



# New South Wales Rugby League Try League Cultural Inclusion Program

## EVALUATION REPORT

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DECEMBER 2020

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# New South Wales Rugby League Try League Cultural Inclusion Program Evaluation

## 1. Background.

People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds face a myriad of challenges when they arrive in Australia and begin the resettlement process. Culture shock, unemployment, discrimination are just some examples (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010). Additionally, people from CALD backgrounds often experience social exclusion, which add to these challenges. Combined, these issues can have a significant impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing, (O'Driscoll, Banting, Borkoles, Eime & Remco, 2013).

Research suggests engaging children and adults from CALD communities in sport and physical activity can be beneficial for supporting social engagement as well as the process for social inclusion in the new host community (Smith, Spaaij & McDonald, 2018). It also contributes to improving health outcomes. While having potential benefits, engagement of diverse cultures and communities, with diverse views and needs, in sporting and physical activity can be complex which needs to be considered in developing programs designed to increase social inclusion.

During 2020 the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) was funded to run a program called Try League as part of the 'Move it Aus Program'. The NSWRL was funded by the NSW Minister for Multiculturalism for a period of four years to run Try League for primary school aged children (4-12 years) across several communities in South West Sydney following a trial in 2018. Consistent with the intent of the funding, the NSWRL sought to target children from CALD backgrounds in the Try League programs to support increased engagement in sport and physical activity, as well as enhancing social inclusion. The NSWRL sought to evaluate this program to inform ongoing development and successful engagement of children and their families, especially those from CALD backgrounds, and its impact on reducing social isolation (NSWRL, 2019).

## 2. The project - Overview

Academics at the University of New England (UNE) were approached by the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) to undertake an evaluation of the Try League program with a focus on engagement and social inclusion of children and families from CALD backgrounds.

In late 2019 an agreement was reached between the NSWRL and UNE. The researchers enlisted to conduct the evaluation were Dr Erica Russ, Dr Stuart Robertson and Dr Louise Morley, from the social work discipline in the School of Health. During December 2019 and January 2020 a 3-phase survey was designed to evaluate effectiveness of the 8-week programs over 4 locations. The survey was approved by UNE's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on 31 January 2020. The ethics approval number given by the HREC is HE20-010, valid to 31/01/2021. The study commenced in February 2020, but owing to COVID19 restrictions in March 2020, it was suspended and the program evaluation period

was extended to 31 December 2020. Try League recommenced a series of 8-week programs in 4 locations in mid-late 2020. The recommencement of these programs and participant numbers were affected by ongoing issues with COVID19 in the program catchment, with programs operating fully from October 2020.

This evaluation report presents the findings of the study. It begins by presenting the aims of the project before going on to outline the methodology used and the rationale for the survey design. It then discusses the challenges posed by COVID19 before going on to present the results, which, although limited, indicate that the NSWRL Try League program has the potential to contribute to increased community participation for CALD families. Then, the opportunities for further development of the Try League program are explored.

## 2.1 Project Aims

This research program aims to evaluate Try League's contribution to achieving social inclusion of people from CALD backgrounds through sport and physical activity. This evaluation considered the participants' perceived strengths of the program, identified the benefits for participants of engagement in the program, as well as barriers to engagement in the program and sport and physical activity more generally.

## 3. Methods

The study applied a mixed methodology in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data. This design drew on similar research methods regarding social inclusion through engagement of CALD communities in sport and physical activity (Hancock, Cooper and Bahn, 2009; Rosso and McGrath, 2016). The rationale for the 3-Phase survey was as follows:

- Phase 1- commencement of the program, where questions focused on background information about existing social engagement and physical activity of the child and family members and motivations for engaging with Try League;
- Phase 2 – end of program, where questions focused on the experience and perceived benefits and challenges of participating in Try League; and
- Phase 3 – follow-up three months after the program to evaluate the ongoing benefits of Try League for participants.

As many research participants were from CALD backgrounds, a culturally sensitive approach was incorporated into the design of the study (Casado, Negi, and Hong, 2012). The research tools were developed in partnership with the NSWRL who also consulted representatives from CALD communities. Similarly, NSWRL volunteers, including volunteers from CALD communities were engaged to assist in recruitment of participants and assist participants to complete surveys where required due to language or literacy difficulties.

The participants in the study were the children in the Try League program as well as their parents or carers. In order to facilitate children's participation, the survey was designed to include both children and their parents or carers (referred to from hereon in the report as

parents). Survey information was provided in age appropriate formats. In order to meet ethical requirements, all participants provided consent with children having the consent of a parent or guardian before completing any questionnaires through an online consent process.

The rationale for developing and conducting the survey on-line was, first, that participants could consent and complete it in their own time, which avoided the ethical issue of participants feeling pressured to participate, and, second, it allowed for accurate analysis of the data.

To protect the anonymity of participants completing the survey, the NSWRL developed a code for all families registered with Try League which was provided to each family in the email inviting registered families to participate in the evaluation. Families completing the survey used the family code in the surveys, enabling the researchers to track and match the participant responses from across the survey phases. The researchers did not have access to identifying details.

Data was analysed using the statistical software package Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the quantitative and an interpretative framework for the qualitative data. Given the small data set, the qualitative data, involving open text responses, was analysed manually using thematic coding (Liamputtong, 2013).

### 3.1 Process

There were significant challenges in carrying out this evaluation. Given the suspension of the program and the short period between the re-commencement of the Try League program and the reporting period, there was limited capacity to undertake the initially intended three-phase evaluation. There were recruitment challenges including limitations on recruiting volunteers and their availability to assist families and children complete the survey if help was requested. The NSWRL was limited in accessing volunteers from CALD communities due to COVID19 restrictions and volunteers who were involved were redirected to assist in the running of the program given public health requirements. Therefore, they were not available to assist families to complete the survey as intended. This particularly affected CALD families. University student volunteers were sought to assist to overcome this problem, but those who offered assistance were not able to volunteer due to COVID restrictions.

The survey was opened for the beginning of the four targeted programs which commenced in February 2020. Shortly after, the programs were suspended due to COVID-19 and the survey process was put on hold. At the time of suspension, there had been a very limited participant response to the survey. The program locations were amended for the recommencement of the programs later in the year. In response, the UNE research team applied for an ethics variation in June 2020 to amend the target locations.

When the Try League program recommenced, the survey was re-instigated with an intention that volunteers would aid recruitment and participant support. Following a slow

response until October, the NSWRL re-emailed all families involved in the new programs, with the majority of the responses being received during November. A further email was sent to families at the end of the eight-week program to encourage responses to the second phase of the survey. In Phase-2 of the survey only 4 completed responses were received prior to the deadline for analysis and evaluation. Phase-2 of the survey was only able to be open for response up to 1 week after the end of the last targeted Try League program. In addition, the funding body required the evaluation report by the end of December 2020, and this dictated the short timeframe for Phase-2 responses. Given the impact of COVID-19, the dates of the Try League programs, and the reporting timeframes, the third (follow-up) phase of the survey was not able to be implemented.

The data collection was cut-off on Sunday 13 December 2020 for the purposes of reporting within the required timeframes, but the survey remains open for additional responses. Similarly, Phase-3 of the survey could be progressed in future should this still be seen as beneficial. The timeframes between the survey cut-off and reporting dates severely limited the analysis timeframes. Therefore, the data presented in this report is preliminary and findings are restricted to available data. Further analysis of Phase-2 and subsequent findings can be provided should additional data be received and/or time be permitted to undertake further analysis and reporting.

#### 4. The Participants and Demographic Information

In Phase-1 of the survey demographic information of participants was collected. There were 26 families who participated in this initial survey. Of those, 9 had a second child participating in Try League thus providing responses from 35 children. Of those children 83.3% identified as male and 16.7% identified as female. The age and gender of the children is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Age and gender of children participating.

Age	Male	Female	Total
4 years	7	1	8
5 years	4	0	4
6 years	5	0	5
7 years	7	1	8
8 years	5	1	6
9 years	1	2	3
12 years	1	0	1
Total	30	5	35

Of the 26 parents or carers who completed the survey the data indicates that there was a higher number of females completing the survey than males and that males. This is demonstrated in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Age and gender of parents completing the survey.

Age	Male	Female	Total
25-29 years	0	2	2
30-34 years	2	5	7
35-39 years	3	5	8
40-44 years	3	6	9
Total	8	18	26

The data collected indicated 20 of the families completing the survey were born in Australia. While predominately Australian born, some participants identified as being from a CALD background with a mix of cultural identities indicated. When asking these participants about

cultural identity, we also asked about who in their family first came to Australia. (Note only 19 provided a response to this question). This is presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Participants born in Australia.

<b>Who in your family first came to reside in Australia?</b>	<b>What culture do you and your family identify with?</b>	<b>Born in Australia</b>
Parents	Australian	1
	Australian and Romanian	1
	Born in Australia with Greek and Maori background	1
	Lebanese Australian	2
	Samoan/ German	1
Grandparents	Australian	5
	Australian - English	1
	Australian and Romanian traditions	1
	Australian- my partner is Fijian	1
	Australian/Lebanese	1
Other relatives	Anglo Australian	1
	Australian	3
	Total	19

Of the six parents who were not born in Australia, four were Indian, one was South African and one identified as Australian-English.



## 5. Phase-1 Results

### 5.1 Existing Level of Social and Community activities of children and their families on joining Try League

To examine the potential social inclusion benefits of participation in the Try League program the survey asked children and their parents a range of questions about the children's current activities and what and why they liked about these activities. This also allowed the researchers to further understand the level of community participation children were engaged in at the beginning of the Try League program. This section of the survey considered sporting and other community and/or social activities children were participating in.

When children were asked about activities they were doing before or alongside Try League, most indicated there were doing something. For example, after school and vacation care, church, playgroup. Some children also indicated types of sports and others commented that they like the activity but did not specify what they did. Of the 35 children, 12 said they did not do any community or social activities. The reasons for this included 'other commitments' or focused only on sport.

When parents were asked about their children's involvement in other community activities the answers indicated that sport is a primary activity including the sports that had already been indicated by the children. Additionally, parents mentioned activities such as including after school and vacation care, children's groups and arts activities such as dancing.

Parents were also asked what other community and social activities they participated in. Of the 25 families, 13 indicated they did not do not engage in any other community or social activity. Following this, the data was broken down by cultural background to see if and where there were any differences. As can be seen below in Table 4, it was predominately participants who identified with an Australia or partial Australian background who did not participate in any other community activities. Respondents noted sporting activities as well which highlights that people regard sporting activities and also being community and social activities.

**Table 4.** Community and social activities participated in by parents.

	Aust.	Aust.- Englis h	Aust. & Engli sh	Aust. & Roma nian	Aust. - partn er Fijian	Aust. with Greek / Maori backgr ound	Indi an	Leba nese Aust ralia n	Samo an/ Germ an	South African	Tot.
Church group, Swimming club, Gym							1				1
Gym	1										1
Just school friends			1								1
Mothers group Social circle Dog rescue					1						1
NA	6	2				1		3		1	13
Netball, PT sessions	1										1
Netball, squash				1							1
Religious							3				2
Sporting clubs (netball, squash)				1							1
Sporting clubs, School activities	1										1
Swimming, Church Club, Gym							1				1

In addition to the information about activities, parents were asked about their view on making friends with people from other cultures and being part of the wider community. In response as outlined in Table 5, 76% said they found it easy to make friends with people from other cultures. Only two respondents, one Australian and one Australian-English indicated that they found it hard.

**Table 5:** How easy is it to make friends with people from other cultures?

	Extreme ly easy	Moderate ly easy	Slightly easy	Neither easy nor hard	Slightly hard	Moderat ely hard	Total
Australian	2	5		1	1		9
Australian - English		1				1	2
Australian and English		1					1
Australian and Romanian		1		1			2
Australian- my partner is Fijian	1						1
Born in Australia with Greek and Maori background	1						1
Indian	2	1	1				4
Lebanese Australian	2			1			3
Samoan/ German				1			1
South African		1					1
Total	8	10	1	4	1	1	25

The person who responded slightly hard to connect responded with the comment *'People are generally insular. They go about their lives without knowing who lives in neighbouring houses or apartments, because they are too busy'* the person who found it moderately hard responded that they were *'not sure'*.

## 5.2 Existing Level of Physical and Sporting Activities of children and their families on joining Try League

This evaluation also sought to understand if the program contributed to greater levels of physical activity. Sports and physical activity are an important element of being part of a community for many people, particularly in the Australian cultural context.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Try League program, it was necessary to learn about the kinds of sports or other physical activities that appealed to families, and whether or not they were already participating in these activities prior to the Try League program. The results suggested that most families were already engaging with some kind of sporting program. Of the children, 66% had participated in team sports, 43% in individual sports, 26% in group exercise, 8% in individual exercise, 26% in personal play, and 20% in another unknown activity type. Only 6% said they did not participate in any activity. The actual activities and the age range of children who participate in them is outlined below in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Breakdown of the sports/physical activities that children currently participate in by age.

	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	12 years	Tot.
Team sports	3	2	2	8	5	2	1	23
Individual sports	4	2	1	4	3	1		15
Group exercise	3		2	2	2			9
Individual exercise			1	1		1		3
Personal activities/play	3	2	2	1		1		9
Don't do sport/physical activity		1			1			2
Gymnastics		1						1
Martial arts			1					1
Rugby League and Touch Football				1				1
Soccer martial arts and swimming				1				1
Swimming	3							3

The children were also asked about their favourite physical activities. A broad range of responses were received with the majority (25) favouring team sports. Football was of particular interest, with 15 of the 35 responses indicating they liked 'football', 'footy' or 'rugby league'. The children were also asked how often they exercised, with 17 out of 35

indicating that they exercised multiple times a week. Only three said they exercised once a week.

Children were also asked about their favourite sports other than Rugby League and what it was that they liked about these sports. Again, team sports such as football were popular. The following table outlines these responses and also shows these responses in relation to children's culture and gender. From the limited data, it did not appear that specific sports were more enticing to specific cultures. Of the female participants, more were involved in individual sports than team sports. The reasons given for the sports identified being a favourite activity are outlined in the Table 7 below.

**Table 7.** Children's preferred sport with reasons for preference listed by culture and gender.

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Why favourite activity?</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Team Sports</b>			
Basketball	Exciting, fast and everyone has lots of chances to score Exciting very active	Australian	2 x M
Cricket	Playing Cricket	Indian	1 x M
Football	Running I love football Love playing and watching it Get to kick ball hard Because it's fun I like the panthers I have fun with my friends Because I get to run around and learn how to play so I can join in with my friends at school.	Australian/English Australian/Romanian Australian/Fijian Indian Lebanese Australian	8 x M
Netball	Lots of my friends and family play and I am good at it	Australian	1 x F
Rugby League	Fun Love the game Anything where I compete Love Scoring tries Because I love to play sport It's awesome fun	Australian Australian/ English Greek Maori Lebanese/Australian Samoan/German	1 x F 6 x M
Soccer	Because it is about kicking a ball and scoring goals Because I have been playing for more than one year and I like doing it Team sports are fun	Australian x2 Australian/Romanian	3 x M
<b>Individual Sports</b>			

Golf	Seeing improvement from week to week	South African	1 x M
Martial Arts	I made a lot of friends and am an orange belt	Lebanese	1 x F
Running	Easy and fun Fun, easy	Australian	1 x F
Swimming	I love the water I love swimming	Indian Lebanese/Australian	2 x M 1 x F
<b>Two or More Sports</b>			
Soccer and footy	Drawing arts and craft	Indian	1 x M
Soccer and rugby league	Anything outdoors	English Australian	1 x M
Swimming and football	I like playing in water and seeing my friends	Australian	1 x M
Rugby league, soccer & handball	I just love it	Australian	1 x M
Soccer and basketball	I am good at this	Australian	1 x M
Footy and cricket	Being with friends and running around	English/ Australian	1 x M

Children were then asked what they liked about the activities they were doing. Answers included making friends, having fun, learning new skills and exercise/fitness. These were things they liked across most activity categories.

Children were also asked what they disliked about the activities they were doing before or alongside Try League. The responses were varied. While issues about the attitudes of others and a lack of teammates or friends indicates the social component of these activities is important to children, of most concern was the difficulty of the physical activity and learning new skills.

As a follow up, parents were asked if they participated in any exercise or sport, again there were 13 respondents who did not participate in any sport or exercise (see Table 9). However, there is a slightly different make up in the cultural background of the person not participating in sport or exercise compared to the social activities.

**Table 9.** Exercise/sport parents participate in by culture

	Aust.	Aust. - English	Aust. & English	Aust. & Romanian	Aust.-partner Fijian	Aust. Greek / Maori background	Indian	Lebanese Aust.	Samoa/German	South African	Tot
No	3	2	1		1	1		3	1	1	13
Yes	6			2			4			0	12

Those that answered 'no' provided responses as to why they did not engage in sport. Nine said that this was due to time constraints, one qualified this by saying they worked a rotating roster and another that they did not like exercise; two respondents said they do not exercise due to injury; however, two responded with a comment '*personal training*', which suggests they are doing some exercise.

When asked how often they exercise or play sport, eight participants responded 'never', which correlates to a similar amount who indicated that they do not do exercise or sport. Of those, who exercised, four said they did this daily, nine two to three times a week and four once a week.

We also asked if other family members were engaged in exercise. In response to the question 'do other family members exercise or play sport', 20 respondents said 'yes' and five responded 'no', a breakdown by cultural background is provided in Table 10. Again the reasons provided for not playing sport were being 'time poor', with one person saying they had also had an injury.

**Table 10.** Do other family members exercise or play sport?

	Aust.	Aust. - English	Aust. & English	Aust. & Romanian	Aust.-partner Fijian	Aust. Greek / Maori background	Indian	Lebanese Aust.	Samoa/German	South African	Tot
No	7	1	1	2	1	1	3	3	1	1	21
Yes	2						1	1		1	5

However, when asked the frequencies the other family members play sport or exercise only two responded with 'never' which is in contrast to the five above who indicated they didn't play sport. As indicated in the table below, most people indicated they exercise more than once a week.

**Table 11.** How often family member exercise/play sport.

How often do they exercise and/or play sport?	
Daily	5
2-3 times a week	14
Once a week	3
Monthly	1
Never	2
Total	25

### 5.3 Barriers to participating in social, community or physical activities.

It is likely that many people experience barriers to engaging in social and physical activities and cultural factors may contribute to this. Therefore, children and their parents were asked about barriers to their engagement in community and sporting activities. Understanding these barriers may inform the development of Try League program.

Children were asked what stops them from participating in or doing more sport or social activities. This helps in understanding the barriers to children and families becoming involved in sport. Most children indicated that they were happy with their level of activity. For those who wanted to more but didn't are indicated in Table 12 below.

**Table 12.** Reasons why children do not engage in sport or other social activities.

Reason	Sport - Frequency
Being teased	1
I feel different to the group	2
Don't like sport/exercise	0
Other social activities	5
Family reasons	3
Other reason	7
Nothing stops me	17
I am happy with the amount of exercise/sport I do	13

The two children who indicated they were worried about being teased and feeling different were both from CALD backgrounds. The child who indicated she was worried about being teased was from a Lebanese background, who was also concerned about feeling 'different'. The other child worried about feeling different was a male from an Indian background.



#### 5.4 Joining Try League

With an understanding of the level and types of activities children were already engaged in, this provides a context for looking at why children and their families were interested in the children's participation in Try League and benefits they expected from being part of this program.

Given Try league was targeting multicultural communities, participants were asked how they knew about the program. Children found out about the program from a range of sources with 'other' most frequently listed. No further explanation was provided by participants. The internet was also commonly identified as well as parents and friends. Table 13 below shows the different responses to this question.

**Table 13.** Learning about Try League

Age	My friend told me	My parents told me	Other family members	Internet	Other	Total
4 years	1	2		2	3	8
5 years	1			1	2	4
6 years	1			1	3	5
7 years	2	2	1	2	1	8
8 years	1	1	1	2	1	6
9 years		2		1		3
12 years					1	1
Total	6	7	2	9	11	35

#### 5.5 Reasons for Participating in Try League

To consider motivations for participation in the program, parents were asked about what they thought were the benefits of their child participating in the Try League program. Physical skills and fitness were considered to be benefits by most people. Social skills such as making friends, team- work, meeting other people and being part of a community were also commonly identified as beneficial. Many parents also considered feeling part of the community and mixing with children of other cultures of value. This is outlined in Table 14 below.

**Table 14.** Parent’s understanding of the benefits of participating in Try League

<b>Benefits for children identified by parents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Fitness	24
Physical skills (running, catching, throwing, kicking balls etc.)	33
Team-work	30
Make friends	31
Meet other people	24
Be part of a community	15
Connect with others from similar cultural background	9
Mix with children of other cultures	14
Other (Have fun with his mates and make new friends)	1

While responding to set categories in relation to Try League, parents provided a broader range of benefits of other community or social activities through open responses. Although response types differ, the benefits of Try League noted by parents somewhat matched the benefits they indicated from their children’s engagement in other community activities. Fitness and the opportunity to develop new skills were highly rated, with social skills particularly noted in relation to other community activities. While this is the case, having an opportunity to mix with children from diverse backgrounds and feel part of a community were identified as benefits of Try League by over half the families. The opportunities to be part of a team and make new friends were highly rated as benefits of Try League.

Cultural factors were further examined. In a breakdown of the above data, those who indicated that ‘connecting with others of a similar cultural background’ was beneficial (9), six were from a CALD background. Also, parents from Australian and CALD backgrounds equally indicated that their children mixing with children from different cultures is important.

When parents were asked why they were interested in their child participating in the Try League program, there were various responses. Broadly, these can be grouped into three categories: the love of the game, child wellbeing, including the acknowledgement of the developmental benefits, and social engagement. But what is important here is that enjoyment and wellbeing are intimately connected.

Several parents indicated that their child chose to participate in the Try League program because of their own love of Rugby League. This was expressed with a certain degree of passion, with one parent saying *‘I love watching NRL and thought my child might enjoy it’*, suggesting that the family culture of enjoying the game had a significant influence in the child’s engagement with the program. As one parent stated:

*We love league in our household and my child showed interest in playing*

For some parents, it was only the children's enjoyment of Rugby League that motivated them send their child to participate in the program, this was also seen as an opportunity for the child to engage in activities that can aid their development. As one parent stated:

*For my child to learn new skills and develop gross motor skills*

As well as the benefits for healthy development, increased social interaction was also identified as an important reason for participating in the program. As is stated by one parent below:

*Learns a new sport – League, increased physical activity. Learns new skills - passing, catching a footy ball, dodging. Interacts with new people/children, makes new friends*

The value of teamwork skills was also acknowledged as a good reason for joining Try League:

*This game is all about coordination between the team members. Also, it is going to help him in teamwork. Making new friends while playing and listening and learning.*

Parents identified many reasons why they chose to send their child to the join the program, and these reasons suggest that parents had a good understanding of the benefits that team sports can have for children not just in relation to individual health, but also in relation to social skills and connections.

Another important reason for parent's enthusiasm was communicated when they were asked about what helped them decide to have their child join the program. This came down to practicalities such as budget and locality and time as is indicated in the data below:

*The cost and timing worked for us.*

*The cheaper fee and the nearby location to attend.*

*My nephew is also attending. The program cost is low. The sessions are local. The timing and location are convenient. The program isn't too long (8 sessions) is just right for the gap into the summer break.*

Children were also asked what they thought they would gain from participating. The perceived benefits understood by children are outlined below. Responses outlined in Table 15, were similar to those of the parents.

**Table 15.** What children thought they would gain from Try League

<b>Benefits children identified</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Fitness	16
Learn a new sport	18
Learn skills for playing sport	25
Have Fun	27
Being part of a team	17
Meet footballers	9
Learn about another culture	3
Feel part of the community	9
Other (get better at football/like the coaches)	2

Of those above that said they are interested in learning about other cultures, all three were from a CALD background. Those who felt they would feel part of the community included six participants who identified as having a CALD background, one did not identify their culture and two identified as Australian.

In addition to asking about the benefits the parents think their children will receive, we also asked the parents what benefit they might get from their child participating in Try League. As the frequencies in Table 16 demonstrate, social interaction and engaging with the community were commonly perceived as important.

**Table 16:** Benefits parents identified for themselves from their child's participation in Try League.

<b>Benefits for Parents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Make friends	19
Meet other people	22
Be part of a community	17
Connect with sporting people	12
Connect with others from similar cultural backgrounds	5
Connect with others from different cultural backgrounds	9
No Benefits	1

Similar to the children's responses, further analysis was undertaken cultural background for those who talked about connecting with cultures. People from a range of cultural backgrounds, including Australians indicated that connecting with people from other cultures would be beneficial, although there were more from other cultural backgrounds (e.g., Indian, Romanian) who identified this benefit. Those who identified a benefit of connecting with people from a similar culture were evenly distributed between the different cultural groups.

### **Barriers to participating in Try League**

Similar to participation in community and sporting activities, we needed to understand some of the barriers to joining Try League. From the parent's perspective, time constraints and other commitments are likely to be reasons. We asked children if they were worried or scared about joining Try League and if so, why. Of the 12 children that responded yes to the question, four were from CALD backgrounds. When asked why they were worried, most children did not provide a reason, two children indicated they were shy.

## 6. Phase-2 Results

As indicated previously, only four responses were received for the Phase-2 survey. Of these, three had completed the initial survey. Data tables and a comparison with Phase-1 data have not been provided due to limited participants and it must be acknowledged due to the small number of participants that the results from this phase cannot be generalised in any way. While this is the case, qualitative information through comment provided in the survey are discussed below.

Of the four children who responded to Phase-2, all indicated that they enjoyed the program, and identified benefits such as having fun, making friends, spending time with other people, learning new skills and participating in teamwork. One child stated that he enjoyed *'Playing with lots of kids and running and catching the ball'*. Another benefit was being more engaged in the community and one child indicated mixing with children of other cultures as a benefit. Three wanted to keep doing sport, two of these indicated they had taken up another team sport and one of these two also took up an individual sport. Three of the four indicated they had joined new community activities since doing Try League. For those who said they made new friends one child continued to see this friend outside of Try League. Three of the four children indicated an interest in doing Try League again.

Four parents completed the Phase-2 survey. Three of the four identified benefits for their children from participating in Try League including new skills, fitness, teamwork, making friends. Two parents also referred to their children benefiting from connecting with community and the opportunity to mixing with people from other cultures. As one parent stated *'he played with lots of children in Try League, so his social skills and community involvement got increased every week.'*

In addition to the benefits for their children three parents identified they had also benefited from their children's participation in Try League with connecting with community being easier. Parents saw their children *'enjoying'* themselves and valued the benefits the children got from the program as is exemplified when one parent stated *'self-awareness, fitness, reduced screen time, easy to go to bed, social skills, love for outdoor play.'* Similar to their children, some parents found meeting other people, being part of a community, and making friends and connecting with people from other cultures to be a benefit they experienced through their children's participation in Try League. As one parent indicated, *'children were playing, and parents were talking to each other.'* Two parents had increased their community participation commencing new community activities. Two parents indicated some difficulties engaging including a lack of time and supporting multiple children's activities.

## 7. Discussion

In order to evaluate the Try League program, we have explored participants' current activities, how they saw the benefits of these activities and we also considered whether or not culture makes a difference. With only 26 families completing Phase-1 of the survey and only four completing Phase-2, it is very difficult to draw definitive conclusions. What can be gleaned from the data however, is that the program was attractive to participants for reasons of physical fitness and social engagement and enjoyment. Therefore, this preliminary data suggests Try League is potentially contributing to meeting the intended goals of increased engagement in sport and physical activity and enhancing social inclusion.

In contrast to much of the current research that considers social inclusion through sport, this study included the perspectives of young, primary school aged children. While it is acknowledged that parents may have supported children to complete their survey there are clear indicators of the children's perspectives. The discussion of the type of activities they do, what they like and dislike about these activities and what they see as benefits of Try League are particular areas where children's perspectives are evident. Of significance in these responses are the importance of friends and teammates as a central component of their participation in sport and other community activities.

### **Engagement in sport and physical activity**

Again, it is difficult to be definitive about whether or not the program resulted in increased sporting and physical activity, as many of the participants said they were already engaged in sporting activities before the program. What is evident is that, of the 36 children who participated in the study, two of them were not previously engaged in sport and 12 were not engaged in other community activities. This suggests that, by joining Try League, these children had increased their level of sport and community activity. Though there was a limited response to Phase-2, those responses also indicated that there was an increase in engagement in sport and physical activity since joining Try League. .

Both children and parents saw the benefits of engaging in sport and participating in Try League for the physical fitness as well as social wellbeing. However, it is noteworthy that many of the parents were not able to participate in any sporting or physical activities due to time constraints, with the majority of those identifying as being of an Australian background or born in Australia. The potential benefits indicated by respondents in Phase-1 were realised within the respondents to Phase-2, with the increase in sporting and physical activity by both the children and the families. These benefits also were reflected in social and community engagement.

### **Community engagement and social inclusion**

The enhancement of social inclusion is difficult to measure due to the limited responses in Phase -2. However, three of the four child respondents indicated that they became involved in new social/community activities, thus suggesting that the development of the connections via Try League increased the participant's social connections. The reporting of sporting activities within the questions of social and community engagement indicate that the two cannot be easily separated as indicated by the responses of the parents in Phase-2.

The study examined the cultural background of people and the variations in participation and perceived benefits in relation to this. Some of the interesting aspects found was that the two people who identified as being from an Australian background or born in Australia found it difficult to make friends with people from other cultures. Similarly, the physical activities those who identified as

having an Australian background or born in Australia where the most likely to not participate in other social and community activities. However, this and the sporting result may have to be treated with some caution as those from a non-Australian background where the minority of those who participated and the lack of participation from other with a CALD background maybe be an indicator of them having limited social and community engagement, or concerns about community participation, particularly in relation to the risks posed by COVID19.

The people who participated in this study clearly understood the benefits of being socially connected within the broader community. This was demonstrated at several points in the data, where people identified reasons for participating in Try League and other community activities as points of social connection. This suggests that playing sport is more than more than just physical activity. It is also about feeling part of a community. In relation to the Try League program, this is significant because it was a core motivation for participating.

Overall, whilst the results are limited they do highlight for the respondents that Try League did provide an avenue for greater community and social inclusion. It is unfortunate that COVID-19 disruptions did not allow for the volunteers from CALD backgrounds to assist with the engagement with the survey, greater participation in Phase-2 of the survey or the implementation of Phase-3 of the survey. This has impacted upon being able to provide full evaluation of effectiveness of the Try League program. There is scope once there is normalisation of society that the study can be replicated.

## 8. Conclusion

While no definitive links can be made from the available data regarding social inclusion or the success of the Try League program in enhancing social inclusion, the data suggests that the social elements are motivators for engagement in this and other sporting activities.

This report suggests that children and their parents do see social connections and skills as elements central to the children's participation in sporting activities. Therefore this is an important consideration for future planning and promotion of the Try League program.

Given the limitations of this study, further research would be required to make clearer links between the perceived benefits of Try League and an increase in physical activity and sport or enhancement of social inclusion. Any future research needs to examine both the perspectives of participants at the end of the program and include a greater proportion of people from CALD backgrounds.



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