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FUNDING RELIEF TO HELP AUSTRALIA'S LITTLE ATHLETES STAY ON TRACK

More than 150 Little Athletics centres from Tassie to the Top End has been given much-needed funding relief ahead of the summer season thanks to a \$521,000 cash injection for sports equipment from Coles.

It is the single largest round of grants distributed to Little Athletics centres since the Coles Little Athletics Community Fund was established two years ago to support aspiring athletes following in the footsteps of Aussie champions and Coles ambassadors like Sally Pearson and Brandon Starc.

The funding relief comes amid research from the Australian Sports Foundation in July which estimated that more than 16,000 local sports clubs were at risk of closing due to reduced revenues and increased costs arising from COVID-19¹.

Coles CEO Steven Cain said he was delighted to announce 158 grassroots sports clubs have been successful in the latest round of grants to purchase brand new sports equipment.

"Community sports clubs, particularly Little Athletics centres, play a vital role in helping kids lead healthier, happier lives. That's why we've provided more than \$1.68 million in equipment grants to 376 sports clubs through the Coles Little Athletics Community Fund in just two years," he said.

"We understand it's been a challenging six months for all athletes, whether they are training for the Olympics or starting out in Little Athletics. We hope this \$521,000 funding boost will help budding athletes and parent volunteers across Australia to stay on track this season."

The Little Athletics centres will receive funding to buy new equipment to support athletes and volunteers such as hurdles, high jump mats, javelins, laptops and hygiene items to meet COVID-19 'return to sport' guidelines.

Coles Little Athletics Australia CEO Martin Stillman said there has never been a greater need for funding relief to grassroots sports clubs than now.

"It's been a really tough twelve months for our Little Athletics clubs and centres. For many centres, the challenges started with bushfires, cancellations due to poor air quality and then culminating in COVID-19 which ended their season abruptly back in March," he said.

"We can't thank Coles enough for stepping up to provide more than \$521,000 in funding support to 158 of our centres, all of whom rely on parent volunteers and will have limited community fundraising opportunities like sausage sizzles and canteen sales this season due to COVID restrictions."

¹ "Impact of COVID-19 on Community Sport," Australian Sports Foundation, July 2020

Commonwealth Games high jump champion Brandon Starc is among the Aussie athletes who have been affected by disruptions and restrictions caused by COVID-19. Brandon said he hopes the funding will give little athletes and community volunteers a morale boost for the season ahead.

“There's a lot of little athletes across the country who have been socially isolated for months and had their sporting activities disrupted. I hope the new equipment will encourage them to get back on the track this season,” he said.

“As a former little athlete, I know how much new equipment mean to kids who are starting out their athletics careers. It gives kids a chance to compete and train at their best and reach their full potential.”

Funds for the grant are raised through the sale of specially marked chiller bags designed by Aussie kids, with ten per cent of every bag sold directed to the Coles Little Athletics Community Fund. Coles has raised more than \$1.68 million for Little Athletics centres, as well as more than \$2.5 million for Guide Dogs, Clean Up Australia, SecondBite and Aspect schools since the community bag initiative was introduced in June 2018.

In addition to providing sports equipment grants, Coles has donated more than 3 million bananas to fuel little athletes at their weekly Little Athletics centre programs since 2017.

For details of successful recipients please visit www.coles.com.au/littleathleticsfund.



Olympic & World Champion Sally Pearson with athletes from Mid Coast Little Athletics Centre (SA) and their new equipment and the Coles Community Bags

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For further information, please contact

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