

# Case Study

**Understanding the value of attracting  
more young people to your golf club**

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## Introduction

If golf is going to do more than survive and actually thrive, it needs a rich infusion of new blood. A vital source of new golfers is young people who represent the long-term future of the game. Research shows the sooner someone is introduced to the sport, the more likely that person will become a lifetime golfer. The participation

survey undertaken by NZ Golf in 2015 found that half of current golfers first started playing golf as a child or teenager. This case study highlights the value of attracting more young people into golf and provides a tangible example of a golf club that has continued to develop a sustainable junior programme.

## Building Great Teams

An independent study undertaken by the Golf Foundation in 2016 in the UK has revealed the importance of young people to growing the game of golf. The fact that 71% of children surveyed expressed a real interest in playing with their parents proves that if clubs can offer a pathway into golf for people of all ages and make them feel welcome, the sport will grow. A key catchment for attracting youngsters to the game of golf is between 6-12 years of age, during which 67% of the UK's participating junior golfers first take up the game.

The study also found that parents recognise the positive impact golf can have on a child's upbringing with 99% of parents seeing golf as providing a very safe environment for their children, and 95% also believe the sport can teach their children valuable life skills.



## Developing a Junior Programme

Russley Golf Club in Christchurch has recognised the importance, for both the game and the future of the club, of attracting young people into golf. Back in 2005, Committee member Steve Kilpatrick set about creating a junior programme which saw numbers at the club grow fivefold. Since 2013, the team of professionals at the club's Golf Learning Centre have taken on the role of overseeing and developing the junior programme.

In recent years, the club found that funding was harder to come by and had to reassess the direction and objectives of the programme to ensure it was sustainable into the future while also continuing to enhance the experience for junior members. As part of a review process, Russley's Head Professional Rodney Yee and his team considered feedback from junior members and their parents about what was needed to improve the programme, and looked to other sporting codes to see what was working and what was not.



## A sustainable model for junior golf

The challenge the club needed to address was how to make the programme financially sustainable without having to rely on external funding. The decision was made to move towards an affordable user pays system for which junior members pay for a group coaching programme in addition to their subscription. While this change has impacted on the total number of junior members at the club, it has meant that the club is now able to consistently meet the development needs of its junior members through a more structured pathway. There are currently 75 junior members at the club with over 50 attending regular coaching programmes. A number of young golfers from outside the club are also attending the programme and by having this large base of junior players, the club has benefited from the additional spend on private lessons, golf equipment, range balls and in the cafe.

The pathway into golf starts with the SNAG programme introducing kids between 5-8 years old to the game. Once kids graduate from SNAG and become course ready, the club then introduces them to junior membership. This next step concentrates on preparing players for the real game through the learning of the four main skills while also introducing players to the golf course, etiquette and rules, and correct use of the facilities at the club. All groups in the programme are limited to 8 players per coach with beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. As a result of introducing user pays coaching along with a more structured programme, the club has seen more consistent attendance coupled with better player progress and higher levels of satisfaction among junior players and their parents. A positive outcome for all parties.

"It's about creating opportunities for young people to learn golf and work towards achieving their goals while developing a passion for the game" said Rodney Yee. "To develop a positive environment at a club requires the right team of people providing a pathway into the game for our juniors. Most importantly for young people and their parents, it needs to be fun, social and safe".

## Conclusion

Russley Golf Club has become one of the main hubs for junior golf in the Canterbury region with junior golfers from around the city being attracted to the club to practice and mix with other young players. The introduction of a more affordable flexible membership category has also attracted a number of parents to join the club to spend quality family time out on the golf course. While the junior programme attracts young people to the club, recognition by the club and the wider membership that junior members are an important part of the club's community plays a major role in helping to retain them in the game.

