

Howlong Country Golf Club

MYGolf Junior Program Story

The Howlong MYGolf Story begins with some clever thinking and foresight on the part of the Howlong Country Golf Club which resulted in the creation of an innovative and unique junior golf program.

In 2011, Golf Australia and Golf Clubs across Australia noticed a dramatic drop in numbers of people playing golf. And more distinctly, that those playing were a part of an aging population. With this in mind, Golf Australia realized that a junior program was the best opportunity to increase awareness and interest in the game of golf. The plan that was created was the MYGolf National Skills Challenge and Awards Program, designed for children aged between 8 - 14 years, with a strong focus on making golf fun and interesting to the younger generation.

Howlong Country Golf Club responded to the call from Golf Australia and took the first steps in initiating the innovative and unique Howlong MYGolf Junior Program. The Club then registered as a MYGolf Junior Centre under Golf Australia's National Skills Challenge Program. Howlong Country Golf Club started out with five dedicated Community Coaches from the township of Howlong and 15 keen local children.

The program gained momentum and community support, and by the end of 2011 Howlong Country Golf Club was named the Golf Australia's Inaugural MYGolf Centre of the Month for December 2011. This was quickly followed with further recognition of the Howlong Program from the Jack Newton Junior Golf Foundation by the awarding of the prestigious JNJG Golf Club of the Year 2011 title.

At the start of 2012 more Community Coaches were recruited and trained in the MYGolf credo of fun learning within this national junior golf program. The innovative Howlong program was again acknowledged by Golf Australia in the awarding of the Inaugural MYGolf Player of the Month Award. This award was given to a special needs junior with autism who participates and socialises in the MYGolf Junior Program directly due to the modifications and adjustments made by the Howlong Club within the program to suit her needs and capabilities. The program sought to highlight the importance of being an all inclusive community program and partnered with Autism Spectrum to raise awareness within the Community. In 2012 an Autism Spectrum My Golf Clinic was held and all participants dressed in blue and information was provided to the community about the importance of this cause.

The Howlong program continued to grow and develop when the Club realised that there was a fault in the recruitment process. The younger siblings of the junior golfers were not allowed to participate because of the entry age restrictions. However, Howlong made a decision to remove this rule and include the younger children, those from the age of 4 years. This proved to be invaluable as the number of juniors participating increased by 25% along with increased parental involvement. The Community awareness of Howlong's MYGolf Junior Program also increased with this move.

And in particular, the free sausage sizzle and drink for the juniors became an important family social event at the end of each program day. It gives parents an important opportunity to interact with their children, be given information about their child's progress and most importantly reward them for their hard work and effort in learning the new sport.

Since its inception the program has sought to partner with the NSW Department of Families to promote Grandparents Day in October and to recognize their contribution as grandparents and Carers within the community. On Grandparents Day, the Grandparents and Carers join in the My Golf Program and their contribution to families with our community is recognized. The Grandparents are provided with free morning tea following the clinics and take much pride in watching the juniors participate in the program.

The Howlong Golf Club's Community Coaches also dedicate their time and expertise to the Howlong Public School's Community sports program which runs for two terms and is held at the Golf Club. These supplementary programs exposed the students to the sports of Golf and Bowls and will be continued as part of the Club's Community commitment.

As the MYGolf Program grew, other opportunities to continue this theme also became apparent. The first of which was the beginning of the Howlong Junior Pennant Playing Program then the MDGA Junior Pennant Competition.

By the end of 2012 the Howlong MYGolf Junior Program reached 95 junior participants with approximately 60 to 80 juniors participating on a regular basis. The Howlong MYGolf Junior Program was again recognised by Golf Australia winning Golf Australia's MYGolf Centre of the Year Title. A tremendous achievement for such a small Club to win the national award.

At the start of 2013 The Howlong Junior Program was once again recognised but this time through a Community Golf Coach award for outstanding contribution to the development of Golf in Australia. This is the only time this award has been given to a club based volunteer coach with all previous awards being given to specialised coaches employed by the golf governing bodies. This was yet another national recognition for the program which further inspired Howlong to continue with its drive of exposing the program to the Community. The Club now supports and embraces the Active After-School Communities Program with the local remote Schools participating in Golf at the Howlong Country Golf Club. These remote schools include Brocklesby and Burrumbuttock where the Club provides the use of its facilities, training and programming with these sessions becoming a highlight of the sports program for these regional children.

As the MYGolf Junior Program continued to thrive, eight advanced juniors undertook the National Skills Challenge of the MYGolf Program and were awarded with their BRONZE Award in March 2013. From this the decision was made by the Board and Junior Sub-Committee to provide a Pathway for these juniors to transition from the MYGolf Junior Program to on-course play. Thus the “Juniors On Course” program was created in June 2013. These JOC Juniors are supported on-course by Community Coaches in gaining their handicap, further skill development, learning the rules of play and etiquette of the game. The JOC Program has proved to be driver for the advanced juniors to enter mainstream competitions and/or the Howlong Junior Pennant Team.

To showcase the success of the program, the Howlong Junior Pennant team won the MDGA Title in 2013 and is now looks forward to the Encourage Shield challenge in Canberra in May 2014. This result has come about from the initial offering of a MYGolf Junior program and the nurturing of juniors through to higher levels of skill and competition within the existing golfing framework.

At the end of 2013 the Howlong MYGolf Junior Program had over 120 registered Junior golfers from the surrounding districts. This excellent result is due to a combination of factors including continued support of the Howlong Country Golf Club, the innovative development of the program, the dedication of the Community Coaches, dedicated family support, the Howlong Pro Shop involvement and the widespread support from the Community at large. These diverse elements have merged to make the Howlong MYGolf Junior Program the success it is today.

Due to the success of the Howlong MYGolf Junior Golf program, the MDGA has embraced the program and is now being rolled out to other remote communities. This program is targeted for completion over the next 2 years and will be supported from the Howlong Country Golf Club, Howlong President and Junior Co-Ordinator who have taken central positions with the MDGA to complete this work.

As well as the rollout, the innovative program has seen the development of a promotions video by Howlong that will be used across the country to illustrate the positive experiences and aspects of the MYGolf Junior Program in learning the game of golf.

The Howlong Country Golf Club is committed to spreading the message of fun and social interaction in the sport golf throughout the district and the community at large. The Club is delighted with the success of the program and the community benefits that have followed. With the game of golf in decline our story is an inspiration to other clubs to follow.