



# Jesus, rugby and riverbanks

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I WAS IN EARLY HIGH SCHOOL WHEN I FIRST STARTED calling myself a Christian. I had attended our localish youth group camp at Scott’s Head and during the camp had the gospel clearly explained in an engaging, relatable way. There was an opportunity to respond to Jesus’ call to follow him and I took it.

I’ve gone on to lead at youth camps myself since then and now direct Rugby Union Camp in Tamworth. It’s the ultimate fusion of two of my greatest loves: Jesus and rugby. The camp is for boys and girls in Years 5 – 10 with no previous rugby experience necessary even from leaders, as we provide tiered training from highly experienced coaches – often former professional rugby players. Anyone who loves Jesus has something to offer at Rugby Camp. Even though some previous leaders are unavailable this year, we’re trusting God has the right people lined up to fill those gaps.

Over the course of the camp, we talk about the Bible being like God’s game plan and how it always works better when you listen to the coach. In rugby every aspect of the game is a battle for possession, each ruck or maul, line out, kick, every part of the game has a side that wins that moment. Life is the same, as Christians we strive for Christ to win every moment, but just like rugby we make mistakes and suffer the consequences. The difference in life is that we know the end result.

My wife, Heather, and our two kids, Erica (13) and Aiden (10) have just clocked up our 10<sup>th</sup> January in Wee Waa, having relocated after a few years in Cowra for me to take on a role as Youth Worker/Chaplain/SRE teacher. It was a move that brought us both back a little closer to home.

I’ve been Chaplain at three of the four schools in Wee Waa for different lengths of time. Working in schools I constantly saw young people struggling with the system they were expected to function in: kids whose home lives would be politely described as fluid; kids with learning and development difficulties both diagnosed and undiagnosed; kids who just struggle to learn in a classroom. Often frustrations would boil over and end in suspensions which only exacerbated issues for those kids. I’d seen similar programs to RiverBank and decided that it was what Wee Waa needed.

RiverBank Youth Work is a not-for-profit company we started to address a growing need in our community to get alongside the young people in our town who are disengaged with traditional education and making choices with lasting negative consequences such as incarceration, injury or even death. Teachers, D C J and others can identify anyone under 18 in need and refer them to RiverBank where we provide them with a safe and welcoming environment for two days each week while they learn valuable employable skills, often metalwork and woodwork, alongside life skills they need to thrive. Whether they’re busy constructing something or fishing, it’s all building skill sets and relationship.

Early on in RiverBank’s journey, I had an Aboriginal lady invite me to speak at a meeting organised by the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) for anyone who had anything to do with



the youth in town from preschool through to high school, including the police. When I explained in the meeting what I wanted to do the excitement from everyone but particularly from our Indigenous people was exciting for me as well. Their partnership and their willingness to work with me and let me work with their kids and the trust we have for each other to try to do the best that we can for these young people is a huge encouragement for me. I still go to AECG meetings. The Aboriginal Lands Council is happy to partner with me as well and we’re doing a couple of native gardens in town this year.

Working with people, particularly people who are hurting, is often a slog. For me the most encouraging parts are always where you see progress, whether a RiverBank kid persisting with a project or keeping their cool when something’s gone wrong, or having one of the young people I work with seek me out for a chat. Far and away the greatest joy for me is when they take steps toward or further into relationship with God. I was speaking with the parent of a young bloke I’ve spent some time with – he’d been through a period of making some poor choices and suffering the consequences. Somewhere something had clicked for him, and his mum was so thankful and excited about the changes she’d seen in him and his willingness to engage with God’s word and God’s people. I couldn’t tell you exactly what I’d done, but it had made a difference in this young guy’s life. That’s the sort of encouragement I think we could all use every now and then. A recognition that your steady, day-to-day struggle to follow God’s way has positively impacted someone else’s walk.

Working with young people is hard. Please pray that I would continue to have the willingness, energy and time to continue to do it well.

Always be praying for young people. Pray that they’d have wisdom beyond their years to make better choices, but also that even when those choices are poor, God would be at work to bring about his purposes.

Please also pray that RiverBank would find a reliable funding stream to maintain its impact and grow into the program it needs to be, giving thanks for the generosity of individuals keeping it functioning so far.

Above all, pray that no matter what I’m doing, God would be honoured in my life and that he would continue to grow his kingdom in all things.

To support RiverBank Youth Work go to: [riverbankyouth.work](http://riverbankyouth.work)