Case Study

Growing the game through Junior Golf

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NEW ZEALAND golf

Introduction

Golf continues to be ranked as one of the highest participant sport and recreation activities in New Zealand. Unfortunately membership at golf clubs has suffered a steady decline nationally in recent years. Junior golf membership has not been immune to this trend and in some instances been worse off.

As at 2014 there were 5836 registered junior golfers in New Zealand, down from 9841 in 2007, a 40.7% decline in eight years.

It was with this in mind that we look into junior golf membership and some of the direct and indirect benefits it provides a club. There is some evidence to suggest that a quality junior programme is linked with and can stimulate overall membership growth.

Discussion

A junior programme can be a great opportunity to gain awareness and interest in golf in your area particularly in more remote places where there is little or no population growth. Programmes can take a number of different forms for example

- Volunteer led programme.
- PGA professional junior academies.
- SNAG and First Tee club programmes.

They all act as different introduction points for young people to be engaged in the game of golf.

One successful example involves the remote Howlong Country Golf Club in Australia who in 2011 embraced the new MyGolf initiative developed by Golf Australia. The programme started out with five community coaches and fifteen junior participants. A number of changes were made to the way the club junior programme operated in an effort to reduce barriers to participation and grow the number engaged.

1. Embracing a 'fun learning' ethos to coaching.
2. Offering inclusive options for all.
3. Relaxing age restrictions.
4. Providing a family social event after all coaching sessions.
5. A 'Juniors On Course' section was added to the programme in 2013 to provide a pathway to playing and further development.

By the end of 2013 the club was catering for over 120 junior members with the Howlong model recognised with multiple awards and now being rolled out in other remote communities. The club has also forged strong partnerships with schools, charities and government bodies in an effort to work towards achieving common goals.

Another example comes from a research paper by NZPGA trainee Kristopher Gunderson which investigated the value and role of junior programme in smaller clubs with a view to having the club junior programme playing a bigger role within remote communities. Survey, personal interview, membership data analysis and specific case studies of people introduced to golf directly and indirectly through junior programmes were used to gather information.

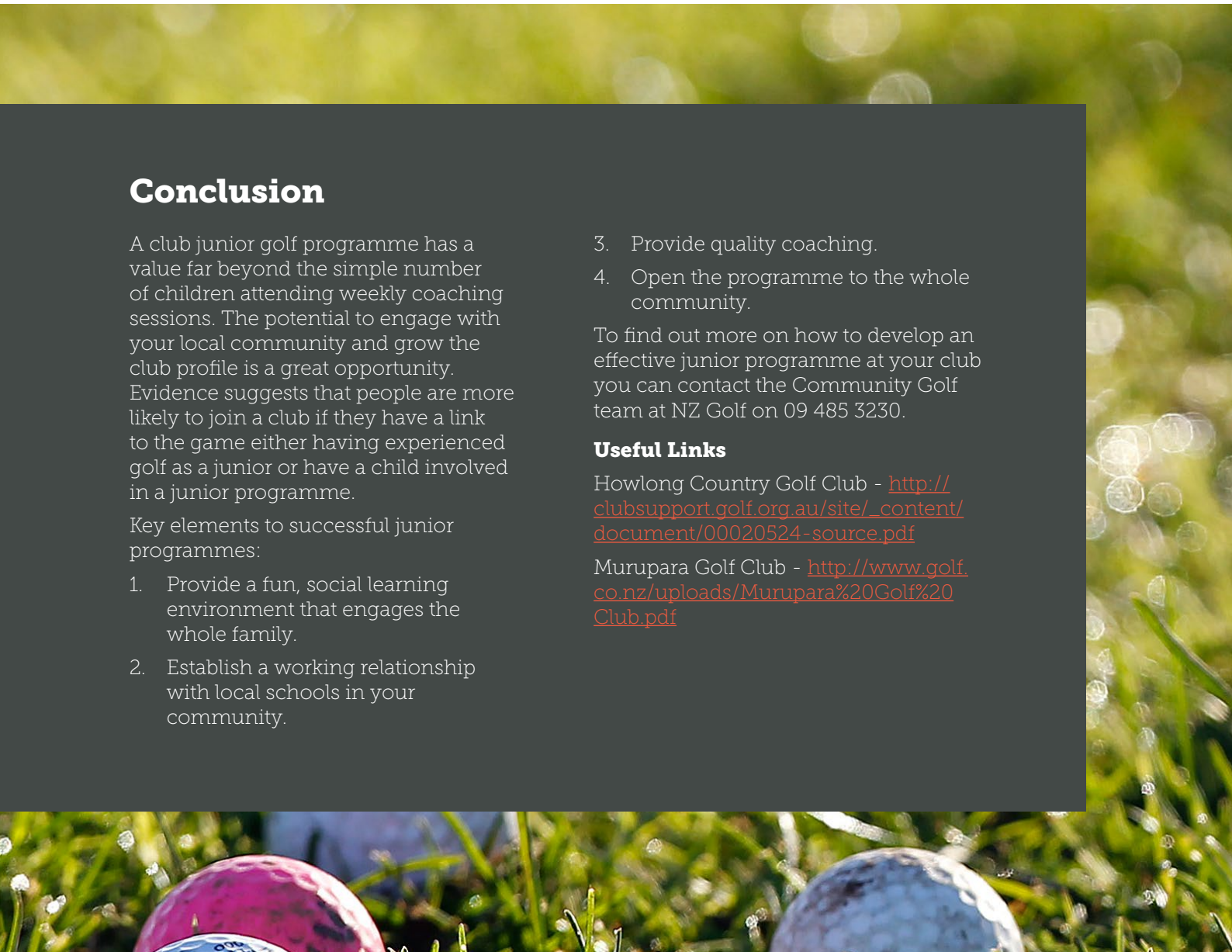
Of those who responded to the survey some interesting trends were identified:

- 54% started playing golf through a junior programme.
- 32% started playing golf after taking their child/grandchild to junior golf.
- 14% started by joining in with friends/work colleagues.

Membership analysis of four golf clubs showed that junior membership stayed relatively consistent as a percentage of total club membership over the ten year period analysed. Where one club made significant change to the structure of their junior programme they saw an increase in junior membership from 10 to 50 with the club gaining several family memberships as well. All through establishing better relationships with local schools promoting junior golf and providing a quality, fun learning environment.

A previous NZ Golf case study involving the remote Murupara Golf Club also looked at ways to grow junior golf. Some of the key challenges faced was the availability of qualified coaches, isolated location and cost.

A partnership was forged with the District Association to deliver a programme in local schools at minimal cost. To ensure future sustainability six volunteers were enrolled in the PGA Gateway coaching course to continue delivery long term. The initiative saw 20 new juniors engaged in the club programme with 10 parents joining the club, a significant achievement for a small club.



Conclusion

A club junior golf programme has a value far beyond the simple number of children attending weekly coaching sessions. The potential to engage with your local community and grow the club profile is a great opportunity. Evidence suggests that people are more likely to join a club if they have a link to the game either having experienced golf as a junior or have a child involved in a junior programme.

Key elements to successful junior programmes:

1. Provide a fun, social learning environment that engages the whole family.
2. Establish a working relationship with local schools in your community.
3. Provide quality coaching.
4. Open the programme to the whole community.

To find out more on how to develop an effective junior programme at your club you can contact the Community Golf team at NZ Golf on 09 485 3230.

Useful Links

Howlong Country Golf Club - http://clubsupport.golf.org.au/site/_content/document/00020524-source.pdf

Murupara Golf Club - http://www.golf.co.nz/uploads/Murupara%20Golf%20Club.pdf