sport Access Foundation asked its 2019 grant applicants what they would they like to ask the CEO of Sport Australia or Paralympic Australia if given the opportunity. A selection of the responses follows, highlighting the major challenges of children and teenagers with a disability to access sport.

Age: 9 years old  
 Location: Inala, QLD  
 Sport: Triathlon  
 Club: N/A  
 Impairment: Paraplegic

"Wheelchair racing in Queensland is almost non-existent! There is a lack of coaching and support for the sport here. This means we are travelling interstate regularly to attend camps and receive coaching. To find a coach or club in Queensland who will support me in my goals and help me get there would be amazing!"

Age: 10 years old Location: Ngunnawai, ACT Sport: Cheerleading Club: Sirens Cheerleaders Impairment: Cerebral Palsy	"I would like to express that clubs need help and training in how they can support kids (and adults) with disabilities. My previous sporting club did not know how to best support me and instead of encouraging me to do my best they put me down until we changed clubs."
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Age: 14 years old Location: Joslin, QLD Sport: Swimming Club: Norwood Swimming Club	"I have been blessed in the sport of Swimming. I think it is one of the best sports that provide opportunities for people with disabilities. All the able body athletes encourage multiclass athletes and our events at a State Level are blended. Everyone from my family to my club Norwood and Swimming SA give me amazing support in a sport I
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<p>Impairment: Cerebral Palsy</p>	<p>love so much. I think it would be good if a proportion of funding was provided for training more swimming coaches in the area of training the disabled that is combined with traditional coaching techniques and studies into the biomechanics of disabled swimmers.”</p>
<p>Age: 16 years old Location: Ringwood, VIC Sport: Athletics Club: Ringwood Little Athletics Impairment: Bilateral Talipes</p>	<p>“I was born with bilateral talipes (clubfeet) and have had 12 surgeries to enable me to walk. The biggest challenge for me is that not all sports accommodate kids with differing abilities. My disability is physical so it means I sometimes need changes to be made so I can join in. It seems like a lot of sports bodies find this too hard and it is easier for them to not include kids like myself. For me, I find it hard to run without falling over and I am not quick on my feet so I find it easier to use a wheelchair with some sports. This is seen as a problem because people seem more worried that I am going to knock their children over than if I can join in. Trust me, I can manoeuvre that chair better than a lot of kids can manoeuvre their bodies so if they would just let me join in, they would see that we could all participate.”</p>
<p>Age: 17 years old Location: Warriewood, NSW Sport: Para-equestrian Dressage Club: Northside Riding Club Impairment: Acquired Brain Injury / Right side hemiplegia</p>	<p>“Prior to suffering a stroke at age 14 I was a representative level netball player and equestrian rider. I found the world of social and competitive sports simple and easy to navigate. However this dramatically changed once I suffered hemiplegia. I would like to express and outline the daily struggles faced by people with a disability from doing simple everyday tasks to participating in sport. We have limited opportunities to access organised sports and need to rely heavily on our family to access and participate in sport. Identification and accessing the specialised equipment required to compete is difficult and costly and is a barrier stopping disabled athletes from participating. Sports is very important for people with disability, for me it has been an equaliser and opportunity to feel normal. When I am riding I feel truly free, leaving behind all my physical impairments. Everyone should have the opportunity to feel this way.</p>

**The facts:**

Approximately 500,000 Australian children in the 7 to 17-year age group are living with a physical, intellectual, sensory or brain acquired injury.

Children with a disability are one third less likely to play sport than those without a disability, but having a disability is not the main reason that prevents children participating in sport<sup>4</sup>. The principal factors that prevent participation in sport include: costs (eg transport, entry fees, support worker); difficulty getting to the venue; not being able to use the sporting equipment; and sports staff not properly trained.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> **‘Getting Involved in Sport: A report about people with disability taking part in sport’** Australian Sports Commission (2012).

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

According to people with disability, the top 10 benefits of taking part in sport include: 'a sense of achievement, do something stimulating, improve health, have a chance to socialise with others, enjoy the company of friends, increase energy levels, improve self-esteem, improve heart and lung fitness, be with other people who are having fun, spend time with friends'.<sup>6</sup>

It has been shown that participation in sport and active recreation for people with disability provides many social and cultural benefits, and those who are engaged in social activities and citizenship are generally more connected to community and enjoy a better quality of life.<sup>7</sup>

An active lifestyle contributes to improved academic achievement and cognition, mental health and quality of life, emotional regulation, and social behaviours and interactions.<sup>8</sup>

### **The future for SAF**

SAF's priorities for the next three years are:

**Grants** – to continue to run a grants program that best serves the diverse needs of children with a disability to access sport.

- SAF aims to increase the value of grants by 10-20 per cent annually over the 2019 base of \$22,250.

**Sport Access Foundation Research Unit** – SAF has identified five principal challenges for children with a disability participating in sport in Australia:

1. the range of needs (from physical aids to transport and specialised coaching) which in turn requires programs and sports to be flexible and adaptable to cater for individual circumstances
2. a range of financial barriers to the ongoing participation of children with a disability in sport
3. a lack of social infrastructure enabling parents to connect their children with suitable sports
4. a lack of support and resources to allow grass-roots coaches to better support and engage children with a disability in suitable sports
5. a lack of quality data about the needs and participation rates of children with a disability in the sporting context, making it difficult to accurately develop and target support programs

SAF's experience also shows that programs for children with a disability are most effective when there is a connection between sporting bodies, community groups, disability groups and parents. However, there is a lack of comprehensive, fact based and current data on issues facing children with a disability and their families in accessing sport in Australia. Such reference material is a core foundation to any realistic strategic planning to get children with a disability participating in sport, and therefore help deliver on the Sport 2030 goal of increasing activity across the nation by 15 per cent. Organisations like Sports Australia, sport clubs and associations and governments can only develop needs-based, inclusive and effective strategies to engage children with a disability and their families when they have knowledge of the gaps to children with a disability accessing sport.

SAF seeks to develop and implement such a strategic research program to guide and inform the sports and disabilities sectors working with children.

- The cost of conducting this research is estimated at \$150,000 - \$200,000.

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<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Australian 24 hour movement guidelines for children and young people (5-17 years), Australian Government Department of Health

**Coach the coach** – SAF seeks to develop and implement a ‘coach the coach’ program to assist coaches in the community keep children with a disability engaged in sport. Initially this will comprise online resources and toolkits, with the possibility to expand the program over time. Alongside this program SAF seeks to implement the ‘EdgeUcate’ program (which includes 2x9 week programs rolled out in school hours, after school hours and concluding with a 4 day holiday recreational camp) that is inclusive and integrates children with and without disability to improve their health, levels of activity and willingness to work together despite their difference. The program also addresses social and behavioural problems stemming from over-use of social media and devices, inactive leisure time, bullying and introduces tools to help with mental well-being.

The cost of the ‘coach the coach’ and ‘EdgeUcate’ program is estimated at \$50,000 per annum.

### **Representing all sports and disabilities**

SAF advocates for the establishment of a national peak body representing access to sport and physical activity for all Australian children and teenagers aged 7-17 years with a disability that encompasses all disabilities including physical, sensory, intellectual, acquired brain injury, behavioural and mental. At the moment, this sector is fragmented. While there are a number of organisations supporting a specific sport and/or disability, there is no body representing all sports and disabilities. Such an organisation would enable more efficient use of resources across the sector.

There is an opportunity for SAF to oversee such an advisory group to lead and inform on participation of children and teenagers with a disability – physical and mental – in all fields of sport and physical activity. SAF differentiates itself by not being aligned to any specific sport or disability group. It seeks to promote inclusion across the broad sector and advocate for all disabilities and sport participation. Often parents and carers are uncertain about which support group or category their child fits in or naturally belongs to due to the very specialised or specific classifications of some sports and programs. SAF also supports all levels of sporting ability, from grassroots participants to developing elite athletes.

SAF is recognised by Sport Australia as a key provider of opportunities for children and teenagers with a disability to access sport and is connected to National Sporting Organisations and their state and regional affiliates. On its website, Sport Australia notes SAF as a grant provider, and as such SAF is promoted across the wider network of schools, parents, NSOs seeking assistance.

### **Governance**

SAF is a registered Australian charity, and a company limited by guarantee. SAF has appropriate child protection and risk management policies in place, is governed by a pro bono Board of Directors, and has no paid staff. All funds raised are directed to grants, and all costs are kept to a minimum.

Accountancy, legal and other services are provided pro bono by SAF’s corporate partners.

### **Conclusion**

SAF welcomes the opportunity provided by the pre-budget submission process to raise awareness of the challenges faced by children and teenagers with a disability to access sport and physical activity, and to outline its work in helping meet these challenges.

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Sport Access Foundation

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