

CNZ Case Study: Parafed Manawatu Programme

Planning

After consultation with Sport NZ about how to best implement its Inclusion Project, CNZ first approached Parafed Manawatu in June 2021 to see whether they would have any interest in trying croquet. Parafed Manawatu showed responded positively and the concept of a four-week programme was discussed. CNZ then approached Rose Gardens CC as a potential hosting venue, including feasibility of wheelchairs, accessibility, timings and costs. The club made itself available.

Initially, the idea was for this to take place in September or October, but because of the logistics involved including receiving funding, hiring an Inclusion Officer, and looking for a time of year in which the ground was the firmest, the programme was then agreed to be held in February and March 2022.

Flexible Programme Outline

Before the programme started, a plan was put in place about how each day would be run, with attention to particular drills and timings of each activity. However, as the first day unfolded, it was clear that players with different abilities could accomplish tasks at different speeds, and that club members taking the lead on individual coaching was a good approach. This meant being flexible throughout the programme.

Another big takeaway from this was having sufficient lawn space available. It meant having one lawn available for players who had picked up the basics quickly to start playing full matches on, while others could still play independently on the other. This had also not been in the initial plan, with only one lawn requested, but the club was quick to put out more hoops to help with the unique needs of each player.

Equipment Adaptation

While the ability for the players to use the club's existing equipment was considered as the main option, we found that the three participants in wheelchairs had difficulties with them. There were several factors behind this, but primarily as the individuals did not quite have the strength to use one arm to guide the mallet. The nature of the chair being in the way meant they could not swing between their legs, and they had to come up with adaptations.

Two of the boys had different approaches with how to do this. Tyler preferred to get out of his chair and to play off the ground, as he could swing the mallet in a full arc with consistent contact. He was also able to move around the lawn on his hands and knees which gave him some mobility autonomy. It is important to note that Tyler is six years old, and regularly does activities from the ground and enjoyed this playful part of it. This may not always be a practical solution for older players.



Jeffrey has some more experience with wheelchair sports, including playing ten pin bowling and basketball from his chair. He is also a little older, and, at 12, has some more strength and control

over his arms. However, he struggled for consistency from his chair, and tried two different hitting techniques with mixed results:



Side-on Two Hands

Easy to aim without assistance and allows for strength adjustment.

Unnatural swinging angle and difficult to generate power.



Front Swing Two Hands

Easy to generate power and natural swinging angle.

Difficult to aim without assistance and difficult to ensure clean contact.

The ultimate solution to both boys' difficulties was having a shorter and lighter mallet that could be used on the side of the chair. This suited the third boy in a wheelchair too, Simon, who had been unable to swing the club mallet on his own at all but could now make contact.



Thanks to croquet player Doug van Belle's new mallet design, the boys could make better consistent contact and aim better. Jacob even felt that he was able to compete with club members.



Given the choice, Tyler still preferred his original option of playing off the ground, but when it came to playing in a match, he opted for playing from his chair with the adapted mallet as he was able to move around the lawn easier and could have some comfort.

Inclusive Environment

Part of the success of this programme was the role the club and its members played. They seamlessly coached individuals and made them feel welcome on the lawns. They also adapted games and drills so that everyone could feel included.

"Our members learnt a new skill set which was taken to a level where they felt they were accepted and a part of a membership." – Parafed Sport Advisor

Another important part of the programme was the barbecue on the final day. This added to the community feel of the programme and allowed everyone to reflect on the day's play together.

"I love that you can compete on the lawn and then have a chat with everyone afterwards. It's been a great way for me to make new friends." – Jeffrey (12)

As more programmes occur around the country, any opportunity to make the new players feel part of the club is crucial, as they think of the entire experience as a positive, not just the sport. Having the right kind of attitude from the club is vital for this to happen.

Another element of the community feel was having younger coaching mentors at the club as they helped to break some of the stereotypes about the sport and gave it more of a competitive edge. One parent commented on the positive impact this had on her son.

Programme Extension

Due to a positive response from all involved, the initial four-week programme was extended for a further four weeks until Easter between the players and the club directly. This was seen as a tremendous success initially. However, due to challenges such as lawn maintenance, Covid cases and weather, only one week went ahead. These factors were largely out of the club's control.

Unique Programme Attendees

7	6	6	19
Players with a disability	Playing family members	Non-playing family & staff	New people to croquet

What We Learnt

Being adaptable was the main takeaway from this programme and having the ability to be flexible on the day was vital to ensuring that all attendees were able to enjoy themselves. Having sufficient seating and shade for breaks was more important than having full clubhouse facilities and toilets which was also interesting.

As more programmes take place and CNZ learns more, resources can be developed to better prepare clubs for what to expect from the athletes with disabilities. We hope that this will lead to easy access to membership and for the players to be allowed to feel as part of the club.

The equipment adaptation was a major success, but possibly not something that can always be relied upon. Having players make their own adjustments with existing equipment is a solution but the equipment gave them the feeling that they could compete with the club members which is the goal.

Having a four-week programme meant that any problems faced in the first week could be dealt with for the following weeks.

Finally, having the right kind of club members involved was crucial. They all had a great attitude by being welcoming, listening, and adapting to different needs. Even those not involved in direct coaching were hospitable on playing days which helped to make this a memorable experience for all involved.