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Tasmanian NDIS participant, Tom Smith said he can’t wait to join the upcoming AFL All Abilities (AAA) football clinic again in the school holidays and spend time building his skills and creating new friendships.

“It’s going to be heaps of fun,” the 15-year-old said, who according to mum Janelle, has plenty of energy to expend.

“Tom loves footy so he’s looking forward to doing another AAA footy clinic,” she said.

“Tom has Global Development Delay and Autism, and when he is out on the field you can see he just loves it – the acceptance, the inclusion and friendships. He just thrives.

“The best thing about these AAA footy clinics is when Tom’s there, he thinks ‘what disability?’ ‘I don’t have a disability’. I can see he feels like he is on an even playing field.”

The Parkside Foundation General Manager, Client Services Disability, Kylie Green said it has entered into a three-year partnership with Southern Tasmania Junior Football League to deliver the AFL All Abilities Program.

“It includes school holiday clinics with participating clubs, an 8-week training program, and a round robin carnival where participants can represent their club and compete for an inaugural trophy,” she said.

“Parkside is working with football clubs across southern Tasmania too, developing and implementing the AAA program to promote and create greater inclusion and local community connections.

“We are also providing disability awareness training to clubs so they can successfully deliver the AAA program, working side-by-side at clinics with members, and actively promoting the program through high schools and colleges,” Kylie said.

Janelle said Tom, who receives NDIS community inclusion funding, enjoys having support workers at the AAA football clinic who love the game just as much as him.

“He loves being involved,” she said. “This clinic has been great for Tom, along with other programs Parkside provide for him, like weekend camps.

“It makes me feel good to know Tom has choice and can do things he really enjoys.”

Kylie said it wouldn’t be able to offer these AAA football clinics without the support of members and players at the Clarence Junior Football Club and without backing from the Southern

Tasmania Junior Football League.

“The Clarence Junior Football Club have been instrumental in supporting us to get this AAA football clinic up and running and making it a success,” she said.

“Members and players have donated their time, supplied equipment and facilities.

“Feedback, from club president, Daniel Archer, is they get as much enjoyment out of it as the participants do whilst at the same time, increasing inclusion – a core club value.”

“The clinics run for two hours and are targeted at participants aged 12 to 20,” she said.

“These clinics are not only fun, they also focus on individual skills development, physical fitness, building community connections and creating friendships.”

Kylie said participation in AAA football clinics means participants can register for an 8-week training program and an All Abilities Round Robin Carnival in 2021.

“Participation in this program can also lead to representation at a state level,” she said.

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