

RFL RUGBEES PROGRAMME

Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Creating Space for Girls to Discover Rugby

Following the success of the home World Cup in 2022, and the enhanced status and awareness of the women's game in England, the Rugby Football League (RFL) recognised an increasing need and demand for multiple entry points into rugby for young girls that were suited to their experience and confidence in playing team sports. Rugby League is well known as a sport that engages with and supports struggling communities and areas of high deprivation. It's therefore even more crucial that the game is accessible and welcoming for girls, giving them opportunities to be active and a network of support in their community.

Launched in 2023, just three months after the World Cup's conclusion, the RugBees programme provides a space exclusively for young girls aged 7-11 to introduce them to a sport that so many would otherwise not have the chance to try. RugBees aims to tackle stubborn gender stereotypes in sport and redefine what Rugby League means to girls. It provides a dedicated space for young girls to discover rugby, focused on developing new skills, connecting with others and fostering a love of the game in environments that are designed to help young girls thrive. Given the communities Rugby League supports no membership fees are needed, with just a nominal fee payable per session.

Participation in RugBees has grown by 40% since launch, with 19 rugby foundations now driving the programme and delivering sessions across the country, with some delivering at multiple locations within their communities. In 2025, 450 RugBees sessions were delivered across the network, reaching nearly 600 girls. The programme is growing steadily and has reached nearly 1,150 girls and had over 13,200 attendances at sessions.

Growth in the wider girls' game continues too. In 2025, 17 clubs entered girls' teams for the first time, contributing to the creation of 34 new teams. The exposure foundations are giving to girls' rugby through RugBees is driving increased awareness of and interest in the opportunities available for girls. Many of the girls involved in RugBees have gone on to play at their local community club.

"It's a really fun place to go, all the girls are really friendly. We learn lots of skills and always play a game at the end."
Girl, Wigan Warriors Foundation



The Warrington Wolves Foundation, who have the largest RugBees programme in the game, conducted research with parents to understand the impact of the programme. All parents said they would recommend RugBees to another family and many believe the programme has had a positive impact on their daughters' confidence and wellbeing:

- 2 in 3 parents felt that RugBees has led to improvements in their daughters' confidence.
- 4 in 5 parents felt that RugBees has led to increased happiness and social skills for their daughter.
- 4 in 5 parents felt that RugBees contributes to greater female empowerment, and the growth of women and girls' rugby locally.

The wider game has seen a big shift over the last few years, with the female game becoming more and more prominent. RugBees aims to drive this change by bringing girls in early at the very beginning of their sporting journey and proving to them that Rugby League is a space for them to be their authentic and unapologetic selves and that they are welcomed, wanted and valued in the game.



"Since joining RugBees my daughter has increased in her confidence and emotional wellbeing. She loves taking part in team activities and is generally much happier in her day to day life."

Parent at Warrington Wolves Foundation

"RugBees provides an amazing opportunity for girls to get involved in playing rugby in a fun and welcoming environment. It has given my daughter the opportunity to learn the game and she has loved it so much she has also joined a community club."

Parent at Warrington Wolves Foundation

"RugBees is the highlight of my week! It fills me with joy seeing the girls running around happy, safe and with big smiles on their faces. As a more senior player, it has been rewarding seeing young girls, sometimes the only girls on their community team, being encouraged to continue or start playing rugby, develop friendships with other girls and be inspired by the women's players who come down and support the sessions."

Player and Community Coach, Wigan Warriors

"There is so much evidence to support that playing sport in a mixed gender setting isn't right for all young girls and can be a barrier to participation which is why we introduced RugBees to help tackle this... Rugbees is a place where they can feel comfortable to fail. A safe space to try this new sport which has been seen as a boys' sport.

We want to break down those barriers."

Jodie Cunningham, Former RFL National Women's and Girls Development Manager, now Head of Women's Pathways and Performance at St. Helens