



Playing for Gender Equality
Season

PARTNERSHIP

NSW Rugby Union Ltd. is the governing body for rugby in New South Wales and an affiliate of Rugby Australia. The NSW Positive Rugby Foundation serves as the official charity, social impact program, and fundraising vehicle for NSW Rugby. Its Rugby for Good programs harness rugby's unique values, qualities, and characteristics to make a positive impact on individuals and communities.

ChildFund Rugby partners with rugby organisations to use the sport as a powerful tool for positive social impact, enabling children and young people to play, learn, and lead. As World Rugby's Social Impact Partner, ChildFund Rugby has developed **Pass It Back**, an integrated rugby and life skills curriculum designed to empower children and young people in vulnerable communities. By building critical social and emotional skills, participants are better equipped to overcome adversity, serve as positive role models, and drive meaningful change within their communities.

PASS IT BACK IN NEW SOUTH WALES

This partnership successfully launched the first season of Pass It Back in Western Sydney, Australia, from February to June 2024, implementing the Playing for Gender Equality module in four schools. During this period, **14** Coaches (eight female) delivered **78** integrated sport and life skills sessions, along with one competition, to **10** teams comprising **127** players (34% female).

PASS IT BACK: PLAYING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Through the *Playing for Gender Equality* module, Pass It Back Coaches lead players in exploring ways to overcome gender inequalities in their communities while building healthy leadership and decision-making habits that strengthen communities.

MODULE OBJECTIVE

Coaches (aged 16 - 25 years old) support players (aged 11 - 16 years old) to explore key topics around managing emotions, forming positive relationships, and challenge harmful norms and stereotypes that impact their development and well-being.

MODULE OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS

The following outcomes and indicators were planned through this partnership:

#	Outcome	Performance Indicator
1	Coaches can deliver high-quality sport for development learning in a safe and inclusive environment by means of enhanced leadership and management skills.	1A. 75% of Coaches demonstrate improved leadership and management skills.
		1B. 75% Players positively assess the learning experience provided by their Coaches as i) safe and ii) inclusive.
2	Children have stronger social and emotional skills, and improved knowledge and attitudes around gender.	2A. 50% of players demonstrate improved rugby skills.
		2B. 50% of players demonstrate strengthened social and emotional life skills and improved knowledge and attitudes that reflect a positive understanding of gender equity.
3	NSW Rugby delivers a safe and inclusive sport for development learning environment.	3A. 75% of Coaches retained at end of season.
		3B. 75% of players graduate.

How to read this data

Key definitions and background information to keep in mind while reading this report include:

Coach	16-25 years old; youth leaders identified and trained as rugby and life skills Coaches.
Player	11-16 years old; children and young people recruited into teams to learn rugby and life skills.
Team	Players are formed into teams led by Coach pairs and made up of 12-16 players per team.
Session	One Pass It Back module consists of 10-16, 90-minute sessions of integrated rugby and life skills activities.
Season	The <i>Playing for Gender Equality</i> season included 8 sessions and 1 competition over 4 months (Note: the season in NSW was reduced due to various factors).
Rugby Skills	Four (4) skills that help a participant become 'rugby-ready'.
Life Skills	A composite of: i) Knowledge and attitudes related to gender and gender norms; ii) Social and emotional learning competencies.
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)	5 competencies, based on the CASEL Framework.

Key Outputs

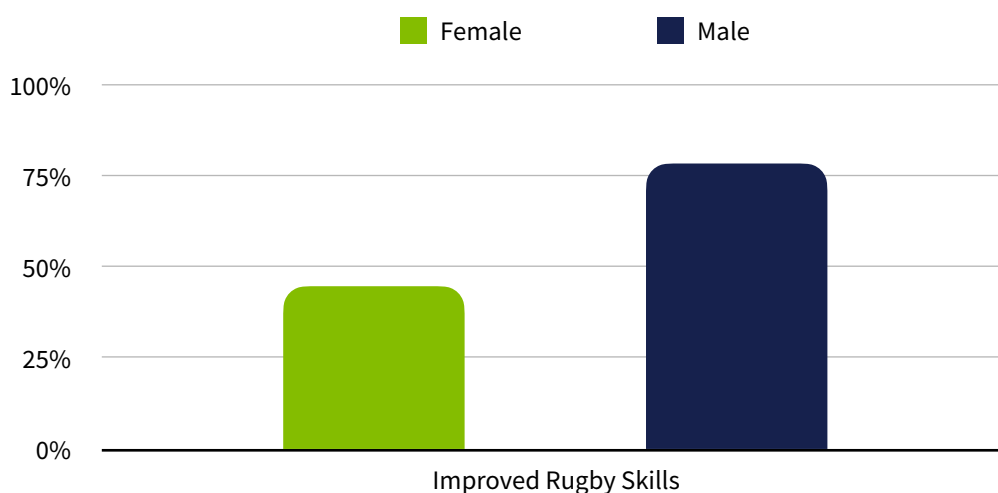
The following performance indicators for outputs/deliverables were achieved:

Season KPI	% Female	% Male
Teams that completed the season	50%	66%
Players who graduated — attended 6 or more sessions	83%	96%

Rugby Skills Outcomes

Players are assessed on the development of their rugby skills, which focus on four key areas relevant to becoming ‘rugby-ready.’ This includes the capability to participate in Tri Tag Rugby competitions, pathways into Tri Tag Rugby teams or clubs, or the foundational skills needed to develop an interest in the contact rugby format.

Graph 1: % Players with improved rugby skills



Key Learning

Forty-five percent of female players and 78% of male players improved their rugby skills. The greater improvement among male players may be partly due to some male Coaches having prior rugby coaching experience before joining Pass It Back.

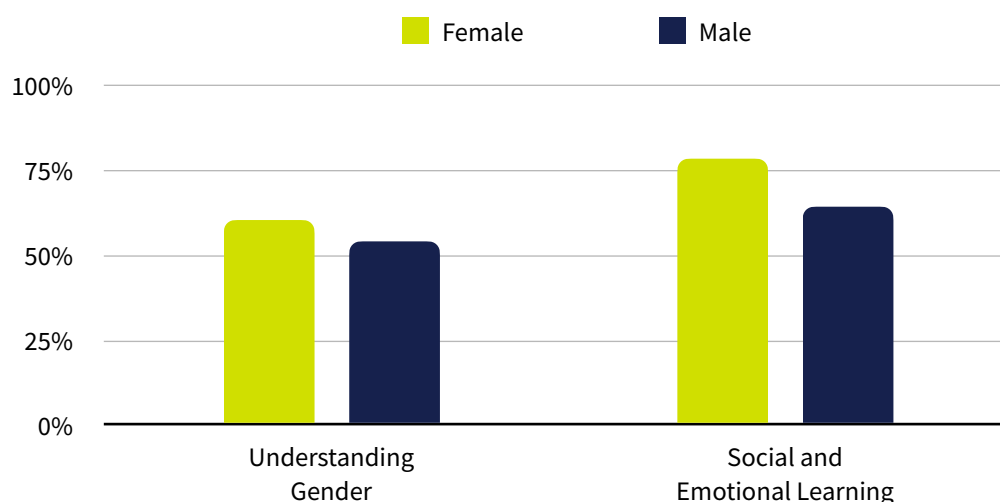
Lower results for the female player groups were recorded. Future recommendations to address this include: i) provide additional support to Coaches entering with lower rugby literacy to help bridge the knowledge gap; ii) increase Coach training time to align with optimal Pass It Back practice, ensuring Coaches receive adequate preparation; iii) ensure all Coaches coach more than 1 team, offering more opportunities for practice and repetition; iv) ensure the full integration of Tri Tag into the curriculum.

Understanding Gender and SEL Outcomes

Players are assessed on learning in two key areas:

1. Improved knowledge and attitudes toward gender inequalities;
2. Enhanced social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies, which foster healthier relationships, leadership, and decision-making skills.

Graph 2: % Players with improved understanding gender and SEL outcomes



Key Learning

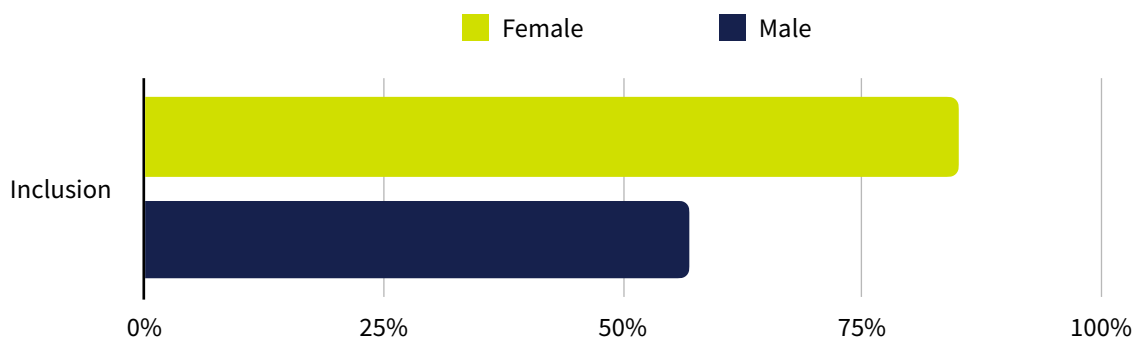
Overall, three in four female players and three in five male players showed evidence-based benefits from participating in Pass It Back. Female Coaches delivered stronger overall results.

One factor to consider is that some male Coaches had prior rugby coaching experience, which may have led to a greater emphasis on rugby skills over life skills in the male teams. Additionally, the behavior of some male participants created challenging learning environments, which, despite the efforts of the male Coaches, impacted the quality of the sessions.

Safe and Inclusive Environment

Coaches are rated by their players based on how well they provide a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment, focusing on both player-Coach and player-player relationships, as well as Coach behavior and coaching skills. The following graphs demonstrate the data collected in relation to these results.

Graph 3: % Players who assess their Coaches as providing a positive learning environment



Key Learning

Four in five female players and two in three male players rated their Coaches as providing a positive learning environment. Overall, this is a strong result, particularly for the female Coach cohort. Male Coaches faced significant challenges related to player behavior and engagement within their teams, which may have contributed to their lower scores.

For future similar work, it is recommended that additional Coach training time, aligned with optimal Pass It Back practices, be provided to better prepare Coaches for managing behavioral and engagement challenges within their teams.



Lessons and Challenges

Key Challenges

<p>Operations</p> <p>The season was reduced from 12 to 8 sessions due to school schedules. Sessions were delivered within a fixed school period, but some were canceled due to weather or school events and could not be rescheduled.</p> <p>Early in the season, the Development Officer was replaced, leading to some scheduling and communication challenges with school coordination and Coach training. Educator preparation was also affected by delays in material delivery combined with a holiday break in NSW, causing further issues with scheduling and coordination.</p> <p>Budget constraints, primarily due to the high cost of Coach payments, resulted in limited available time and resource for Coach training and meetings.</p> <p>Less than 50% of registered teams were girls' teams. Social and cultural factors impacted female participation, and insufficient mitigation measures were put in place. As a result, three planned schools dropped out of the season.</p> <p>Operating within the school context, there was no time allocated for player recruitment or community engagement activities, making it difficult to address recruitment challenges.</p> <p>Several boys' teams experienced significant behavioral issues, including bullying and threats of violence toward other players and Coaches. These incidents led to the resignation of one Coach, and several players were asked to leave the program.</p>	<p>Curriculum</p> <p>The Tri Tag format was used for this pilot. However, during the season, NSW Rugby identified opportunities for stronger alignment and integration to improve curriculum integration, as well as Coach and player development. ChildFund Rugby plans to collaborate with rugby stakeholders to address these improvements in future programming, following the approach used for other formats of the game that Pass It Back has successfully aligned with.</p> <p>Protocols and Tools</p> <p>Pass It Back's informed consent approach, which requires individual players to 'opt in' to the program, differs from NSW Rugby's standard school programming, where teachers 'opt in' for a group of students, and individuals can choose to opt out. This difference created challenges with registration and collecting informed consent.</p> <p>Additionally, the GoCanvas app faced challenges during rollout and usage.</p>
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Key Lessons

All Coaches who completed the season have now been employed as casual staff with NSW Rugby, providing them with ongoing economic and professional development opportunities.

One teacher noted an anecdotal increase in school attendance among students participating in Pass It Back, though no formal evidence was collected to confirm this observation. Teacher engagement also played a key role in addressing behavioral issues during session delivery.

If Pass It Back is implemented in schools again, delivery during a double period of Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) or Physical Activity and Sports Studies (PASS) could be planned for, where possible.

Additionally, recruitment activities that highlighted the integrated model and introduced Coaches as role models were conducted at one school. These efforts successfully addressed player uncertainty about Pass It Back and increased registrations.

Season Snapshots

The following snapshots are taken from Coach journal entries and interviews with Coaches, players, and community members. They highlight key examples of significant changes and impacts experienced by participants, which underpin the outcome data presented above.

Chaela-Lee's Change

Chaela-Lee's journey to self-confidence began with her love of sports. Though initially drawn to athletics, swimming, and AFL—where she played for the Giants Academy—rugby union captured her interest at 15. “I started playing under-15s rugby after six years of AFL,” she explained. “This is my fourth year playing rugby.”

Before becoming a Pass It Back Coach, Chaela-Lee, a recent high school graduate, was more reserved. Stepping outside her comfort zone and expressing herself was a significant challenge. Her work coaching with the NSW Waratahs in late 2023 highlighted this. Her shyness was evident during the first few months, as she lacked the confidence to run drills independently.

“The Chaela I knew before this program was different,” shared Max, a family friend. “She lacked confidence and drive.” However, the program ignited a transformation. “This has changed drastically,” Max continued. “She’s now willing to challenge herself and others, striving to progress in life.”

Chaela-Lee's growth hasn't been limited to her coaching role. Her experience with Pass It Back has helped her develop into a confident, independent young woman. “Coaching has helped me find

my voice,” she said. “I can now have conversations with people I wouldn’t normally talk to and build connections with them.”

A fellow Coach observed, “Chaela’s confidence has soared. It’s evident in everything she does, from sports to her work ethic.” Her newfound independence is clear. “In 2023, Chaela wouldn’t go out of her way to help herself,” the Coach added. “Now, she seizes opportunities and is more independent.”

Chaela-Lee’s mother echoed this sentiment:

“Chaela this year has shown us a lot of growth that has been really impressive to watch. The confidence she now possesses has made me proud to watch as she is kicking goals at work and was starting to branch out in sporting until a recent injury. When Chaela got injured, she had the quick turnaround to say she wants to be back for this certain date; this is something we would not have seen in previous years.”



Pass It Back has revealed a new side of Chaela-Lee that we hadn’t seen before. Not only has Chaela-Lee benefited and grown, but so have the other Coaches, who have, in turn, impacted the students we’ve been delivering the curriculum to, while supporting our schools and giving back to our communities.

Building Trust and Breaking Barriers at Chifley College

Pass It Back encountered some of its most remarkable participants at Chifley College Bidwill Campus. The 25 students there, along with their dedicated teachers, truly impressed our staff and Coaches. Chaela-Lee, Phoenix, and Levi built strong connections with the students, creating a lasting impact.

However, starting at Chifley wasn't easy. We were initially informed of scepticism towards Pass It Back. "It was crucial to win them over," Alexis, one of our team leaders, stated. "Fortunately, we managed to form two teams: a boys' team of 15 and a girls' team of 10."

At first, the students were reserved during Coach-led discussions, connecting better through the rugby activities. "This raised concerns about trust issues," Alexis said. This insight prompted the Coaches to adjust their approach. The breakthrough came in week three. "We were all nervous," admitted one student. "We didn't know what to expect." This shift came from the Coaches' consistent presence and genuine interest in the students' lives.



Coach Levi shared, "Here at Chifley, it's been amazing to see the kids develop. They were initially shy and withdrawn, but now they openly share their stories in a safe environment. A sense of solidarity has formed, both player-to-player and Coach-to-player."

Chifley's remarkable growth in just six weeks fostered a special bond between Coaches and players. To create an unforgettable experience, we treated the kids to an all-inclusive NSW Waratahs game. They toured the locker rooms, watched both matches, and participated in the guard of honour for the women's team. "We cheered so much we lost our voices," one participant exclaimed. "The golden point was the best!" This experience, unlike anything most of them had ever had, was a huge boost for everyone involved.



Coach Chaela, reflecting on her experience, said, "Every Thursday, I'm excited to go to Chifley. The girls are amazing—energetic, eager to learn, and always giving their all. It just keeps getting better!"

Ultimately, this story highlights the power of trust and embracing new experiences in creating change. Pass It Back fostered positive transformation, impacting the students' behaviour, improving school attendance, and increasing overall engagement. Witnessing the impact on these remarkable kids has been incredibly rewarding.

Coach Elarnay's Journal

I asked the girls if they knew what passion meant, and they all gave great answers, like "It's when you encourage your teammate" and "When you give your all and go hard at something." The girls demonstrated passion during the drill by using their communication skills and cheering each other on. It made me reflect on how, at the beginning of the session, their energy was a bit flat, but by the end, they were having fun and enjoying themselves.

My boss mentioned that my energy was a bit low, which snapped me out of it and helped me bring my energy back. I realized the girls might have mirrored my low energy, but once I lifted my own, the players did the same. This was a valuable learning experience, showing me that I need to bring high energy right from the start, even when I'm feeling flat.





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