

# West Coast Swimming Club: Stingrays Program

SPORTS CONNECT CASE STUDY

## Background

**After successfully coaching a trio of Paralympians, the West Coast Swimming Club (WCSC) commenced the Stingrays Program in 2006. The club identified the need for greater entry-level opportunities for children and teenagers with a disability in the sport of swimming.**

The program has grown to now include 17 swimmers, three certified coaches and a dedicated position within the club's committee.

The squad meets once a week on a Saturday morning and provides participants with the opportunity to improve their fitness, work on their technique, learn to follow a coach's instruction and become part of a club environment.



According to the program's liaison Elise Gray, whose daughter is a Stingray, the success of the program has been as beneficial for the able-bodied members of the club as it has for those with a disability.

"Our swimmers see the kids with various disabilities hopping in and giving it a go despite their various challenges and by all accounts it proves to be an inspiring and valuable lesson," she said.

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The squad is open to anyone with a disability and currently caters for participants who have both high and low levels of required support.

"When swimmers first come to us, they have a range of abilities and we don't expect them all to be able to swim 25 or 50 metres straight away," Elise said.

"The squad is divided up into groups depending on their ability or the level of support they require. This has meant that even though we have a range of disabilities in our squad they are able to swim together seamlessly."

The program has also had benefits for the swimmers that extend beyond physical fitness.

"The Stingrays swimmers take great pride in wearing the West Coast uniform. I think it provides them with a real sense of community and belonging. They love to support their fellow club members when they compete and they get a lot of support right back," said Elise.

The presence of the Stingrays squad has also proven to be a great educational tool for the parents and officials at West Coast.



"Giving the program a voice on the committee has meant that we are able to highlight the importance of the program to fellow committee members and families of the club. The majority of which have had minimal involvement with children with disabilities in the past," said Elise.

### Connection model

The Stingrays Program has clearly stated aims.

These are:

- Provide a pathway for swimmers with a disability into mainstream squads if they desire.
- Provide competitive opportunities for swimmers with a disability (SWD).
- Include participants in club activities.
- Educate club members as to the needs and abilities of SWDs.

In order to achieve these aims the program has instigated several initiatives.

These include:

- One weekly swimming session with fully accredited coaches.
- The involvement of senior mainstream swimmers as mentors and assistants.
- A 'first session free' policy that allows participants to 'try before they buy'.

- Invitation to Stingrays to compete in monthly club night competitions.
- Opportunity to compete in Swimming WA Multi-Class events.
- Invitation to Stingrays to attend club functions.
- Position for the program on the committee.

### Challenges faced

- Raising awareness of the program and attracting participants.
- Funding reliant on volunteer coaches.
- Increasing the knowledge of club officials about the value of the program.
- Increasing the knowledge of club members and officials about the individual needs of a disability.

### Where to from here

- Increase profile of the program through internal and external promotion.
- Seek sponsorship of program.
- Increase fees of Stingrays members to bring into line with mainstream members. Additional funding to be used to pay coaches and additional lane hire costs.



### For more information:

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