



THE DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE DIVIDEND



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HEADLINES

£1=£9.84

Players and their families are the primary beneficiaries of Disability Rugby League. Every £1 invested by players and their families generates a social return of £9.84

£1=£3.39

The Social Return on Investment of Disability Rugby League overall is £3.39

Disability Rugby League provides a supportive environment where people can participate in sport regardless of their disability; it brings together those who have shared experiences and face similar challenges as part of their daily lives.

The support, camaraderie and friendships developed through Disability Rugby League have a positive impact on the players self-confidence, aspiration and mental health.

Disability Rugby League provides new opportunities and experiences, reduces the levels of loneliness and isolation of its players, and changes the way people think about their disability.

FOREWORD



Adam Hills MBE is the Presenter of Channel 4's The Last Leg, and Rugby League World Cup 2021 Ambassador.

When I was three days old, my dad brought a red and green toy rabbit to the hospital for me. He was a South Sydney Rabbitohs fan, and therefore so was I. It must have been a weird time for him, knowing that his son had been born with a deformed right foot and yet wanting him to be a Rugby League fan (and maybe even a player).

Although my parents were told I'd probably never walk, the right specialist and the right prosthetics allowed me to do more than that – I ran, skipped, hopped...and played Rugby League. At first it was just in the backyard, then on the street, then eventually at school. At around the age of 13 however, it became apparent that I'd never represent my country. Furthermore, it became obvious that a prosthetic leg was becoming more and more of a hindrance in an able-bodied contact sport.

Gradually I drifted away from Rugby League and became a tennis coach – a sport in which a prosthetic leg was slightly less of an obstacle. I always pined for League though and viewed it as “the one that got away.” At 14 I was offered the chance to try out for the Paralympics – but as a kid I didn't like running, or swimming. I just liked Rugby League (and tennis). I also didn't consider myself to be disabled.

In 2017, at the age of 47, I became aware of Physical Disability Rugby League. There were six teams in Sydney, but the commute from London was impractical. Instead I offered to help the Warrington Wolves as they set up the first PDRL team in the UK. Since then, I have played over twenty games for Warrington, as well as two games for my beloved South Sydney Rabbitohs, one for NSW City, and half a game for Lancashire.

I'm not exaggerating when I say Physical Disability Rugby League has changed my life. At first I felt guilty at the amount of joy the game was bringing me, but as I looked around at my teammates, I realised we were all getting the same things out of the game. Camaraderie, fitness, fun, mateship, friendship, and a sense of belonging to a team. We got to play the sport we love, the way we love, with no concessions made for our disabilities. Because when everyone on the team is disabled, no one feels disabled.

The benefits of Disability Sport are immeasurable, and yet this report will attempt to measure them. From a personal perspective I've seen Physical Disability Rugby League improve people's physical and mental health, provide a community for people who may not have one, and give people with physical disabilities the chance to experience some things that able-bodied people often take for granted.

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There is a special bond that is formed when you're part of a team, knowing that you've given your all for the person standing next to you on the field. That bond continues off the pitch as well, as I've seen my teammates provide support and friendship for each other 24/7. In particular, during the Covid Pandemic, the team WhatsApp group became an invaluable support network as we posted exercise challenges for each other, and instituted Zoom calls for us all.

Without PDRL, we'd probably have never known this bond. If you had asked us all to come together once a week to form a disability support group, none of us would have attended. But ask us to come to Rugby League training every Monday, and at least twenty of us will show up. In my case, I make the trek from London to Warrington every week – to see, play and train with my mates. I even turned down an invitation to Prince Charles' 70th Birthday because it was on a training night. And with the first ever Physical Disability Rugby League World Cup taking place in 2022, I finally have the chance to represent my country. On top of all that, I'm now proud to call myself disabled.

Since discovering Physical Disability Rugby League, I've banged on about its benefits to anyone who'll listen. Mental health, physical health, a social network...all of these are enhanced when people with disabilities have the chance to play as part of a team. Many's the time I've said "someone should do a study about it." And now someone has.

As you read this report, you'll see facts and figures, tallies and graphs, and a load of facts. But every single person that plays Disability Rugby League – whether it be Physical Disability, Learning Disability, or the Wheelchair game – has a story like mine. A story of an improved quality of life, of a happier disposition, of better health.

For people with disabilities, sport is like a public building. All we ask is for a way to get in.



FOREWORD



John Hughes is the Director of Partnerships and Communities, Community Integrated Care.

Community Integrated Care exists to enable people who require care and support to live 'The Best Life Possible'. This is a vision that is truly inspirational, but in some ways almost impossible. I feel the weight of this goal every single day in my role. It's a daring, uncompromising, visionary call to arms, that ignores limitations and asks you to break through barriers. It tells you that anything but the best is not good enough for the people who we are privileged to support.

'The Best Life Possible' is almost an ask for perfection. That little statement when unpacked is virtually unscalable. It means enabling people to find and fulfil their potential, live their dreams, and be at their most independent, enjoying a life full of meaning, with people who love and respect them most, in a place that they can call home.

But for many of the people we support, and people like them, life isn't perfect. Prejudice exists and society fails to see their talents and worth. There is a lack of meaningful and aspirational opportunity. A complex mix of factors means that they face huge health, wellbeing, and economic inequalities. The world isn't accessible, on many levels. Too many people, tragically, live lives of isolation.

In this context, it would be easy to look at our vision and to see it as an impossible ask. A statement that reaches beyond our grasp. But thankfully, I know differently. If I ever need to remind myself that it is possible for people to live The Best Life Possible, I only need to look at the Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League and our work with Rugby League.

Community Integrated Care is proud to be the Official Social Care Partner of the RFL. For six years, we have collaborated with the sport to create a ground-breaking range of opportunities that transform the health, happiness, wellbeing, and inclusion of people who access care and support, and carers. The list of what we have achieved together is breath-taking – accessible sports programmes for people who have profound learning disabilities, work and education programmes, social clubs, anti-discrimination campaigns, carer wellbeing programmes, support groups for people living with dementia.

In the last year alone, we've created more than 20,000 hours of life-changing opportunities for people to get active, develop skills, make friends, and grow in independence with the sport. To me, it is unlikely that there is any other sporting partnership in the world that is so vast, ambitious, and impactful. At the heart of this is Learning Disability Rugby League.

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In this report, you will read that this world-first sport generates £1.2m of social impact for its communities every year. This is a mind-blowing figure and a great quantification of the rewards it generates in promoting healthier, more independent lives, and a more inclusive society.

For me though, I'm fortunate to see the hundreds of stories that sit behind this hugely impressive data. Learning Disability Rugby League is a sport that makes once-in-a-lifetime experiences everyday ones. It's a platform where people who are too often pacified with low-aspirational 'opportunities', labelled and judged, and deprived of dreams have an opportunity to be at their absolute best, as Super League stars.

I've had the honour of seeing so many personal journeys. I know many people who have lacked confidence or only saw their own limitations and become swaggering, happy, ambitious people, radiating joy, because they've found their place. And, as this report powerfully shows, every achievement on the field shows the wider world the value of inclusion and rubbishes prejudice, highlighting the talent and magic that we squander when we fail to see people's potential.

This is a sport where what happens off the pitch matters as much, and I'd say even more, than on it. By being part of the Community Integrated Care family, the sport, its coaches, the players, and their families, are connected to a charity that wants to change lives and enable more inclusive society. We've enabled many players to access training and new skills, achieve paid employment, find support in their daily lives, or have an organisation they can turn to in crisis. When you read this report, remember that all of this additionality isn't within the scope of the research. This is just the amazing things that happens within the field of play.

What other sport can say that it is able to support people to play at Anfield or St James's Park, and also work with a top record producer to write a rap song, become a journalist and interview their heroes, or become a chef and publish a cookery book? Only ours.

Of course the first five years of our involvement with Rugby League has included a global pandemic, and the specific challenges that presented to our community. It was a source of further pride and joy for us all that our LDSL participation numbers increased during lockdown, very much against the overall trend – while Leeds Rhinos and Widnes Vikings were at the fore of a number of clubs to provide brilliant support in distributing hundreds of thousands of items of PPE to our workforce, and helping to create opportunities for care services during lockdown.

It was a period when the value of our partnership shone through, and our Chief Executive Mark Adams was thrilled to receive the RFL President's Award for 2020 from Clare Balding, on behalf of Community Integrated Care.

It was an educated experiment when Community Integrated Care first invested in Rugby League. It, frankly, isn't what care providers normally do. As a charity, it is so important that we use our resources responsibly to achieve an impact, and I felt that we could do that in Rugby League, because of the values it upholds.

FOREWORD

In 2016, we looked at our services and our status in society, and felt adrift. Social care is unseen, overlooked, or perhaps more accurately, often looked down-upon. We wanted to see what would happen if we partnered with a sport that is at the heart of our communities. We hoped to draw in the skills of its clubs to transform health, to galvanise supporters to promote inclusion, and to find a place where the people we support could achieve remarkable things.

I could never have imagined quite how big things could get. Right now though, all I can see is possibilities. This publication is the opening chapter of what we will achieve together, not the final volume.

Endless credit goes to our partners at the Rugby Football League. I see the bold, ambitious, inclusive values that I love about Community Integrated Care reflected in our friends in the RFL. Their vision has changed lives and set a blueprint that all sports should aspire towards

John Hughes



STEEDEEN

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OXEN

LEEDS RHINOS
WHEELCHAIR

WHEELCHAIR RUGBY LEAGUE

WHEELCHAIR RUGBY LEAGUE

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INTRODUCTION



Ralph Rimmer, Chief Executive of the RFL.

In the three years since the publication of Rugby League's original Dividend Report in 2019, our sport, like society, has been tested as never before.

We often used the Dividend Report to guide our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as it had provided such a timely confirmation of the value of Rugby League to the communities in which it is established.

That reinforced our determination to commission further research, into specific areas of the sport.

"These Girls Can – The Wider Social Impact of the Growth of Women's and Girls' Rugby League" was published in March 2021, and the Dividend Report was also updated to incorporate the events of 2020-21.

Now, I am delighted and excited that the Disability Rugby League Dividend is published – again in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University's Institute of Sport.

I have been involved with Rugby League at various levels over several decades, but nothing has been as uplifting or inspirational as the development in recent years of Physical Disability Rugby League, Learning Disability Rugby League and Wheelchair Rugby League.

This report captures that inspiration, through the case studies of Oliver Thomason and Ian Toole, and the words of so many others who have been involved in PDRL, LDRL and the Wheelchair game.

In that regard, I thank Adam Hills and John Hughes for their heartfelt and moving forewords – as well as the hours they have poured into the sport.

But as we proved with the original Rugby League Dividend Report, these passionate individual stories are so much more powerful when brought together, and accompanied by rigorous research to underline the tangible value to society provided by Rugby League – underpinned by the work of the sport's charity, Rugby League Cares.

INTRODUCTION

The timing of this report is neat, as we look forward to hosting the Rugby League World Cup in England. It will be the most inclusive in history, providing Wheelchair Rugby League with an unprecedented national platform for us to celebrate the athleticism and personal stories of the players – and now with a demonstration four-team PDRL event also included in the schedule.

Learning Disability Rugby League also has strong links to the World Cup, through Community Integrated Care's Inclusive Volunteering Programme supported by Sport England – and one of the most memorable occasions so far in 2022 came at the St Helens community club Portico Vine, when a number of LDRL stars took the stage at one of the superb new facilities funded by the World Cup's CreatedBy programme to explain how Rugby League had transformed and enriched their lives.

I defy anyone not to be inspired by reading the Disability Rugby League Dividend, whether a quick flick or a detailed study. And as John Hughes says in his foreword, the most exciting thing is that this is just the start.

There is potential for so much more in coming years, and for Rugby League to make a positive impact on so many more lives. Armed by the findings of the Disability Rugby League Dividend Report, and boosted by the World Cup, we are determined that potential will be fulfilled.



INTRODUCTION

Playing Rugby League, across all its levels, is more than a game. There is not any single defining characteristic; instead, for each of its participants it means something different. However, whilst each participant may have a different reason for engaging with the sport, all will benefit from the positive aspects of Rugby League. Some of the headline benefits may include, but are certainly not limited to, physical, emotional, and mental well-being in all their facets.

Rugby League is a sport born out of a necessary, rebellious attitude to provide equality in participation, to ensure Rugby League was accessible for all. For those working-class members of society professionalisation, and thus the creation of Rugby League, meant the ability to continue to play and still provide financial support for their families.

The pursuit of equality is something that is still consistently visible in our society today. Today's vision of equality is much more complex and challenging but one that Rugby League, due to its rich history, is in a unique position to bridge. The game of Rugby League is deeply rooted and essential within its communities which, to this day, remain in resoundingly working-class areas. Many community Rugby League clubs are the pillar within their community, as well as offering aspirational opportunities to demographics within society who may not otherwise access any form of physical activity. The Rugby League Dividend report published by the Rugby Football League, including academic research by Manchester Metropolitan University, demonstrated the significant socio-economic impact of Rugby League in areas of high deprivation. The report showed that for every £1 invested in Rugby League there was a social return on investment of £4.01, often within communities most in need of support.

Inclusion is at the heart of all the disability offers provided by the Rugby Football League. Rugby League is a sport that reflects its communities and as such we are always striving to achieve progress in equality. It is important that people of all abilities are represented within the game. This means that all community and professional clubs should be conscious of the needs and requirements of disabled people within their community.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Rugby League lost the ability to host both training and games. Many people who participate in the disability variants of Rugby League come from groups identified as most vulnerable to the effects of Covid-19. As such during the 2020 season activity in all disability variants of Rugby League came to a halt, and what little activity there was isolated to small windows of opportunity restricted to socially distanced training. As we entered 2022 restrictions due to Covid-19 were significantly reduced and Disability Rugby League is returning to pre-pandemic activity. Players are returning and engaging with the sport again, whilst new teams have been established across all three variants, Wheelchair Rugby League (WhRL), Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL) and Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL). The early signs are encouraging that Covid-19 has not impacted the growth and development of Disability Rugby League.

A specific area of focus heading into the Sport England 2021-2025 funding cycle and beyond for the Rugby Football League is that of inclusivity and equality, with a target to ensure that all can engage with Rugby League.

INTRODUCTION

In the most recent government study, the disability community in the UK accounted for 11.9 million individuals. From our core communities the figure stands at 3.2 million (North-West & Merseyside, Yorkshire & Humber, North-East) [1]. This is a substantial number of individuals, from the Rugby League geographic heartlands who have previously not had the opportunity to engage with Rugby League in all its forms. It is our mission to broaden the landscape, and give all those individuals the opportunity to enjoy our game and access the same benefits from participating, in all its forms, in Rugby League. We feel Rugby League has the potential to become, and will strive to ensure it becomes, the most inclusive sport in the UK.

The Rugby Football League has promoted inclusive forms of Rugby League for many years, but in our more recent past we have seen a swift development of new variants of Disability Rugby League. These variants have widened the playing opportunity for those from various disability backgrounds and further increased the opportunity for disabled individuals to participate in playing Rugby League.

There are numerous ways to engage with Rugby League away from playing. We at the Rugby Football League aim to make the sport as inclusive as possible and as such have various targets and programmes to contribute to this. This commitment is set out in “TACKLE IT”, Rugby League’s action plan on diversity and inclusion. TACKLE IT is a sport-wide plan to make Rugby League a truly inclusive sport by tackling discrimination and breaking down barriers to involvement. There are four strategic goals by which diversity and inclusion will be advanced.

1. Widen the reach and appeal of Rugby League
2. Diversify Rugby League’s Talent Pool and Workforce
3. Improve the culture of Rugby League
4. Clarify processes, instil confidence in – and encourage – the reporting of discrimination, and ensure appropriate sanctions are in place – Rugby League has a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and unacceptable behaviour

Dr Rimla Akhtar OBE, who has been a Non-Executive Director of the RFL since 2019 and chairs the RFL’s Inclusion Board, said:

“Like all sports, Rugby League has been and remains on a journey in terms of ensuring that inclusion is intrinsic. The development of Disability Rugby League has been a hugely positive step in that journey in recent years, and the compilation of this report is a timely measurement of the progress that has been made, and its value in various ways.

“The lockdowns in response to Covid-19 presented many challenges to all in society, and there were additional specific challenges for those involved in Disability Rugby League. The pandemic also confirmed how Rugby League is a powerful force for good, and how it has such a deep connection with so many communities, adding greater clarity to the importance of the sport promoting inclusivity in all forms.”



GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

2002 – Wheelchair Rugby League conceived and launched in France

2006-2007 – First Wheelchair Rugby League internationals were played between France and Great Britain in Toulouse, followed by games in Paris and Harrow College

2008 – RFL hosted France in international event at Brunel University

2008 – First ever Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup took place in Australia with England winning the first event beating Australia in the Final

2012 – Fassoulette-Kielty Trophy launched to be contested by France and England going forward

2013 – Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup in England, France won the trophy

2014 – Wheelchair Rugby League Home Nations in Medway

2015 – Wheelchair Rugby League European Championships in Medway

2016 – Wheelchair Rugby League 4 Nations in Rochdale

2016 - Community Integrated Care creates first partnerships with Rugby League

2017 - Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup in France, France won the trophy

2017 - PDRL Established in the UK

2017 – PDRL exhibition game played at Halliwell Jones, Warrington and included Adam Hills as a member of the foundation and men first team

2018 - First game played at Victoria Park, Warrington vs Leeds

2018 - Warrington travelled to Sydney for the first PDRL World Club Challenge and won against South Sydney Rabbitohs in the ANZ stadium

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

2018 - First inclusion festival, Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) and PDRL players on the same field

2019 – Wheelchair Rugby League 3 Nations tournament

2019 – England Wheelchair Rugby League team tour Australia playing 5 games; NSW, QLD and Australia x3

2019 - Learning Disability Super League created

2019 - LDSL & PDRL festival at Magic Weekend, Anfield

2019 - LDSL at Old Trafford for an end of season celebration

2019 - PDRL at Old Trafford for an exhibition game

2019 - Warrington won the first PDRL formal league structure

2020 - RLWC2021 and Community Integrated Care launch RLWC Inclusive Volunteering Programme

2021 - England Community Lions PDRL launched with Shaun Briscoe named Head Coach

2021 - PDRL Classification Structure accepted and adopted by International Rugby League (IRL)

2021 - PDRL Super League expanded to 7 teams

2021 - LDSL expands to 13 foundations/clubs

2021 - Wheelchair & PDRL World Cups to be held alongside Men's and Women's tournament

2022 - LDSL expands to 17 foundations/clubs

2022 – LDSL, RFL & Community Integrated Care partnership 5-year celebration and extends to a further 5 years

2022 - PDRL expands to 8 foundations/clubs



GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

WHEELCHAIR RUGBY LEAGUE

Wheelchair Rugby League (WhRL) is a well-established version of the game and is currently the most inclusive format across Rugby League. WhRL provides the opportunity for all to play Rugby League together regardless of gender and disability and non-disabled participants can play. **17% of WhRL players are female, significantly higher than the 10% that constitute the Community Rugby League player pool. 50% of players over age of 35.**

WhRL in the UK has multiple playing offers from Super League level to beginners and even adapted versions for people to try the game in less competitive environments. There is also a long-standing Challenge Cup competition, as well as a performance element that sits within the England Performance Unit and has competed at each of the Wheelchair Rugby League World Cups to date.

WhRL is closely aligned with the professional game and several clubs that participate in the national competitions are supported. **There are currently over 200 registered WhRL players.** WhRL transcends the traditional Rugby League heartlands of Northern England, with around half the teams located in Wales, Scotland, and Southern England.

In recent years WhRL fixtures have been broadcast on both the BBC, Sky Sports and the RFL's Our League platform, raising the profile of the game and bringing it to a new and wider audience.

PHYSICAL DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL) is an ambulant, full contact and touch format of the game providing more people with the opportunity to participate in Rugby League.

PDRL was first established in the UK in 2017 where the first game ever to be played in the Northern Hemisphere took place between Leeds Rhinos and Warrington Wolves. Since then, the game has developed significantly, with four more teams added in 2018, and eleven teams competing in 2022.

PDRL teams are supported by the professional game clubs; the first regular season took place in 2019 with Warrington Wolves being crowned champions. Since then, the sport has continued to grow and is now working towards a standardised internationally recognised classification system to implement for international competitions. These discussions have been driven by the announcement of the first PDRL World Cup to take place at the same time as the RLWC2021. Now PDRL has an England team set up within the Community Lions programme and will take part at the RLWC2021 tournament.

"I'm now part of the extended England (PDRL) training team. It still doesn't feel real that I might have the opportunity to represent my country through the sport. It's something that you put away as a kid, you realise growing up I'm not going to be an international athlete, but now I'm pulling on an England shirt, the aim is to get to that World Cup and represent my country it's unbelievable and still hasn't really sunk in."

- Nick Kennedy, Castleford Tigers PDRL

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

PHYSICAL DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

Participation numbers have grown steadily since the launch of PDRL, with the addition of new teams in 2022 **the number of players is projected to reach over 200** for the first time. PDRL is played across the age spectrum with 40% of players over the age of 35 - significantly higher than Community Rugby League. Given that PDRL teams are supported by professional game clubs, many of the players are based in the Rugby League heartlands. However, as the variant of the game continues to expand the geographical reach will grow.

Community
Integrated
Care



Case Study – Oliver Thomason

Starting paid employment in social care in January 2021, as Community Integrated Care's Sports Inclusion Coordinator, Oliver Thomason has already engaged thousands of people in getting more active, mentored many, and championed social inclusion through one of the world's biggest sports events.

As part of his role, Oliver co-produces new physical activity solutions for people who have learning disabilities, encourages people to become more physically active, and works with leading sporting agencies to champion opportunities for people who have support needs. His successes have included:

- Hosting a virtual Strictly Come Dancing masterclass experience, choreographing dance lessons alongside professional stars
- Leading and starring in educational videos for the charity's 'Beat The Bin' campaign, inspiring people with learning disabilities to save food and money, and adopt healthier habits
- Assisting with the development of wellbeing walking groups for people who access support
- Launching multi-sports provision programmes with Warrington Wolves, St Helens and Widnes Vikings rugby league clubs, supporting people to be more active
- Championing the Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League— a ground-breaking adapted version of rugby league, giving 250 people who have learning disabilities the chance to play for the teams they support
- Inspiring 300 people to sign up for the first ever dedicated volunteering programme for people who have learning disabilities and autism at a major event, with the Rugby League World Cup 2021 (RLWC)

Oliver is also employed as the Official Inclusion Ambassador for the RLWC, championing disability inclusion on a global scale. This led to him to some incredible experiences, such as closing the London Stock Exchange market ceremony, leading the way for people with learning disabilities to be heard and empowered across the world.

He continues to inspire and change the lives of thousands, remaining humble, optimistic, and ambitious. Oliver is a voice of the people.

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

LEARNING DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) is a non-competitive version of the game that is specifically adapted for people who have learning disabilities and autism. It was born out of the initial launch of PDRL and Community Integrated Care's development of accessible sports provision for people who have learning disabilities, including tag rugby sessions, two years earlier. It was apparent that there was an appetite within the learning disability community for a Rugby League playing offer. Due to the full contact nature of PDRL it was deemed important to ensure the learning disability community had a bespoke offer to meet the needs of the demographic.

LDRL is a touch Rugby League variant of the game allowing participants the opportunity to access fun training sessions and festivals that also allows the participants to access the social benefits of Rugby League.

In 2018 our partners, Community Integrated Care, who are one of Britain's biggest social care charities and have invested in our sport since 2016, came in to support this concept and in 2019 the Learning Disability Super League was created. This introduced a regular season of festivals, events and showcase matches at some of the biggest venues in the country such as Anfield, Old Trafford, and St James' Park. These events created lasting lifelong memories associating positive thoughts and feelings towards leading a healthy and active lifestyle, as well as aiding peoples mental and emotional wellbeing.

"Our charity put forward an idea about creating a learning disability Super League, giving people the chance to be Super League players, playing the sport they love with the same esteem as their Super League heroes that thousands of people cheer on"

– John Hughes, Community Integrated Care

Over 300 players participate in LDRL, with new teams forming each year as the variant continues to grow. Around 65% of LDRL participants are under the age of 24, the sport provides a vital support mechanism for these children and young adults.

LDRL players are disproportionately located in areas of high deprivation, both in comparison to the general UK population but also other Rugby League players, who themselves often reside in areas of high deprivation. **55% of LDRL players live in areas which rank in the top three deciles for general deprivation. This increases to 58% for Education and 65% for Health & Disability**, therefore support mechanisms provided by sport become even more important.

This programme is just one element of a much wider partnership with Community Integrated Care, who are the Rugby Football League's Official Social Care partner. This includes complimentary programmes including employment and volunteering support, social clubs, online activities, disability inclusion campaigns, carer wellbeing programmes, and a raft of physical activity programmes for people who have more profound support needs and therefore cannot participate in the Learning Disability Super League. For the purposes of this report, we focus exclusively on Learning Disability Rugby League, so this represents just one important snapshot of our combined social impact in the social care space.



Case Study – Ian Toole, Widnes Vikings LDRL Player

As Community Integrated Care concludes its fifth anniversary of working in rugby league, the charity is proud to announce a long-term extension to its role as the Official Social Care Partner of the Rugby Football League.

Since 2016, Community Integrated Care has pioneered many innovative programmes with the sport, at a local and national level, that promote the health, happiness and inclusion of people who access support, and help impact paid and family carers.

This work was taken to new levels in 2018, when the Rugby Football League and Super League allied with the charity to become the first governing body and topflight league with a dedicated Social Care Partner. Followed by the creation of the world-first Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League and the Rugby League World Cup 2021 Inclusive Volunteering programmes.

Ian Toole is just one example of how the partnership has had a life-changing impact on people with learning disabilities and autism.

Just over a year ago, Ian knew little about rugby league and had certainly never played the sport.

Fast-forward 12 months and the 45-year-old is now an integral part not only of Widnes Vikings' Learning Disability Super League team, but also the club's match day operation and office staff, through his volunteering role achieved through the charity's Inclusive Volunteering Programme.

Set up by Community Integrated Care, the Learning Disability variant of rugby league has provided immeasurable opportunities to the learning disability community, creating a supportive and inclusive programme which enables players to flourish in all aspects of life.

It has given more than 300 people who have learning disabilities or autism the chance to play for the clubs that they love, enjoying a specially accessible and adapted form of Rugby League.

Ian shared how the sport has played a key role over the past year in building both his friendship groups and his confidence.

"I love my team-mates, they are good to me," Ian explains. "I have made lots of friends, and some from other teams as well. I feel good when I put the Widnes shirt on. It makes me feel happy and proud."

Ian's support worker Sara has seen first-hand the impact that his involvement in rugby league has had on him over the last year.

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

LEARNING DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

She explained: “Ian’s journey began due to attending the Community Integrated Care and Widnes Vikings multi sports club on a Thursday. Seeing how much Ian appeared to love rugby it was suggested to myself about Ian coming along to the Learning Disability Super League training session and see if Ian would like to join the team if he enjoyed it.

“Ian picked up the game quite easily and he has now taken to watching rugby more. I get a lot of job satisfaction from seeing Ian achieve these great successes. I love to see the progress he has made and how much he has shone since joining the LDSL, not only on the pitch but off it as well.

“It is vital for Ian and other to have these opportunities, and to live their best life possible - because why shouldn’t they? They should be able to lead an active life and achieve things like everyone else, regardless of disabilities.

“I for one have had some choked up moments, especially when the Widnes and Leigh fans cheered them after they had finished playing their match at half-time. It was such an amazing moment to be a part of.”

Future plans for the partnership include a major education project to promote inclusive attitudes in young people, new community projects to support people living with dementia, and the development of new sports and social opportunities for people who have learning disabilities and autism.



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CHANGING LIVES: THE IMPACT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

To fully understand the value of Disability Rugby League and the significant positive impact it has on its participants, their families, and wider society the Rugby Football League conducted a survey of all Disability Rugby League participants. The results of the survey were supplemented with a series of interviews with players, parents and volunteers involved in the sport. Upon analysing their answers there were several key themes, these include.

- Increased Confidence and Self-Esteem
- Physical and Mental Well-Being
- Expanding Social Circles and Connecting Families
- Perception of Disability

INCREASED CONFIDENCE & SELF-ESTEEM

It is not uncommon for people with disabilities or impairments, both mental and physical, to suffer from low confidence and low self-esteem. The reasons for this are varied and often unique to an individual's circumstances and experiences. It may arise from the way the person feels they are perceived by others, or it may be due to their inability to participate in normal daily activities. **Research suggests that 49% of disabled people feel excluded from society whilst just 23% feel valued by society [2].**

Disability Rugby League provides a supportive environment where people can participate in sport regardless of their disability, it brings together those who have shared experiences and face similar challenges as part of their daily lives. The support, camaraderie and friendships developed through Disability Rugby League have a positive impact on the players self-confidence.

Of the players surveyed **82% reported improved self-confidence due to their participation in Rugby League whilst 91% said their life has improved.** Rugby League provides an opportunity to achieve goals, however big or small, with **90% of players stating they have achieved things they never previously thought possible before playing Disability Rugby League.**

"It has just cemented that only you can tell yourself what you can and can't do or achieve"
– **Chris Hall, Castleford Tigers PDRL**

"It has given me more confidence in myself and beliefs that I can play and do what others can do"
– **Daniel Smith, St Helens LDRL**

"Off the field it has helped my confidence, going to a new team and getting to know everybody, and feeling part of a group of people who care about each other"
– **Chris Hayned, Sheffield Eagles WhRL**

A large part of increasing self-confidence is the sense of belonging and being part of a community of like-minded individuals, this was commonly references in the interviews given by players.

"It's class, from supporting my local team and watching them play to pulling on a shirt and playing it myself it's connected me to the sport on a whole new level"
– **Tristan, Hull FC WhRL**

"Over the past 10 years Rugby League has become necessity, as it has developed from a hobby into a lifestyle"
– **Thomas Martin, Halifax Panthers WhRL**

"It's completely changed my life. I became disabled when I was 17, I spent the next 20 years thinking I couldn't really do anything. Now through PDRL instead of being at home every night I'm out every night either helping to coach or play, it's so important these opportunities are out there"
– **Heather Robinson, Salford Red Devils PDRL**

PHYSICAL & MENTAL WELL-BEING

Recent government data shows that 44% of disabled adults are physically inactive, doing less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week. This is significantly higher than non-disabled men (21% physically inactive) and women (25% physically inactive) [3]. The benefits of physical activity are significant and can reduce the likelihood of a person developing lifestyle diseases such as heart disease, some cancers, and strokes, whilst vastly improving the length and quality of a person's life. The same is apparent for people with mental health conditions, where low levels of physical activity are prevalent. Studies have shown people with mental health conditions can spend up to 12 hours a day on sedentary activities. This can, in part, lead to significant health disparities and premature mortality, potentially reducing their life span by 10 to 20 years.

88% of PDRL players and 92% of WhRL players surveyed said they would be less active if they were not able to play Rugby League. When asked many players commented on the impact playing Rugby League has had on their health.

"It's improved my health and well-being, it has significantly improved my social life, I have met people and made lifelong friends"

– **Julian Osborne, Torfaen Tigers WhRL**

"[Playing Rugby League has made me] Fitter, healthier, happier"

– **Joe Coyd, London Roosters WhRL**

"I can't even measure how much (PDRL) has changed my life. I was a fitness instructor and I'd fallen away from that, but this has got me back into fitness. The sport has made me fitter and stronger and in turn helped with my disability. It's also helped me deal with mental health issues"

– **Nick Kennedy, Castleford Tigers PDRL**

Whilst the physical benefits of sport and exercise are well documented, the positive impact it has on mental health and well-being can be overlooked. Studies have shown disabled adults are five times more likely to suffer from mental distress than a non-disabled adult [4]. **Disability Rugby League provides an escape from the challenges individuals face on a daily basis; many were keen to attribute their participation in Disability Rugby League as a reason for an improvement in their mental health.**

"Due to Covid my mental health went downhill, and I was really struggling, playing rugby league has helped massively with that, now I'm getting out and doing things I love again. The lockdowns were so hard, without being able to train it took its toll and my confidence was shot. Since playing again it's had a massive boost"

– **Phil Kenney, York City Knights LDRL**

"[Playing Rugby League] gives me a feeling of self-belief and has really helped me with my mental disorders. It keeps me active and stops me thinking about bad things." (PTSD)

– **Paul Horrobin, Leeds Rhinos WhRL**

"Wheelchair rugby league gives me a purpose. I can forget all the struggles of daily life and compete at the highest level with lifelong friends"

– **Martin Norris, Wigan Warriors WhRL**

CHANGING LIVES: THE IMPACT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

PHYSICAL & MENTAL WELL-BEING

Learning Disability Rugby League provides an essential impact on health and wellbeing. People who have learning disabilities face significant health inequalities. The Learning Disability Mortality Review (LEDAR) demonstrates that the difference in median age of death between people with a learning disability (aged 4 and over) and the general population is 23 years for men and 27 years for women. Access to high-quality and inclusive physical activity provision is limited in many communities. Learning Disability Rugby League gives people an aspirational, motivational and social platform to be active with others – helping to reduce these health inequalities.

EXPANDING SOCIAL CIRCLES AND CONNECTING FAMILIES

Navigating life with a disability can be challenging. One significant aspect of this is increased loneliness and isolation. Studies show disabled people are more likely to spending long periods of time alone (61% disabled vs. 28% non-disabled), less likely to cohabit with a partner (28% of disabled were single vs. 13% non-disabled), have limited contact with their families (21% disabled vs. only 5% non-disabled) and be unemployed (34% unemployment among disabled vs. 6% non-disabled) [5].

91% of Disability Rugby League players said the sport had provided new opportunities and experiences, whilst 97% have made new friends through their participation, indicating the positive impact Disability Rugby League has on reducing the levels of loneliness and isolation of its players.

“As a player I am more active than I would be if I didn’t play rugby, I have quite a few great friends that I have met through Rugby, socialising with friends that have the same interest”
– **Stephen Rigby, Wigan Warriors WhRL**

“Wheelchair rugby league has taken me all over the world. I’ve met friends that otherwise I would never of met and completely changed my life for the better”
– **Martin Norris, Wigan Warriors WhRL**

“I went to Castleford as it was the nearest club to where I lived at the time, I didn’t know anyone in Castleford and now I’ve met blokes that will be life-long friends. You knock lumps out of each other on the pitch and get stuck into each other but after the game you get together and have a laugh”
– **Nick Kennedy, Castleford Tigers PDRL**

“It’s made me more confident in my ability to play Rugby League and more confident in talking to new people”
– **Aaron Fairhead, Hull FC LDRL**

“Before rugby there wasn’t much in Joe’s life for him to do, it was hard to make friends and communicate with people, but since he’s started playing LDRL he’s made lots of friends. It is incredible how many people have taken to him”
– **Parent of Joe Connor, Widnes Vikings LDRL**

CHANGING LIVES: THE IMPACT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

EXPANDING SOCIAL CIRCLES AND CONNECTING FAMILIES

"I really enjoy playing against other teams and meeting new people, my confidence has grown a lot since I joined the rugby team, I've made a lot of new friends. I'm really proud that I'm part of the team. My family and friends show me a lot of support and I really appreciate that"

- Reny Molyneux, Warrington Wolves LDRL

It has also brought families closer together. **88% of players said they are supported by their family and friends**, some even play on the same team as their family members.

"I never thought I would be able to play again however discovering wheelchair rugby is amazing and I can now play along-side my son who has a lower limb disability, which is truly amazing"

- Vicky Brooks, Sheffield Eagles WhRL

"I am able to play along-side my son who is non-disabled and my wife"

- Alan Izzard, Dundee Dragons WhRL

"Being the father of an England wheelchair rugby league player, I first started to get involved when my son was introduced to the sport years ago. I have been able to play along-side my son both of us having disabilities which has meant a great deal to me"

- Stephen Rigby, Wigan Warriors WhRL

"I always supported my local rugby league team but never played rugby league. I'm very lucky the rugby league team we support as a family has a wheelchair rugby league team and as a result I never felt judged and always supported and welcomed. The players are both disabled and non-disabled. It's great fun because of this"

- Sue Phillips, Hull FC WhRL

Disability Rugby League is truly open and accessible to all. It is one of the few sports where players can be involved regardless of their gender, age, or disability. It is this aspect of the sport many find appealing and has allowed them to be involved in something they previously may have believed was not available to themselves.

"Wheelchair league is more inclusive as trans players can fit in and be a part of sport without judgement"

- Verity Smith, Leeds Rhinos WhRL

"Rugby League comprises a community of people which share the values of compassion, determination, diversification, and camaraderie"

- Thomas Martin, Halifax Panthers WhRL

"Team players are non-judgemental, and you don't have to be 'good at sport' to be included. There is no discrimination between sex, age, and disability"

- Sue Phillips, Hull FC WhRL

CHANGING LIVES: THE IMPACT OF DISABILITY RUGBY LEAGUE

EXPANDING SOCIAL CIRCLES AND CONNECTING FAMILIES

“Rugby League is my absolute life and has been for a very long time. I lost my way with it at one point and stopped going to games. I didn’t see myself represented. This (PDRL) has reinstated my love for the game, I want to be a part of it and drive Rugby League into communities that don’t normally play it”

– **Heather Robinson, Salford Red Devils PDRL**

Ability to play alongside all ages, gender, and abilities. WRL is Incredibly inclusive and has allowed me to return to the game I love that I haven’t been able to play since injury

– **Stacey, Sheffield Eagles WhRL**

Learning Disability Rugby League players have access to a wider set of opportunities to develop social connections and grow in independence through our partnership with Community Integrated Care. This includes their Inclusive Volunteering Programme with the Rugby League World Cup, which offered more than 4500 hours of aspirational activity in 2022 – building skills, independence and social connection. In evaluation (Substance, 2022), 96% of participants say that they have made new friends through this project, with 100% demonstrating improved confidence.

Warrington Wolves player, Matt Price, is an example of a Learning Disability Rugby League player who has gained significant opportunities through this additional personal development support:

‘Matt started a photography club with Ben [Community Integrated Care Inclusive Volunteering Specialist]. He gained a new passion and went out and bought himself a £600 camera with his own money. He has started a placement with the Warrington Wolves Foundation. To see him achieve success like that was great.’

PERCEPTION OF DISABILITY

Sport can play an important role in how people perceive disabilities. **88% of PDRL players say playing Rugby League has changed the way they think about their disability.** Those who become disabled later in life often face their own unique set of challenges. The person may have to adapt their lifestyle and activity, often losing aspects of the life they had before becoming disabled, this transition can be hard on individuals, their families, and their friends. Disability Rugby League provides opportunity to play sport regardless of disability, for previously active people this provides a path back into sport and the ability to socialise with those that have shared experiences.

“I was finding it quite tough as before I was very active, and I was suddenly not able to do anything. After waiting year after year with things not getting better, I was feeling down with all the things I couldn’t do anymore. Playing wheelchair rugby has taught me that with a few changes, I can get back to my old lifestyle and enjoy every session”

– **Chris Haynes, Sheffield Eagles WhRL**

“When you’re in a disability team you can joke about the one-armed guy dropping the ball, we’re all in the same boat its more comfortable and it’s a nice experience”

– **Nick Kennedy, Castleford Tigers PDRL**

PERCEPTION OF DISABILITY

“Still having a family and a team I thought I had lost everything after crushing my spine after playing elite women’s Rugby League for 26 years, I was ready to give in I had nothing left to focus on”

- Verity Smith, Leeds Rhinos WhRL

“Has made me interested in participating in a sport I would never have considered if not in a wheelchair”

- Sue Phillips, Hull FC WhRL

“Having a disability from birth means some things were more of a struggle growing up, but when you get onto the field those things take a backseat and you’re doing the same thing everyone else is doing. It provides that motivation and proof that when you’re up against something tough that you can achieve”

- Adam Morris, Warrington Wolves PDRL

Encouragingly, many of the players interviewed were keen not to dwell on their disability, focusing on their abilities instead, the inclusive nature of Rugby League allowing them to exceed where previously they may not.

“I have used rugby league to showcase ability and not disability”

- Alan Izzard, Dundee Dragons WhRL

“Whilst I’m playing Rugby League, I don’t feel disabled or different as once we are all in our wheelchairs I feel as able as many of the able-bodied players”

- WhRL Player

Not only has Disability Rugby League helped participants accept and embrace their disabilities, but it also plays an important role in increasing awareness and educating individuals on other people’s disabilities.

“Prior to playing I didn’t really know anyone with a disability. It has given me perspective on my disability and made me a stronger person”

- Martin Norris, Wigan Warriors WhRL

“I didn’t know many disabled people before I got involved and now, I know about multiple different disabilities and how that affects people going about their daily lives”

- Tristan, Hull FC WhRL

A key factor in Community Integrated Care’s investment in Rugby League is not only the impact that the sport can have on self-perception, but also the message of inclusion that it presents to the wider public. In many communities, people who access care and support face direct discrimination and the charity believes that, as a society, the talents and value of people who access care and support are overlooked.

Learning Disability Rugby League has been seen by millions of people nationally in media coverage and showcased at Rugby League’s biggest games. By aligning with a sport that is at the heart of its community, it is delivering powerful examples of inclusion that inspire the wider population.

PERCEPTION OF DISABILITY

The RFL and Community Integrated Care have successfully delivered several campaigns to publicly promote inclusion, which were co-produced with Learning Disability Rugby League players. This includes a joint effort to recognise World Down Syndrome Day, which was featured live on BBC Sport, and 'On The Same Team', our primary school education programme to help tackle bullying and discrimination amongst young people.



SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

OVERVIEW

This section of the report aims to evaluate the social return on investment (SROI) of Disability Rugby League and was produced in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University. The methodology is inspired by the Rugby League Dividend report, which was published in 2019, the methodology of which has been updated and adapted to reflect the intricacies of Disability Rugby League.

The update consists of additional social outcomes as identified in the most recent version of the Sport England model. The adaptation to Disability Rugby League leads to further social outcomes compared to the traditional community Rugby League. These include but are not limited to socialising more, making new friends for youth players and increased confidence for all players.

A summary of the methodology and results are presented here, the full study can be found in the appendix of this report.

The report focuses on three key stakeholder groups:

Players / Families - They invest in sport clothing and footwear, travel, and potentially equipment (e.g., wheelchairs); in return, they receive social outcomes related to health, wellbeing, individual development and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.

Volunteers - They invest their time; in return, they receive social outcomes related to wellbeing and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.

Society / Rugby Football League / Professional Rugby League Clubs / Community Integrated Care - They invest in programmes, equipment, and staff; in return, they receive social outcomes related to social capital, volunteering and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.

Financial inputs and social outcomes of these three key groups of stakeholders are calculated for each of the three variants of Disability Rugby League: Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL), Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) and Wheelchair Rugby League (WhRL), as well as for Disability Rugby League overall.

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

METHODOLOGY

Financial inputs were primarily identified from the data provided by Rugby Football League, namely:

- Number of clubs / teams involved in all three variants of the sport.
- Number of players, and their demographics (e.g., age, gender, location, socio-economic status).
- Number of volunteers and coaches.
- Published accounts from Club Foundations (to estimate clubs' investment in Disability Rugby League).
- Financial contribution from Rugby Football League to Disability Rugby League.

Financial inputs were associated to expected social outcomes to help inform the second stage of the study. In the Rugby League Dividend report, the identification of the social outcomes was based on a model previously applied to sport in England (original Sport England model). The authors of this model identified eleven social outcomes and the changes sport make in these outcomes, allowing them to estimate the value for each of them. More recently, these authors have developed an updated model including sixteen social outcomes (updated Sport England model).

Following a comprehensive review of relevant academic literature and non-academic documents specific to SROI (linked to disability), additional social outcomes were also identified. Of particular interest was the SROI analysis conducted on the Health Disability Sport Partnership project running from 2013 to 2016 in Wales. This analysis includes additional social outcomes compared to the Sport England model. However, the main reason for the inclusion of the additional outcomes is that the report does not distinguish between intermediate outcomes (causes) and social outcomes (consequences). After careful distinction between the two types of outcomes, we added socialising more / making new friends for youth players, increased confidence for all players, and wellbeing for families.

In addition, review of literature beyond sport led to the identification of social outcomes related to self-regulation of behaviours for youth players with learning / mental disabilities, as well as change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities for families, volunteers, society, and staff (Rugby Football League and clubs).

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

RESULTS

SROI is the ratio of the sum of all social outcomes expressed in monetary terms divided by the sum of all financial inputs invested by the different stakeholders to generate the social outcomes. In case a social outcome could not be evaluated in monetary terms, the financial input(s) supposed to specifically generate this outcome was (were) removed from the calculations.

The table below shows the financial inputs and financial outputs for each stakeholder group across each variant of Disability Rugby League.

	Stakeholders	Financial Inputs	Social Outcomes	SROI
PDRL	Players / Families	£30,502	£370,160	12.14
	Volunteers	£66,011	£122,852	1.86
	Society / RFL / Clubs / CIC	£59,872	£147,413	2.46
	Total	£156,384	£640,425	4.10
LDRL	Players / Families	£70,850	£877,806	12.39
	Volunteers	£59,870	£111,424	1.86
	Society / RFL / Clubs / CIC	£215,729	£216,648	1.004
	Total	£346,450	£1,205,878	3.48
WhRL	Players / Families	£100,966	£743,638	7.37
	Volunteers	£175,005	£325,701	1.86
	Society / RFL / Clubs / CIC	£177,481	£326,417	1.84
	Total	£453,452	£1,395,757	3.08

Overall Totals

Stakeholders	SROI
Overall Total for Disability RL Players / Families	9.84
Overall Total for Disability RL	3.39

SUMMARY

Players and their families are the primary beneficiaries of Disability Rugby League, with an average SROI of 9.84, i.e. for £1 invested by players and their families, their social return is £9.84. This is highest for LDRL (£12.39) due to the specific needs of its participants and lowest for WhRL (£7.37) due to costs associated with buying equipment.

The calculations identified that **the SROI of Disability Rugby League overall is 3.39, i.e. for £1 invested, the social return is £3.39.** Volunteers and society / Rugby Football League / clubs / Community Care Integrated also benefit from their investment, with their SROI being respectively 1.86 and 1.52. The study also distinguished between the three variants of Disability Rugby League, with PDRL, LDRL and WhRL benefiting from SROI of 4.10, 3.48 and 3.08, respectively.

Overall, these results demonstrate the ability of Disability Rugby League to generate social outcomes for players with disabilities, their families, volunteers, and society overall. Thus, Disability Rugby League plays a key social role in England. The future existence and potential extension of the social outcomes identified depend on the sustainability and increase in the financial inputs made by different stakeholders, current and new.

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT

SUMMARY

“The findings within this report are greatly significant to the future travel and growth of the Disability Variants of Rugby League. The figures attached within to social benefit are not only staggering, almost £13 to the pound on some metrics, but reflect just how much Rugby League holistically offers to the lives of disabled participants. The implications of these findings will contribute to the sustainability of the game in every way and prove, without doubt, the impact Rugby League has on one of the most underrepresented groups in the sporting landscape. Ultimately these findings will allow more people living with disabilities an opportunity to improve their lives through Rugby League participation”

- Chris Godfrey, RFL Social and Inclusion Manager



THE JOURNEY TO DATE AND LOOKING FORWARD

Building on the successes from the previous four-year funding cycle, the Rugby Football League aims to continue the momentum built in Disability Rugby League. Without direct financial support allocated in the previous funding cycle, The Rugby Football League was able to create and establish two new disability offers. With a new dedicated focus to inclusion and disability sport we anticipate an exciting future ahead in 2022-2027. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic a specific response in 2021 was taken to re-establish disability Rugby League in the sporting landscape and within its existing communities. Also to engage with a new audience and, within inclusion, continue to not only re-engage but grow the game and all disability offers.

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2022 also highlighted the need for physical activity to contribute towards physical health. But further, importantly identified the importance of the wider social impact on participants and all the benefits of Rugby League on mental health and well-being. This new focus and weight of importance will drive our work in developing and increasing the importance of playing Rugby League to its participants.

In 2021, in response to the impact of Covid-19, within the disability variants we aimed to re-engage with our existing participants by re-establishing our community competitions in all disability variants. We created playing offers that were customer centric and met the needs of our players, ensuring activity commenced in 2021 and ensured our participants could engage in meaningful activity. This focussed on all divisions in WhRL as well as the Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League whilst adding opportunities for PDRL players to engage in a representative programme.

Within WhRL we will promote and recommence the WhRL England Performance programme in light of the build-up to competing in the Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup 2021. Within PDRL we have launched, and commenced training, with the PDRL Community Lions Programme in the build-up to the RLWC 2021.

This was supported by the ongoing development of an internationally recognised classification system which will create further equitable participation across varying disabilities. Within the LDRL community we will further progress and support new teams from our community foundations. This will give new geographic areas the opportunity to aspire to representing their pro-clubs. These aspirational playing offers will inspire and engage with existing and new players to Rugby League.

A further focus of development in 2021 was to make the accessibility of CPD opportunities for coaches, referees, and support team, easier for all. This was facilitated by incorporating these resources through online learning channels and the continued development of Our League Learning Zone. The training resources will be more readily available to all, but also more resources will be developed in a view to empower people to become independent learners and ensure players have access to the best coaching and support.

THE JOURNEY TO DATE AND LOOKING FORWARD

In 2021 we aimed to evolve the way we report on disability Rugby League, with a new focus on reporting on the true value on social impact of Rugby League in the disability community. As such, we will look to establish and develop a reporting system focussing on areas which have been previously, anecdotally, taken for granted on how Rugby League impacts not only the participants lives but the lives of those around the participants. This will enable diversification and broaden the financial sustainability of the sport by highlighting the financial value Rugby League participation for our disabled participants. We will also look to provide added value to events, fixtures and festivals for our disabled participants maximising the opportunity to develop through participating in Disability Rugby League. This added value will take form in developing partnerships with those that offer CPD opportunities and support to disabled communities.

The Rugby Football League has agreed a multi-year extension to its relationship with Community Integrated Care, who as one of Britain's biggest charities bring significant added value to sport through strategy, CPD and investment in local and national programmes. In 2022, this saw all Learning Disability Rugby League coaches receive high-specialised training, including access to an autism experience simulator and an introduction to support techniques rooted in behavioural sciences. The scope and depth of our joint work to upskill coaches, volunteers and club employees will continue to expand in the years ahead.

In 2022, due to significant continued developments we continue to see Disability Rugby League as one of the major potential growth areas in the sport. The greater level of diversity in delivery has shown that there is a growing appetite within disability communities for Rugby League participation. Within the heartlands of Rugby League this can be seen by the rapid growth and rise in participation but away from our typical geographic areas of success our goal is to create meaningful and impactful opportunities for all to engage. This will include working with partners to support and encourage young people to access participation opportunities. Creating a sustainable model of player recruitment and retention in identified regions to ultimately populate the disability specific offers for years to come.

Finally, a specific focus, of everything we do in 2021 through to 2022, will be incorporating and maximising the impact of the RLWC 2021. We will continue to work in close partnership with the RLWC2021 team and signpost our participants appropriately to all the opportunities offered. We will also continue to maximise investment in our communities, where possible, to ensure the facilities our participants access are of the highest quality. Using this event as a beacon to work towards and an opportunity to create interest in the Disability Rugby League variants, create support from new partners and increase participation across the whole game, this will be key for our disability communities and adding extra value to Rugby League participation.

"We are delighted that we can deliver the first-ever PDRL World Cup alongside the Men's, Women's and Wheelchair competitions in what will certainly be the biggest, best and importantly most inclusive Rugby League World Cup in history. The action will be intense, and the final being staged at Warrington's Halliwell Jones Stadium before the France v Samoa game ensures not only a big crowd but also a fitting finale to this tournament."

– **Jon Dutton, RLWC2021 Chief Executive**

Whilst there has been a focus in 2021/2022 to re-engage, the outcomes will also contribute to the larger 2022-2027 plan where there are five specific focus areas within the RFL 22-27 strategy. We will take a holistic approach to Grow Our Game, Develop Our People, Support Our Communities, Sustainability & Economic Development and Governance. These five areas of focus will contribute to, and be consistent across, all outcomes and targets of Rugby League.

THE JOURNEY TO DATE AND LOOKING FORWARD

Grow Our Game

- Create further representative opportunities in both WhRL and PDRL
- Establish stronger regular competitions by increasing participation in the heartlands
- Develop participation outside the traditional areas of Rugby League
- Create new, Learning Disability & Physical Disability, grassroots levels of the competitions
- Regional playing offers available across all our Disability Rugby League offers
- Disability Rugby League offer to be widened to include a junior/schools playing offer
- Participants, volunteers, teams, and clubs will be fully Sports TG integrated
- Continue to raise the profile of all Disability Rugby League

Develop Our Communities

- Create bespoke, disability variant specific, CPD resources
- Empower our participants to facilitate delivery and activity
- Resources to be available remotely online increasing accessibility
- Facilitate greater representation of disabled volunteers in Rugby League
- Signpost individuals to community clubs and support opportunities
- Disability community to be represented and influence the direction of inclusion sport
- coaching positions promoted to disabled coaches in disability sport

Support Our Communities

- Increase disability awareness across the Rugby League population
- Rugby League, at all levels, and environments more accessible for the disability community
- All Rugby League venues are accessible
- Develop pathways for disabled people volunteer within the Rugby League

Sustainable Economic Development

- Evolve the way in which we report on Rugby League participation
- Places actual value on participation for long term investment
- Save money in care costs, medical support, living costs, income support
- Secure corporate and commercial investment

Governance

- Implement our current competition management structures as the competitions develop
- Management groups set up to run as member leagues
- Disability representation on these groups
- PDRL and Wheelchair we will continue to influence and develop governance internationally
- Annually review standards, domestically
- Annually review laws, rules, and membership criteria

The key vision across Disability Rugby League is to support our communities by being one of the most inclusive sports in the world offering all our audience the opportunity to engage in our game. To achieve this the 2022-2027 plan highlights and underpins key milestones and interventions for the next 5 years to contribute to the wider picture. The disability Rugby League landscape is a cornerstone in this vision and achieving the targets outlined in this document will support that vision. However, to continue the progress post 2027 we feel it is important to have overriding themes that if will provide a direction of travel, supporting the achievement of our strategic targets.

THE JOURNEY TO DATE AND LOOKING FORWARD

Across all three variants of disability Rugby League, we will aim to ensure we have management and advisory groups to help govern the sport appropriately. Ensuring player, coach and club voices are heard on how we steer the game and have a fair, accessible equitable sport for all. We will aim to also have financial sustainability across the disability variants. By combining research around monetary value on participation, as well as developing new commercial partners, as the profile of the sport increases, relieving the need to rely on Sport England investment across our disability sport.

Wider targets on growing our game will differ, in method, across the variants, whilst the outcomes will continue to be consistent. PDRL will look to build towards Paralympic recognition and be a true international disability sport, to achieve this we will support other nations engaging in the sport and develop the game to have recognised international competition. We will support this further, and develop our people, each year by reviewing our classification criteria keeping in line with IPC standards and guidance from experts within disability sport.

Within LDRL we will look to grow our game through developing regionalised community playing offers, underpinned, and supported by, our community foundations. This will include junior participation opportunities for young people, with learning disability community, in the community game. We will also look to incorporate a school playing offer engaging with young people in an education setting and creating a school's participation framework. We will continue to develop our people by furthering the significant volunteering pathway created with Community Integrated Care, giving all our participants the opportunity to develop and engage in working environments and having a greater impact on their lives.

In June 2022 the RFL and Community Integrated Care announced a long-term extension to the sport's pioneering Social Care Partnership - as Community Integrated Care celebrated its fifth anniversary of working in Rugby League. Community Integrated Care is one of Britain's biggest and most successful social care charities, supporting more than 3,000 people who have learning disabilities, autism, mental health concerns, dementia and complex care needs to lead the best life possible. Since 2016, the charity has pioneered many innovative programmes with the sport of Rugby League at a local and national level that promote the health, happiness and inclusion of people who access support, and help impact paid and family carers. This work was taken to new levels in 2018, when the Rugby Football League and Super League allied with the charity to become the first governing body and top flight league with a dedicated Social Care Partner. With a shared vision of using the power of Rugby League to change lives, this collaboration has formed many innovative programmes, and helped bring significant investment, resources and skills to support the sport's disability inclusion efforts. Changing the lives of tens of thousands of people, creating unprecedented opportunities across communities, and helping to promote a more inclusive society, this is a truly groundbreaking. This success has most prominently included the creation of the world-first Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League and the Rugby League World Cup 2021 Inclusive Volunteering programmes. The Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League has given more than 300 people who have learning disabilities or autism the chance to play for the clubs that they love, enjoying a specially accessible and adapted form of Rugby League. This programme was named as the 'Best Model of Integrated Care' by Skills for Care, the national body for training and innovation in social care. The Inclusive Volunteering Programme has supported more than 350 people to access live-changing mentoring, support and opportunities, through projects inspired by Rugby League and the RLWC2021 and opportunities to volunteer at major games.

THE JOURNEY TO DATE AND LOOKING FORWARD

The project has already provided more than 4,500 hours of support to participants, enabling people to fulfil their greatest dreams and grow in independence. The programme was named as the “Best Community Scheme” at the 2021 Sports Business Awards and won the Sporting Chance honour at the National Learning Disability and Autism Awards. Other innovations created by the partnership have included the creation of www.What-To-Do.co.uk, a website that offers free live accessible activities every day for people who access care and support, and a major campaign to help develop the activity skills of care workers during lockdown. At a local level, Community Integrated Care works directly with many of Rugby League’s charitable foundations and clubs. With programmes including accessible sports classes for people with profound learning disabilities, education and vocational programmes, social clubs, campaigns to promote inclusion, dementia cafes, and carer wellbeing programmes, this represents a uniquely diverse commitment to social impact through sport. Future plans include a major education project to promote inclusive attitudes in young people, new community projects to support people living with dementia, and the development of new sports and social opportunities for people who have learning disabilities and autism.

“The RFL, and our club, foundation and Super League partners, have been incredible partners who deserve enormous credit for their vision and belief. Together, we have delivered an impact that is entirely unique in world sport. We are very excited by the difference that we will make together in the years ahead.”

- John Hughes, Director of Partnerships and Communities at Community Integrated Care

“There could be no better example of the positive impact of sport in general, and Rugby League in particular – and this partnership extension means an impact on hundreds more lives, in parts of the country where times are especially tough.”

- Ralph Rimmer CEO of the Rugby Football League

Finally, with a view of WhRL our target to grow our game will be to be the biggest disability sport in the UK. We will look to have the most players and the biggest pool of volunteers across all disability sport. As such we will look to develop our people by offering CPD and attracting the biggest base of volunteers and support across all disability sport.

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NEWCASTLE UNITED





Social Return on Investment of Inclusion Rugby League

For



Rugby Football League

April 2022

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About Manchester Metropolitan University

Manchester Metropolitan is home to circa 37,000 students and 3,000 academic staff. We are a modern University, in a great global city, here to make an impact on Manchester, our nation and beyond, with a driving ambition to discover and disseminate knowledge.

We work closely with our city, with business, the community and our academic peers - locally, nationally and internationally - to be inventive and creative, generate great opportunities, and enable our students, colleagues, partners and everyone whose lives we touch to make an impact. We are an active, energetic and engaged University, driven by putting our thinking and ideas, our research and knowledge to work in the real world.

Our strategic themes are the backdrop for our plans and strategies and set the tone for our approach:

Place: To create a University with all the drive and spirit of a great global city.

Ambition: We have set ambitious targets across all areas of business to ensure that we can make an impact.

Partnership: We aim to engage with a variety of organisations at a regional, national and international location to achieve mutually beneficial results.

Community: Our strategy and work is designed to impact on multiple communities, not just our own.

Sustainability: We recognise the need for a sustainable environment, working hard now and in the future to help craft a better world.

Research excellence

We deliver outstanding research that addresses the biggest challenges facing contemporary society. Even more than that, we are committed to real-world research, which has a lasting and sustainable impact on society. The University is home to 13 leading [centres of research and knowledge exchange](#) across a variety of key disciplines and our drive for excellence and impact, powers and underpins all that we do. The driving force behind the next phase of our ambitious research plans, the Centres focus on areas of excellence and quality, as independently confirmed by the results of Research Excellence Framework 2014. Our world-leading scholarly outputs directly shape and lead policy and business change across the Manchester city region, nationally and globally.



Evidence of Expertise and Experience

The research team is extremely well placed to undertake this work as members have already made a major contribution to the fields of sport economics, sport management, and sport policy, with specific reference to the social impact and social return on investment (SROI) of sport.



Research Lead

Dr Nicolas Scelles is Senior Lecturer in the Business and Law Faculty at Manchester Metropolitan University and member of the Faculty's Sports Policy Unit. He is a sports economist having published over 50 articles in leading academic journals such as *Applied Economics*, *Economies*, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *Journal of Sports Economics*, *Soccer & Society*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Sport Management Review*, *Sustainability* and *Team Performance Management*. He is member of the Boards of the International Society for Sports Sciences in the Arab World (I3SAW) and the Scientific Council of the French Observatory of the Sports Economy, and the Advisory Panel for the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) SROI. He is leading the research team working on the updates of the UEFA Grow Index and led the research team having produced the report on the economic and social impact of Rugby League in England. He is on the editorial board of 7 journals and has co-edited 2 Special Issues, 1 about the 'Policy and Politics of Women's Sport and Women in Sport' in *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* and 1 about 'Sport Policy and Finance' in *Sustainability*.



Dr Yuhei Inoue is Reader in the Business and Law Faculty at Manchester Metropolitan University and member of the Faculty's Sports Policy Unit. He is an expert in the social impact assessment of sport and has conducted research to understand how sports events and organisations across the world may enhance personal and social well-being. He has completed the SROI Practitioner Training delivered by Social Value UK and is a member of Social Value International. To date, he has published over 45 articles in leading academic journals in sport management and related disciplines. He is on the editorial board of leading sport management journals and co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Sport Management*, entitled "Transformative Sport Service Research: Linking Sport Services with Well-being."



Dr Seth Perkin is Lecturer in the Business and Law Faculty at Manchester Metropolitan University and member of the Faculty's Sports Policy Unit. His PhD thesis defended in 2020 was entitled "Tensions and transformations: An ethnographic account of disability sport in the United Arab Emirates".



Dr Maurizio Valenti is Senior Lecturer in the Business and Law Faculty at Manchester Metropolitan University and member of the Faculty's Sports Policy Unit. He serves as Programme Leader of BSc (Hons) Sport Business Management and BSc (Hons) Sports Marketing Management and teaches Sport Economics, Sport Finance, Sport Business Analytics and Foundations of Research in Sport. His principal research interests reside around sports economics and sports management. To date, he has published in leading academic journals such as *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *Sport Management Review* and *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*. The research he conducts covers various aspects of women's football, including competitive balance, uncertainty of outcome and countries' international sporting success. He has received support through the UEFA Research Grant Programme to conduct research on the organisation and management of European women's football clubs. He has published on the approaches to maximise attendance at UEFA Women's Champions League matches, and on the policies relating to the sporting success of the 55 UEFA member associations. He is a member of the research team working on the UEFA Grow Index and acts as ad-hoc reviewer for various academic journals.



Executive Summary

This research aims to evaluate the social return on investment (SROI) of Inclusion Rugby League (Inclusion RL). The methodology is inspired by the [Rugby League Dividend report](#), while being updated and adapted to reflect the peculiarities of Inclusion RL. The update consists of additional social outcomes as identified in the most recent version of the Sport England model. The adaptation to Inclusion RL leads to further social outcomes compared to RL. These include but are not limited to socialising more / making new friends for youth players and increased confidence for all players.

Three key groups of stakeholders are identified:

- Players / families: they invest in sport clothing and footwear, travel, and potentially equipment (e.g., wheelchairs); in return, they receive social outcomes related to health, wellbeing, individual development and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.
- Volunteers: they invest their time; in return, they receive social outcomes related to wellbeing and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.
- Society / RFL / clubs / CIC: they invest in programmes, equipment and staff; in return, they receive social outcomes related to social capital, volunteering and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.

Financial inputs and social outcomes of these three key groups of stakeholders are calculated for each of the three variants of Inclusion RL: Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL), Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) and Wheelchair Rugby League (WcRL), as well as for Inclusion RL overall. This allows the research team to calculate the SROI of PDRL, LDRL, WcRL separately and Inclusion RL overall. Besides, for each of the four SROI calculated, a distinction is made between the three key groups of stakeholders.

The calculations identify that the SROI of Inclusion RL is 3.39, i.e., for £1 invested, the social return is £3.39. Players and their families are the primary beneficiaries, with a SROI of 9.84, i.e., for £1 invested by players and their families, their social return is £9.84. Volunteers and society / RFL / clubs / Community Care Integrated also benefit from their investment, with their SROI being respectively 1.86 and 1.52. This means that for £1 invested, both groups of stakeholders receive a social return of more than £1.

The study also distinguishes between the three variants of Inclusion RL, with PDRL, LDRL and WcRL benefiting from SROI of 4.10, 3.48 and 3.08, respectively. It must be noted that WcRL requires specific wheelchairs, costing from £500 to £10,000 per person for an estimated lifespan of five years. This additional investment explains why the SROI for WcRL is comparably lower than PDRL and LDRL. Yet, the overall SROI of WcRL is more than 3, and notably more than 7 for players and their families, which ultimately provides a rationale for the financial investment in WcRL. In addition, the importance of providing individuals in need of a wheelchair with the opportunity to play a variant of Inclusion RL, together with the associated social outcomes, fully justifies the financial investment required.

Overall, these results demonstrate the ability of Inclusion RL to generate social outcomes for players with disabilities, their families, volunteers, and society overall. Thus, Inclusion RL plays a key social role in England. The future existence and potential extension of the social outcomes identified depend on the sustainability and increase in the financial inputs made by different stakeholders, current and new.



Social Return on Investment of Inclusion Rugby League

Rugby Football League (RFL) is currently working on a project around the social impact of Inclusion Rugby League (RL). Inclusion RL consists of Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL), Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) and Wheelchair Rugby League (WcRL). The three variants of the sport are delivered by the professional club foundations and a third-party charity (Community Integrated Care). Inclusion RL opens the sport up to those unable to play the traditional game, further helping with the social care costs of some of its participants.

RFL and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) agreed to produce a study that evidences the social return on investment (SROI) associated with Inclusion RL, similar to the analysis conducted in the Rugby League Dividend report in 2019¹. The next section presents the methodology applied, followed by the outcomes. The last section concludes with a short summary of the key findings.

Methodology

The methodology relies on the following five stages, developed further in the rest of the section:

1. Mapping stakeholders, identifying their financial inputs (how much they invested) and the rationale for investing (for what social outcomes).
2. Identifying how to calculate the values of the social outcomes.
3. Reviewing the data provided, their fit with the needs for the calculations and any additional data required.
4. Calculating the values of the social outcomes and SROI.
5. Writing a note about the methodology and results (the present note).

1. Stakeholders, financial inputs and social outcomes

The research team produced an initial list of stakeholders, including players, families, friends, clubs, coaches, managers, officials, staff, volunteers, society / communities, RFL, Community Integrated Care (CIC), carers, support workers, employers, fundraisers, partners, UK government, local authorities, sports agencies (e.g., Sport England, UK Sport). Among these stakeholders, the focus was drawn on those for which information for financial inputs is available or can be extrapolated from the data for sport in England. Based on this, the final list of stakeholders consisted of players, their families, volunteers, society / communities, RFL, clubs and CIC. Financial inputs were primarily identified from the data provided by RFL, namely:

- Number of clubs / teams involved in all three variants of the sport.
- Number of players, and their demographics (e.g., age, gender, location, socio-economic status).
- Number of volunteers and coaches.
- Published accounts from Club Foundations (to estimate clubs' investment in Inclusion RL).
- Financial contribution from RFL to Inclusion RL.

Financial inputs were associated to expected social outcomes to help inform the second stage of the study. In the Rugby League Dividend report, the identification of the social outcomes was based on a model previously applied to sport in England (original Sport England model)². The authors of this model identified 11 social outcomes and the changes sport make in these outcomes, allowing them to estimate the value for each of them. More recently, these authors have developed an updated model including 16 social outcomes (updated Sport England model)³. The 16 social outcomes are as follows:

¹ Scelles, N., Grix, J., Jones, M., & Hostler, T. (2019). *The Rugby League dividend: Economic and social impact of Rugby League*. Research report by MMU for RFL.

http://secure.rugby-league.com/ign_docs/Economic%20and%20Social%20Impact%20Report%20v2%20OUTPUT.pdf

² Davies, L., Taylor, P., Ramchandani, G., & Christy, E. (2016). *Social return on investment in sport: A participation wide model for England: Summary report*. Research by Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) for the Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF), Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Sport England.

<http://www4.shu.ac.uk/assets/pdf/research/sirc/Final-SIRC-SROIEngland-Web-report.pdf>

³ Davies, L., Christy, E., Ramchandani, G., & Taylor, P. (2020). *Measuring the economic and social impact of sport in England: Report 1: Social return on investment of sport and physical activity in England*. Research by Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC) for Sport England. <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-09/Social%20return%20on%20investment.pdf?VersionId=5BgVln09jwpTesBJ4BXhVfRhV4TYgm9E>



- 10 health outcomes for adult players: reduced risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke; reduced risk of breast cancer (applied to females only); reduced risk of colon cancer; reduced risk of Type 2 diabetes; reduced risk of dementia; reduced risk of depression; reduced risk of hip fracture (participants 65+); reduced risk of back pain; improved good health (reduced GP visits and reduced use of psychotherapy services); increased risk of getting a sports-related injury.
- 1 wellbeing outcome: improved life satisfaction for adults (with a distinction between players and volunteers).
- 2 individual development outcomes for players: improved education performance for people aged 11-18 years and enhanced human capital for graduates.
- 3 social and community development outcomes: reduction in crime for males aged 10-24 years; improved social capital to community (social networks, trust and reciprocity); non-market value for sports organisations utilising volunteers. The first two outcomes benefit society, while the third and last outcome benefits clubs.

These social outcomes were identified as relevant to the aim of the present study, although the individual and social and community development outcomes merit further examination depending on the variants of Inclusion RL considered.

Following a comprehensive review of relevant academic literature and non-academic documents specific to SROI (in particular linked to disability), additional social outcomes were also identified. Of particular interest was the SROI analysis conducted on the Health Disability Sport Partnership project running from 2013 to 2016 in Wales⁴. This analysis includes additional social outcomes compared to the Sport England model. However, the main reason for the inclusion of the additional outcomes is that the report does not distinguish between intermediate outcomes (causes) and social outcomes (consequences)⁵. After careful distinction between the two types of outcomes, we added socialising more / making new friends for youth players, increased confidence for all players, and wellbeing for families.

In addition, review of literature beyond sport⁶ led to the identification of social outcomes related to self-regulation of behaviours for youth players with learning / mental disabilities⁷, as well as change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities for families, volunteers, society and staff (RFL and clubs)⁸.

2. How to calculate the values of the social outcomes?

As noted above, the social outcomes identified in the Rugby League Dividend report and Sport England model are relevant to the present study. An important question to address was whether the calculations of their values required further adaptation due to their specific application to disability sport. The review of academic literature and non-academic documents specific to SROI and disability revealed that no specific adaptations were needed for the calculations within the context of disability sport and, more generally, disability. Therefore, the research team adopted the same values per person for each social outcome as previously identified in the Rugby League Dividend report and Sport England model. For the additional social outcomes, the values per person to be

⁴ Chin, C. (2016). *Health Disability Sport Partnership: A social return on investment analysis*. NHS Wales, Betsi Cadwaladr, University Health Board and Disability Sport Wales. <https://vdocument.in/health-disability-sport-partnership-the-health-disability-sport-partnership-is-a.html>

⁵ Taylor, P., Davies, L., Wells, P., Gilbertson, J., & Tayleur, W. (2015). *A review of the social impacts of culture and sport*. Research by Sheffield Hallam University and Business of Culture for the Culture and Sport Evidence (CASE) programme, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416279/A_review_of_the_Social_Impacts_of_Culture_and_Sport.pdf

⁶ Hutchinson, C., Berndt, A., Cleland, J., Gilbert-Hunt, S., George, S., & Ratcliffe, J. (2020). Using social return on investment analysis to calculate the social impact of modified vehicles for people with disability. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 67(3), 250-259. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12648>

Tirado-Valencia, P., Ayuso, S., & Fernández-Rodríguez, V (2021). Accounting for emotional value: A review in disability organizations. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12,741897. <https://doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.741897>

⁷ Leck, C. (2012). *Social return on investment (SROI) evaluation report of the Houghton project*. Care Farming West Midlands. <https://socialvalueuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Houghton%20Project%20SROI%20assured.pdf>

⁸ Ruiz-Lozano, M., Tirado-Valencia, P., Sianes, A., Ariza-Montes, A., Fernández-Rodríguez, V., & López-Martín, M. C. (2020). SROI methodology for public administration decisions about financing with social criteria: A case study. *Sustainability*, 12(3), 1070. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12031070>



included in the calculations of the present study were informed by the values reported in the original document sources.

After identification of the different values per person to be used in the calculations, a question was whether inflation should be accounted for. The reason is that most values were used in the past, with inflation supposed to increase costs and, as such, values over time. Nevertheless, we needed to consider whether an assumption should be made that improvements in research, knowledge, technologies and processes over time may reduce costs and counterbalance inflation. The updated Sport England model does not support such assumption, as values have increased over time, in line with inflation. As such, it was decided to account for inflation in the present study.

In order to estimate the number of persons benefitting from a social outcome, it was decided to apply the percentage of persons benefitting in previous work to the sample in the present study and to round it to the nearest whole number. In order to maintain a conservative approach, values were excluded from the analysis when only an extremely low percentage of individuals benefitted from a specific social outcome.

3. Data

Once the members of the research team identified how to calculate all social outcomes, they reviewed the data initially provided by RFL to assess which ones fitted with the needs for the calculations. This allowed the research team to identify additional data required and liaised with RFL to provide some of them, while others required research from relevant literature and sources by the research team. The data provided by RFL cover most financial inputs from stakeholders and part of the non-monetary numbers needed to calculate the social outcomes (e.g., the number of participants), while the data collected by the research team cover additional data needed to extrapolate some financial inputs from stakeholders, other non-monetary numbers (e.g., the percentage of participants supposed to benefit from a specific social outcome) and the values per person of the different social outcomes expressed in monetary terms. This is because they were necessary to calculate the total social outcomes and SROI. Overall, the process of data provision by RFL and data collection by the research team resembled the one followed in the Rugby League Dividend report.

Table 1 presents data on the number and percentage of clubs and people involved in the three variants of Inclusion RL – Physical Disability RL (PDRL), Learning Disability RL (LDRL) and Wheelchair RL (WcRL) – as well as overall in 2021, the year analysed.

Table 1 Data on number and percentage of clubs and people involved in Inclusion RL in 2021

	PDRL	LDRL	WcRL	Overall
Clubs	5	13	19	29*
Players	127	295	226	648
% female players	2.2%	9.0%	17.0%	10.5%
% male players	97.8%	91.0%	83.0%	89.5%
% under 16 players	7.4%	23.5%	2.2%	12.9%
% 16+ players	92.6%	76.5%	97.8%	87.1%
Coaches	16	13	16	45
Volunteers	27	26	98	151

* The total does not correspond to the sum of the number of clubs in the three variants due to some clubs operating in at least two of the variants.

4. Calculations

SROI is the ratio of the sum of all social outcomes expressed in monetary terms divided by the sum of all financial inputs invested by the different stakeholders to generate the social outcomes. In case a social outcome could not be evaluated in monetary terms, the financial input(s) supposed to specifically generate this outcome was(were) removed from the calculations. For example, the social outcomes specific to the events and training organised and funded by RFL could not be assessed with enough precision based on the data provided. This means that financial inputs specific to such events and training were excluded from the calculations. Besides, we made sure that we did not double count financial inputs. For example, PDRL/LDRL development funds are



part of the RFL budget that goes to clubs. Thus, they should not be included for both RFL and clubs, otherwise this would result in the same amount being counted twice. Similarly, Community Integrated Care provides funding to RFL which then uses it, so this funding should not be counted twice.

In the present study, we conducted the calculations distinguishing between four SROI:

1. SROI of Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL).
2. SROI of Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL).
3. SROI of Wheelchair Rugby League (WcRL).
4. SROI of Inclusion RL overall (based on the first three).

Results

This section presents the results per variant of Inclusion RL and Inclusion RL overall. Tables are presented and grouped per stakeholder. Where relevant, some stakeholders are grouped together. For example, players and their families are grouped together, as some families may provide the financial inputs required for players, e.g., for sport clothing and footwear, travel, and potentially also equipment. Besides, RFL’s and clubs’ financial inputs come to some extent from charitable activities, which can be associated to inputs from society and Community Integrated Care (CIC). As such, society, RFL, clubs and CIC are grouped together. Overall, three key groups of stakeholders are identified:

- Players / families: they invest in sport clothing and footwear, travel, and potentially also equipment (e.g., wheelchairs); in return, they receive social outcomes related to health, wellbeing, individual development and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.
- Volunteers: they invest their time; in return, they receive social outcomes related to wellbeing and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.
- Society / RFL / clubs / CIC: they invest in programmes, equipment and staff; in return, they receive social outcomes related to social capital, volunteering and change in attitude toward disability / awareness of rights and potential of people with disabilities.

1. SROI of Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL)

Table 2 outlines the stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of PDRL. Overall, the SROI of PDRL is 4.10, i.e., for £1 invested, the social return is £4.10. SROI is greater for players and families: for £1 invested, players and their families receive a social return of £12.14.

Table 2 Stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of PDRL

Stakeholders	Financial inputs	Social outcomes	SROI
Players / families	£30,502	£370,160	12.14
Volunteers	£66,011	£122,852	1.86
Society / RFL / clubs / CIC	£59,872	£147,413	2.46
Total	£156,384	£640,425	4.10

2. SROI of Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL)

Table 3 outlines the stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of LDRL. Overall, the SROI of LDRL is 3.48, i.e., for £1 invested, the social return is £3.48. SROI is greater for players and families: for £1 invested, they receive a social return of £12.39. It is worth noting that the social outcomes for LDRL require a high investment from society / RFL / clubs / CIC, probably due to the peculiarities of learning / mental disabilities. Despite this high investment, the SROI for these specific stakeholders reaches more than 1, i.e., for £1 invested, they receive a social return of more than £1.



Table 3 Stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of LDRL

Stakeholders	Financial inputs	Social outcomes	SROI
Players / families	£70,850	£877,806	12.39
Volunteers	£59,870	£111,424	1.86
Society / RFL / clubs / CIC	£215,729	£216,648	1.004
Total	£346,450	£1,205,878	3.48

3. SROI of Wheelchair Rugby League (WcRL)

Table 4 outlines the stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of WcRL. Overall, the SROI of WcRL is 3.08, i.e., for £1 invested, the social return is £3.08. SROI is greater for players and families: for £1 invested, they receive a social return of £7.37. It must be noted that WcRL requires specific wheelchairs, costing from £500 to £10,000 per person for an estimated lifespan of five years, i.e., from £100 to £2,000 per year. This additional investment explains why the SROI for WcRL is comparably lower than PDRL and LDRL. Yet, the overall SROI of WcRL is more than 3, and notably more than 7 for players and their families, which ultimately provides a rationale for the financial investment in WcRL. In addition, the importance of providing individuals in need of a wheelchair with the opportunity to play a variant of Inclusion RL, together with the associated social outcomes, fully justifies the financial investment required.

Table 4 Stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of WcRL

Stakeholders	Financial inputs	Social outcomes	SROI
Players / families	£100,966	£743,638	7.37
Volunteers	£175,005	£325,701	1.86
Society / RFL / clubs / CIC	£177,481	£326,417	1.84
Total	£453,452	£1,395,757	3.08

4. SROI of Inclusion Rugby League (Inclusion RL) overall

Table 5 outlines the stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of Inclusion RL overall. The SROI of Inclusion RL is 3.39, i.e., for £1 invested, the social return is £3.39. SROI is greater for players and families: for £1 invested, they receive a social return of £9.84. Volunteers and society / RFL / clubs / Community Care Integrated also benefit from their investment, with their SROI being respectively 1.86 and 1.52. This means that for £1 invested, both groups of stakeholders receive a social return of more than £1.

Table 5 Stakeholders, financial inputs, social outcomes and SROI of Inclusion RL overall

Stakeholders	Financial inputs	Social outcomes	SROI
Players / families	£202,318	£1,991,604	9.84
Volunteers	£300,886	£559,978	1.86
Society / RFL / clubs / CIC	£453,082	£690,477	1.52
Total	£956,286	£3,242,059	3.39

The research team conducted a sensitivity analysis to ensure the consistency of the SROI results. This allowed assessment of Inclusion RL SROI under different sets of assumptions (e.g., alternative values in the number of persons benefitting from social outcomes; alternative values set per person). The sensitivity analysis yielded values ranging from 3.31 to 3.58. Therefore, the SROI of Inclusion RL (3.39, included in Table 5) is confirmed and deemed sufficiently conservative, which is a key feature of any reliable SROI study.



Conclusion

This research aimed to evaluate the social return on investment (SROI) of Inclusion Rugby League (RL). The methodology of the present study followed the one employed in the Rugby League Dividend report, while being updated and adapted to the peculiarities of Inclusion RL. Three key groups of stakeholders were identified: players and their families, volunteers, and society / RFL / clubs / Community Care Integrated. Financial inputs and social outcomes of these three key groups of stakeholders were calculated for each of the three variants of Inclusion RL: Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL), Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL) and Wheelchair Rugby League (WcRL), as well as for Inclusion RL overall. This allowed the research team to calculate the SROI of PDRL, LDRL, WcRL and Inclusion RL overall. Besides, for each of the four SROI calculated, a distinction was made between the three key groups of stakeholders.

The calculations identified that the SROI of Inclusion RL is 3.39, i.e., for £1 invested, the social return is £3.39. Players and their families are the primary beneficiaries, with a SROI of 9.84, i.e., for £1 invested by players and their families, their social return is £9.84. Volunteers and society / RFL / clubs / Community Care Integrated also benefit from their investment, with their SROI being respectively 1.86 and 1.52. The study also distinguished between the three variants of Inclusion RL, with PDRL, LDRL and WcRL benefiting from SROI of 4.10, 3.48 and 3.08, respectively. Overall, these results demonstrate the ability of Inclusion RL to generate social outcomes for players with disabilities, their families, volunteers, and society overall. Thus, Inclusion RL plays a key social role in England. The future existence and potential extension of the social outcomes identified depend on the sustainability and increase in the financial inputs made by different stakeholders, current and new.