

My Story by Natalie



The months leading up to HSC and trials can feel absolutely relentless on our wellbeing and I'm probably not the only Year 12 student who feels that way. As trial exams approach and the pressure of the final assessments continues to build, it can feel like every moment is dedicated to studying. Another deadline, another page, another push for the best possible results. While academic success is important, it is just as important that we look after ourselves. Throughout Year 12, my friends and I have experienced the 11pm nights after finishing work, the assignment due at 9am and a mum asking why we hadn't studied yet. There were and will be many of those nights where our desks are covered with notes, textbooks and unfinished

tasks, with little time to recharge and take a break. We often are so focused on our goals that we forget the importance of taking care of ourselves. One thing that has helped us manage this constant stress and pressure is making time to be active together. Whether it is once a week, once a fortnight, by simply walking to the cafe or library, spending time outdoors, or even finding opportunities to move away from our study spaces together, these moments have allowed us to reconnect and reset. The photo, "Beyond the Textbooks," captures one of these moments. After a random Thursday filled with classes, assignments and the pressures of Year 12, one of us just said "let's go to the beach." An hour later we were there, still in our jerseys. Away from the endless notes, deadlines and expectations, we found comfort in the presence of each other despite Australia's freezing winter weather. It started as a joke, the first person to fall had to buy lunch the next day. We were laughing too hard to hold a straight line, one of us even face planted. Even in the midst of our chaos, it's always brought up and suddenly we're laughing our heads off. By moving together, laughing together, or even existing somewhere that wasn't a desk we were able to support each other during this demanding year. Physical activity not only helps keep us healthy but it has also improved our mental wellbeing significantly as we can recharge. Although we come from different backgrounds, expectations at home and experiences, we share many of the same challenges young people face navigating the final year of high school. Through activities like walking together, spending time outdoors, even handstands, we have built a sense of belonging and support which can help us through stressful periods. As we approach the HSC, remember that success isn't defined by results and it is okay to take breaks to recharge. Remember, you are more beyond the textbook!

More than a Game by Ibrahim



When I joined Jets, I didn't expect it to change how I saw myself or my community. My family moved to Australia before I was born, and for a long time, I felt like I was standing between two worlds: the culture at home and the culture at school. Soccer became the bridge. Our team is a mix of backgrounds, teammates whose families come from Australia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and more. On paper, we don't have much in common. On the field, none of that matters. What matters is the pass you make, the goal you defend, the huddle you form before kick-off. That huddle is my favourite part of every match. We stand shoulder to shoulder, arms wrapped around each other, heads down, breathing together before the whistle blows. In that circle, there's no language barrier, no cultural gap just us, present for each other. It's a small moment, but it grounds me every single week. Physical activity has done more for my mental health than I expected. Before I joined the team, I used to carry a lot of stress quietly, schoolwork, family expectations, the pressure of fitting in. Running on the field gave that stress somewhere to go. Every sprint, every tackle, every full-time whistle left me lighter than when I started. But it wasn't just the exercise, it was doing it with people who showed up for me, week after week. I remember one game where I made a mistake that cost us a goal. I was ready to spiral into embarrassment, the way I sometimes do when I feel like I've let people down. But my teammates didn't let me sit with that alone. One of them jogged over, put a hand on my shoulder, and said, "It's alright man, heads up." That's it. Five words. But they reminded me that I wasn't just playing for the team, I was held by it. That's the thing about sport in a multicultural community, it teaches you that support doesn't need the same culture. A high five means the same thing in every language. A huddle feels the same whether your grandmother makes you a snack at home. We come from different places, but on the field, we're building something together trust, resilience, ambition for winning and a sense of belonging that follows us off the pitch and into everyday life. Since joining Jets, I've noticed I handle stress differently. Instead of bottling things up, I look forward to training as a release a place where my mind gets quiet and my body gets to work, surrounded by people who have my back. It's taught me that wellbeing isn't something you build alone. It's built in huddles, in shared effort, in showing up for each other rain or shine, it's built in the game where you give your heart out to win the match for your team. That's what physical activity has given me, not just fitness, but family chosen, diverse, and always in my side.

Connection through Folklore by Anastasia



For many years, I wondered whether I was Australian enough. Although I was born and raised here, the world I came home to was different from the one outside my front door. My parents arrived in Australia as immigrants, carrying the stories of war and the traditions of their Serb-Bosnian heritage. English was not my first language, family gatherings were filled with homemade food and conversation in another language, and our customs often felt worlds apart from those around me. I constantly felt as though I had to choose between two identities, never fully belonging to either. Everything began to change when I joined my Serbian folklore group. Every Friday, 8:45 pm sharp, I would step into rehearsals, put on my belt and dance alongside those who understood exactly what I was feeling. Together we practised traditional folkloric dances that demanded energy, coordination and teamwork. We laughed as we forgot steps, encouraged each other when choreography became challenging and celebrated every performance together. What started as a way to connect with my culture soon became the highlight of my week. As school became busier and life felt more overwhelming, folklore became a sort of escape. The moment the music began, my worries about assignments, school and expectations seemed to fade into the background. Instead of overthinking, I focused on every step, every rhythm and every movement. By the end of each rehearsal, I always felt lighter than when I had arrived. The friendships I formed through dance became just as important as the folklore itself. I met and reconnected with people who, like me, were children of migrants balancing two cultures. We shared similar stories, laughed about the weird family traditions and understood one another without needing to explain ourselves. Knowing I was surrounded by people who embraced every part of my identity gave me a sense of belonging that I had never experienced before. Ironically, it was through celebrating my Serb-Bosnian heritage that I finally embraced what being Australian meant to me. I realised that being Australian was never about leaving part of myself behind. Instead, it meant celebrating the many cultures, languages and traditions that make our country stronger. My heritage and my Australian identity were never competing; together, they shaped who I am. Today, Serbian folklore is much more than a dance group. It is where I stay active, reconnect with my culture and spend time with people who uplift and support me. Every rehearsal strengthens not only my body, but also my confidence, resilience and wellbeing. It reminds me that some of the most meaningful connections are built not through words alone, but through dance, music and shared experiences. For me, every step on stage is a reminder that I belong exactly where I am. (Here's a picture of my group performing; I'm the girl on the far left!)

Beyond the Boundary by Karthika



Beyond the Boundary BZZ..BZZZ The sound of my 6:00AM alarm wakes me up in the pitch black. My bed is warm, and my body begs for me to stay under the covers, the snooze button is yearning for my attention. For a second, I stare at the ceiling while hesitating. Then I remember the goals I've set for the new season. I jolt out of bed, grab my kit, then head downstairs. Waiting for me in the kitchen with a cup of lemon tea in his hand, is my Papa. During the drive to the cricket nets at dawn, the silence is deafening. Starting high school this year and playing cricket is a lot of pressure. Everyone expects you to play perfectly, while balancing schoolwork, training, and matches can get pretty stressful. My brain is overloaded. But early mornings and afternoons like this with Papa change everything. There are no coaches grading me or scoreboard t. It's just the two of us with a bucket of leather balls, and a damp pitch. When we get to the nets, the work starts. It is freezing at first, but why need a jacket or AC when you have a dad? 'Warm up! Warm up!' he yells. I run back and forth, squats, pushups, anything you can think of. For him, warming up is a key thing in this sport. Once he starts throwdowns. Crack! I knock one hard, and the sound echoes across the empty ground. Papa watches the ball, giving me tips on my technique and footwork. We practice straight drives and pulls until my arm falls out and sweat drips down my face. This hard training is definitely what helps my mental health. When a cricket ball is coming toward you at full pace, you can't think about homework, high school drama, or matches. You just have to put all your attention toward the ball. It clears my mind completely and brings me back to the present. It makes all my stress vanish. Mornings like these build my confidence. Papa is my coach, but he is also my N.1 supporter. His advice and pep talks makes me never lose hope. I know he always has my back no matter what happens in the matches. By the time the sun comes up, we pack up our kits. My body is tired, and my energy is drained but my mind feels happy, relaxed, and ready for the day. My photo shows this very moment. It is a picture of the nets with the bright sunrise behind us. Our wide smiles show the hard work, all the fun we have during training, and the amazing bond I have with my dad that keeps me mentally strong on and off the pitch.

Tomorrow is not Promised by Hohepa



This year, my family gathers at the cemetery to celebrate the birthday of my siblings' mum, who passed away last November. She is buried there, and right beside her resting place is a big piece of empty grass — wide, peaceful, and open. As the youngest in my family, I used to feel unsure about how to handle grief, but that space has become somewhere I can breathe, move, and feel connected. Even though my dad passed away last December and is buried in New Zealand, we carry him with us in spirit every time we visit. Rugby was something that connected all of us, so we bring a rugby ball to honour both of them. It's our way of turning sadness into something meaningful. The first time we went after losing

them, I felt overwhelmed. Being the youngest, I didn't always know how to express what I was feeling. My mood had been low, and everything felt heavy. But when my family arrived with food, laughter, and that familiar rugby ball, something inside me shifted. We walked over to the big stretch of grass and started passing the ball around. At first, it was slow and gentle. The moment the ball touched my hands, I felt my body relax. My breathing steadied. My chest felt less tight. Soon, we were running short sprints, dodging each other, and laughing in a way we hadn't done since they passed. The empty grass became a space of healing. Playing rugby didn't erase the grief, but it lifted the heaviness. It reminded me that physical activity can clear the mind, ease stress, and bring moments of joy even during the hardest times. My siblings, who were nervous about being at the cemetery, ended up smiling and chasing each other across the grass. Movement helped all of us feel lighter. It turned a painful day into one filled with connection, memory, and love. Even though Dad is buried far away in New Zealand, playing rugby made us feel close to him too — like he was part of the celebration. After the game, we sat together on the grass, sharing stories about both of them — their humour, their strength, their love for family. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by sadness, we felt grounded and connected. The combination of movement, family, and open space turned a day of grief into a day of healing. Now, every year, we return to that big piece of empty grass with the same rugby ball. It's our way of celebrating their lives, remembering them, and taking care of our mental wellbeing. Being active together helps us release stress, feel less worried, and reconnect with each other — and with the people we miss.

Finding my Footing by Kiara



Art, connection to culture, a way of representing myself. That is what I associate with Traditional Chinese

dancing. It's challenging but fun characteristics make it one of my favorite hobbies and an activity to practice whenever I need to take time to relax, sit back, and take my mind off the piles of homework that accumulates on my desk. As a year seven student trying to survive their first year in school, I know that change is never easy. I loved the sunlit ease of primary school and my friends that had grown with me for seven years.

Adapting to the increasing homework load, finding my way through the school, and waking up an hour earlier is horrifically challenging for me. I always find that the few weeks before an assessment is always a hurricane as I try to balance all projects and prepare for exams, becoming lost has been an

everyday thing as I accidentally follow the wrong person, and dragging myself out of bed every morning an hour and thirty minutes earlier than the year before always proves a challenge.

Such a big jump from primary to high school is extremely stressful for me, especially since I've been waking up at 8:00 for seven years of my life. At the times when everything goes in a blur, it is dancing that allows me to pause, take a deep breath, and refresh. Unlike how strange the lifestyle of high school seems to me, dance is much more familiar. The moment the songs start to play, the heavy fog of school stress begins to evaporate. No matter if the music is slow, or fast paced, sweeping the air with those familiar movements feels soothing. Traditional Chinese dance requires you to forget everything else, and focus on precision, timing, and movements. When I dance, the tranquil sensation of the movements replace the equations in my mind. The physical exertion helps me reset my mind and refresh for new information to come. Even as my heart races and sweat slides down my forehead, I can feel the anxiety of the school week melting out of my mind, replaced by a deep, glowing sense of pride and accomplishment. When I finish a dance on stage, I know that I am representing myself and my culture. When the music finally fades and I exit the stage, I am always tired, but my spirit is completely weightless with the feeling of pride and accomplishment. The homework would still be waiting on my desk, but my mind is refreshed and ready to finish it. Dance has taught me that just like mastering a difficult, technique heavy choreography, navigating Year 7 also takes patience, practice, and a lot of resilience. This Multicultural Health Week, I am incredibly grateful for Traditional Chinese dancing, because by moving my body and representing my culture, I always find the strength to refresh my mind as I continue to find my way through high school.

My Self-discovery to Joy by Mihika



If someone asked me what helps me feel like myself again after a stressful week, I wouldn't say studying harder or spending more time on my phone. I'd say, "Come for a walk with me." This year has been busy. There have been days when I've come home from school exhausted, worrying about assignments, exams and everything I still have to do. On those days, my friends are usually the first people to message on the group chat,

"Badminton this afternoon?" Even if I don't feel like going at first, I never regret saying yes. We're not competitive people at all. Half the time we're laughing because someone completely misses the shuttle or it flies onto the next court. Those little moments remind me that life doesn't have to just be about school and deadlines. For an hour or two, all I'm thinking about is the game, laughing with my friends, getting exercise and enjoying being outside. One of my favourite memories was a family picnic at Mount Annan Botanic Garden. We did a takeaway pizza, found a shady spot under the trees and spent the afternoon together. After eating, we went for a long walk around the gardens and talked about the funny stories that always come up when my whole family is together. Later, we pulled out a ball and started playing catch. Everyone joined in. We weren't keeping score or trying to win anything. We were just laughing whenever someone missed the ball or made a terrible throw. At one point, I looked around and realised that nobody was on their phone. My sister was walking around, my parents were smiling, and everyone was completely present. It made me realise how rare that can be. That afternoon wasn't anything extraordinary, but it's one of those memories I'll always hold onto because it reminded me how important it is to slow down and spend time with the people you love. Dancing is another way my family comes together. Whether it's a birthday or a cultural celebration, someone always ends up turning on the music. It starts with one person dancing, then another joins in, and everyone is laughing together. I used to feel embarrassed, but now those moments are some of my favourites because they remind me of where I come from and how I can keep holding onto these traditions. Looking back, I've realised that physical activity has never really been about exercise for me. It's about the conversations during a walk, the laughter during a game of badminton, playing catch until the sun starts to set and dancing with people who love it as much as you do. Those moments help me clear my mind and appreciate the people around me. They've shown me that looking after my mental health doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, all it takes is fresh air, movement and the people who matter most. Here is a photo of me with my sister on a walk.

More than Just a Game of Tag by Safwa



After a long week of school, my favourite part is hanging out with my friends. Whether it's at school or outside of school, they are always there for me. It can be as simple as walking through the park or going to each other's houses. Those little moments always lift my mood and make my mental health feel so much better. Whenever I'm with them, it's like I can leave all my worries behind for a while. It's amazing what seven bored 12-year-olds can do for each other's mental health. When we're together, we forget about trying

to act grown up and turn back into carefree kids, laughing, running, and playing tag. I'm thankful for them every single day. Even when everything feels like it's going wrong, seeing them always makes things better. Recently, we started playing tag during our break times to prepare for our athletics carnival. At first, it was just a way to practise running, but it quickly became the best part of our school day. Running through the wind while laughing with my friends is one of the happiest feelings I've ever had. It reminds me that life isn't only about getting the highest marks, winning awards, or achieving big goals. Sometimes, life is simply made up of lots of small, happy moments that become the memories we treasure most. I think many people forget about those little moments. We remember our biggest achievements, but we often forget the photo of ourselves laughing with our friends at our tenth birthday party or the games we played together at school. We sometimes believe that if we don't achieve one huge goal, our lives aren't successful. But I don't think that's true. Even if life doesn't always go the way we planned, it still leads us where we're meant to be. As we grow up, we'll make mistakes and take the wrong path sometimes, but those experiences help us find the right path to take. For me, running around with my friends helps me feel connected with them. It relieves my stress about classes, homework, and exams, and reminds me to enjoy being young. That simple game of tag isn't just exercise; it's something that helps us relax, smile, and enjoy the rest of our day. My friends and I don't need expensive activities to have fun. We don't go shopping or to fancy restaurants. We'd rather go to the park, play tag, and laugh until we can't breathe. While some people spend their breaks worrying about how they look, we spend ours making memories together. We choose happiness, and we take it seriously. If we can laugh together, then why cry alone? Hanging out with my friends and playing a simple game of tag helps... This photo shows my friends and me choosing who will be "it" before another game of tag. It captures the small moments that have made a big difference to my mental health, my friendships, and my happiness.

Finding Myself One Step at a Time by Andrea



Finding myself, one step at a time Have you ever thought that a walk could change someone so much? I never believed something as simple as walking could brighten my world until it changed my life completely. What started as an ordinary walk became the beginning of my journey towards happiness, showing me that even the smallest steps can lead to the biggest changes. My days felt empty, like I was trapped in an endless nightmare that replayed the same story. I chose the safety of my room, isolating myself from the

world because I no longer had the strength to face. Then one day, my mum encouraged me to go on a walk to help ease my mind. It felt daunting, like I was taking a step I wasn't ready for, but I challenged myself and walked beside her. At first, every step felt impossible. My thoughts raced, and I wanted to turn back. But as we kept walking, the burden on my mind gradually lifted. The fresh air filled my lungs, my breathing became steadier, and I felt my body slowly relax. By the time we returned home, I felt calmer, lighter and more hopeful than I had in a long time. That night, I lay awake looking at my ceiling, wondering if I finally had a chance to bring myself together again. For the first time in weeks, my mind felt quieter. I fell asleep more easily, and when I woke the next morning, I felt motivated to leave my room instead of hiding away. That single walk reminded me that healing doesn't always happen all at once. Sometimes it begins with one small step. As the days passed, our walks became more than just physical activity. They became a time to talk, laugh and enjoy each other's company. Every walk relieved my stress, lifted my mood and gave me more energy. Walking regularly helped me sleep better, clear my mind and feel stronger both physically and emotionally. Instead of feeling trapped by my thoughts, I began looking forward to each walk because I knew I would return home feeling happier than when I left. Walking beside my mum reminded me that I wasn't fighting my battles alone, and when my sister joined us, every walk became another memory we shared together. These simple moments slowly rebuilt my confidence and reminded me that I was surrounded by people who cared about me. One of my favourite memories is hearing my mum's soft, warm voice call me "sweedy". English isn't her first language, and "sweedy" is the closest she can get to saying "sweetie". It became our special word and never failed to make us laugh. Today, I am happier, stronger and more confident. I never skip our walks because they remind me that caring for my mental health can begin with something as simple as putting one foot in front of the other. Every walk strengthens my body, calms my mind and fills my heart with gratitude for the people who walked beside me when I needed them most.

Finding my Balance by Noor



Every time I look at this photo, I remember the time I realised I was actually rollerblading all by myself! It's funny to think about it now because in the first 10 minutes, I kept on grabbing dramatically onto the edge of the rink just to stay upright because I was convinced I was going to fall over every five seconds. I was gripping the railing so tightly that I probably spent more time waiting for a miracle to help me glide across the floor, then actually giving it a proper shot. Looking back, it's one of those little things that still makes me laugh, but it's also one of the little things that changed my thoughts on who I am. At the time, like many other teenagers, I was

spending way too much time comparing myself to people on social media. The people behind the screen seemed perfect, with perfect friendships and endless confidence. It made me wonder if there was something missing with me, which made me feel swallowed by anxiety a lot of the time. However, looking back almost a year later I can see that I was forgetting that I was meant to be me, just a normal kid, just like any random girl in Australia. When my friends asked if I wanted to go rollerblading I was really excited to try something new; but stepping on the rink made me feel like I should pursue a career in a circus instead because of how clumsy I was. That day some of them were on rollerblades while others were skating, and everyone seemed to know exactly what they were doing. I was ready to give up when I remembered a trip when I had gone to Canberra with my family and my sister taught me some basics of ice-skating. I could hear her reminding me to bend my knees, keep my balance, and trust myself. Soon those small, but very helpful pieces of advice began to click and very soon my doubt transformed into joy. One of my friends actually noticed the smile on my face and snapped the photo of me. Originally, I just thought it was a picture to save in my camera roll, but now for me it symbolises when I stopped doubting myself and learnt that growth does not have to be perfect to be important. What made the day even more special was the people I spent it with. My friends come from different cultural backgrounds from all over the world, but at the end of the day we are all one and free Aussies supporting our wonderful Matildas team. We might look different but we share laughter, food, and the future together. My friends' and sister's support made me feel I truly belonged. Putting on music and skating along with people I care about helps me clear my head and boost my wellbeing. It's the little things like sport and friends that improve my mental health.

Connected to My Roots by Leilani

My name is Leilani and I am a proud young Samoan who comes from a large family. In my culture, family and coming together are a huge part of my daily life. My family has taught me that connection, support and showing up for each other are important parts of wellbeing. Although life can get busy, my family always prioritises making time for one another. Growing up surrounded by my extended family has given me a strong sense of belonging and reminds me of the importance of having people around me who care and encourage me. One of the special ways my family and I connect is through my dancing. Dance is a big part of who I am and is a way for me to express myself, be creative and share my emotions. When I dance, I feel confident, free and connected to who I am. Whenever I have a dance concert or competition, my family shows up in numbers. I always look out and see my grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins and family members supporting me from the crowd. Having my family there celebrating my achievements makes me feel proud and reminds me that my hard work is recognised and valued. My family also connects through physical health and staying active together. My uncle is a personal trainer and for many years has taught our family the importance of looking after our bodies and staying strong. My family trains at Hype together every day, and although I don't always join them, I really enjoy the times when I do. The photo above was taken when I joined my family at Hype Studio for a training session. It represents one of the ways we connect through physical health, encouragement and spending quality time together. Training together allows us to challenge ourselves, support each other, laugh and become stronger both physically and mentally. I am also lucky to have family members who have taught me the importance of wellbeing and self-care. My mum is a Girl Coach who mentors teenagers, and my dad is and has been a strong youth mentor and community member. Watching the way they support others has helped me understand the importance of caring for my own wellbeing and showing kindness to those around me. Looking back, I realise how lucky I am to have a family that supports me in so many ways. Through culture, dance, exercise and spending time together, my family helps me feel connected and improves my mental health and wellbeing. They have shown me that wellbeing is about finding things that bring you joy, staying connected to the people you love and knowing you have a strong support system around you.

Walking Back to Myself by Mia



On the 9th of March 2026 I lost my best friend to suicide. My bond with my father was like no other. He was my rock, my inspiration, the person I turned to when I needed someone. He told me all his problems and I told him mine. The person I always vented to was gone. My bed felt like my new home, and the only comfort I felt was from sitting alone with my own thoughts. I didn't want to go out. I didn't want to talk to people and as much as I didn't want to admit it, my mental health was weakening. School, once my comfort was a place I couldn't handle to challenge. Learning, hanging out with my friends and connecting to my culture was unachievable. I no longer felt like myself. I was lost. But I think most of all I felt disconnected. To my family, to the world and to my culture. So I made a change. Something in my brain switched and I knew to help myself recover from this trauma, I couldn't let myself fall into a place I wouldn't be able to get myself out of. One morning I woke up, I dragged myself out of bed, put on my headphones and walked out the door with my mum. I wiped the tears from my face and told myself that to do this was to help myself. To reconnect to what I felt I had lost. With every step I took, I felt more free. I was walking on country. Not my mob's country. But the country I had been raised on. Dharug country. We walked through the bushes and the trees, with the sound of birds chirping in my ears and leaves crunching beneath my feet. A part of me felt healed. Who knew such a small act could make such a big difference. But it was because it was me, it was my culture, It was who I was and always will be. It made me realise that even through the hard times in life that you don't want to have to face, reconnecting with your culture and doing the things you love can help you find who you are again. Life can throw you challenges, ones that may feel they are too hard to get out of. But going outside and doing an activity that you love, can make such a huge difference. And I can proudly say that getting out, walking and immersing myself into the environment has helped heal a part of me. I have a long way to go in my grief journey. However, I am so grateful that I have found something that can take me away to another place and allow me to relax. No other thoughts in my head and no other problems to stress about. As silly as it sounds, walking has helped my mental health and I seriously don't even want to know the position I'd be in without the freedom it has provided for me.

My Story by Ana



Globally accepted nicknames for my sport include 'the People's Game', the 'World's Game', and the 'Beautiful Game'. All of these describing words are exactly what I have found football to be. Every time I find myself in small-sided or even professional-field sized environments, I find a hidden confidence in my voice, my stance, and even my own expectations of myself, which navigates me through playing to the best of my abilities, giving constructive feedback to my team which is always respectful as well as respected, and having fun with my teammates outside of the sport. Before I started consistently travelling to the small-sided, casual futsal trainings once a week with my friend which were hosted by Sydwest Multicultural Services, I doubted the experience heavily. What if everybody else is frustrated that I cannot understand the same language? How will I communicate with the players? What if they don't use similar rules and I am unable to play properly with them? Maybe I should just stick to my proper team, the one I have known for ages already, change won't do me much good. However, when I arrived and we played our first few matches, I realised. This really is the 'World's Game'. Although the language barrier was heavy, all could be understood. Everybody knew when somebody was gesturing you to pass, shoot or even tackle. And when you skillfully created good opportunities, praise was handed out graciously even by opposing teams, and when you would make a mistake people would laugh, but that was okay too, because we all laugh together in the same language, everybody sharing a beautifully understood (and sometimes slightly embarrassing) moment. Even before I joined my new club and team for the current 2026 season, I was nervous about whether or not I would be included or accepted- when I arrived at the trials, most of the girls, none of whom I had met before, had already known each other from previous years or even went to school together. It was a whole new suburb, environment and level of football. I could have backed out, but instead, after a few sessions, some shared jokes and a few generous rides home, I developed friendships that may last a lifetime, and I will forever be grateful for putting myself out there and sparking communication with the girls who I play alongside each and every week, giving me something to exciting look forward to after long school days and on weekends. The globalised nicknames of football really do stay true to themselves- The 'World's Game' signifies how everybody can be unified and come together to enjoy a round or two of the world's most popular sport, against any opponents no matter the age, skill or language barriers. The 'People's Game' highlights its accessibility to all, young and old, ignoring financial status and other separations that are unnecessarily created. All anybody needs to find their team is a splash of confidence, a little bit of practice and a welcoming smile!

Tag Team Arena: Winning the Mental Match by Jayden



For a teenager, identity is usually wrapped up in motion. From the under-6s onward, my life was defined by the black, orange and white colours of Leichhardt Juniors. Playing in the Balmain Junior League, my world revolved around the heavy thud of a perfect tackle, scoring tries, and kicking winning goals. My bedroom shelves lined with trophies proved my dedication. I even gave up the basketball representative path because Sundays belonged strictly to footy. Sports weren't just a hobby; they were my ultimate shield against anxiety. My mum, who served as our team manager, was always right there on the sidelines. She always told me, "Have fun and just do your best," remaining fiercely encouraging even when we lost. My biggest supporter, alongside Mum, was my Nan. Because she was too sick to come to the games, Mum would record my matches for her. The moment the siren or bell sounded, I had to call her straight away. Hearing her say, "That's my boy," meant more than any trophy, especially since she lovingly gave me pocket money for every single try or goal I scored. Losing her on Christmas night 2019 shattered a massive piece of my world. When severe chronic fatigue struck a few years later, my mental health plummeted. The roaring grandstands vanished, replaced by an overwhelming, heavy exhaustion. Even walking my two energetic Staffies, Harley and Bella, felt like climbing a mountain. Stripped of my outlets, my anxiety skyrocketed in the stationary isolation. But resilience doesn't always roar on a crowded field. Sometimes, it builds momentum in a quiet home gym. Knowing how deeply I missed the competitive camaraderie of sports, my mum stepped right back into her role as team manager. We transformed our home gym - equipped with an all-in-one station, weights, and a treadmill - into our personal stadium. Our physical routine became a choreographed, tag-team workout. While Mum sets the pace on the treadmill, I focus on controlled strength reps at the all-in-one station. Then, we changed. She takes over the resistance training, and I step onto the treadmill, adapting the speed to match whatever energy my body has left. The creativity of our routine lies in how we connect through our shared passion. While swapping stations, we blast music or stream live games, cheering on our favourite team, the Wests Tigers - watching the May brothers, Api Koroisau, Jahream Bula, and Alex Twal. We analyse the plays, yell at the screen, and celebrate every point together. Harley and Bella curl up on the floor, panting happily as our loyal mascots. Engaging in this modified movement has radically transformed my wellbeing. The tag-team exertion stimulates vital endorphins that cut through my chronic brain fog and calm my anxiety. Training alongside my mum gives me a structured routine, a sense of purpose, and an undeniable feeling of athletic connection. Moving together has taught me that true wealth in mental health isn't about running fastest. It is about having a teammate who refuses to let you sit on the sidelines of life, keeping the spirit of the game - and the memories of those who cheered for you - alive.

Author Bio: I am a teen sports fanatic from Sydney, Australia, who grew up living and breathing junior rugby league and basketball. After being diagnosed with severe chronic fatigue syndrome a few years ago, my life completely shifted from the competitive playing field to finding new,



MYV competition: People's Choice Award

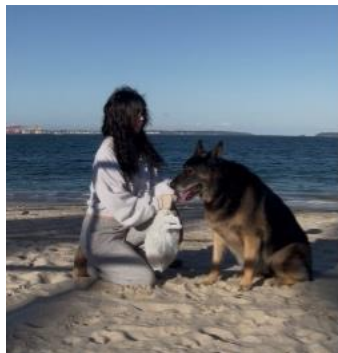
creative pathways for my physical and mental recovery. Today, I manage my anxiety and health by running a home gym “tag-team” routine with my mum, accompanied by our two loyal Staffies, Harley and Bella. I am passionate about showing others that living with a chronic illness doesn't mean sitting on the sidelines of life; it just means finding a new arena to play in.

Where I belong by Sarjna



Dance has been a part of my life since I was three. Now, at fifteen I realize what started as a childhood activity has become my passion and a significant part of who I am. Dance has given me an opportunity to express emotions that words can't. Through dance, I have found joy, developed strength, discipline and resilience, and built meaningful connections with people, culture, and history. One of the most special aspects of dance for me is cultural dance. Cultural dance connects me to ancient traditions, stories, and values that have been passed down through generations. They tell stories about communities, beliefs, celebrations, and important moments in people's lives. What fascinates me most is imagining a time when there was no technology, no televisions, computers, or mobile phones for entertainment. In those days, people used creativity, music, and dance to bring communities together. For me, dance has never been just about performing on stage. It is where I build strong relationships with teachers, fellow dancers, and audiences. It is where I connect with the people I love, build lifelong friendships, and nurture my mental health and wellbeing. Whether we are perfecting a routine, laughing backstage before a performance or volunteering together at community events, these shared experiences have created friendships built on trust, teamwork and mutual respect. Knowing that I have people who genuinely believe in me gives me confidence. As I have grown, I have also taken on the role of mentoring younger dancers. Helping them learn new routines, overcome stage nerves and build confidence has been one of the most rewarding parts of my journey. Seeing their excitement and watching them believe in themselves reminds me of how much encouragement can positively impact someone's wellbeing. Seeing a nervous child walk onto the stage with a smile because they know someone believes in them is incredibly rewarding. Their progress inspires me just as much as I hope I inspire them. People often say that exercise is good for your health. I believe it is much more than that. It creates friendships, builds confidence and reminds us that we never have to face life's challenges alone. I have been fortunate to perform at multicultural festivals, charity events and community celebrations across Sydney. These experiences have allowed me to connect with people from diverse backgrounds while sharing culture through movement. Knowing that our performances bring joy to audiences gives me a deep sense of fulfilment and reminds me of the positive impact physical activity can have in bringing communities together. After more than eleven years of dancing, I can confidently say that dance is much more than a hobby. Dance has shaped who I am today. It has connected me with my family, surrounded me with lifelong friends, given me opportunities to serve my community and provided a lifelong foundation for positive mental health and wellbeing. The connection is not limited to just people around me but also to generations of artists who used dance and music to tell stories and celebrate life. No matter where life takes me in the future, it will always remain a cherished part of my identity. It is not simply something I do, it is where I feel happiest, strongest and most connected.

More than a Walk by Angelina



For a long time, I thought physical activity had to look impressive. I thought it meant training everyday, running faster, and constantly winning and pushing for new goals. That was until the day I started walking my dog along the beach, where I realised moving isn't always about proving yourself, but slowing down. The first walk I took my beautiful dog Bella on was a hard one. After spending so much time indoors during lockdown, me and her needed a change of scenery. I was wearing an oversized hoodie and sweatpants because I expected nothing more than a normal walk. I'll never forget the incomparable feeling of smelling fresh, salty air after spending so much time inside. Or how it felt as though my mind grew quieter, like all the 'drastic' thoughts little me had didn't seem so drastic after spending time near the water. And even years later, that feeling never changed. I started picking up rubbish to take care of the beach. And as I did I started noticing how much litter there was. It made me wonder how people could take such a beautiful place for granted, as if there was carelessness everywhere. But as I continued collecting rubbish I started interacting with the people in my community, and for the moody little tween girl I was, these interactions surprised me. People would smile at me as I walked past, mumbling little 'thank yous', stopping me to chat about the beach, even stopping to give Bella a pat or to lend me a helping hand. Slowly, these interactions showed me that there's still kindness in this world, even when you don't expect it. To me, these walks aren't like typical sports with judges and prizes, they offer me the ability to just simply exist, to the point where I stopped thinking of these walks as exercise. It's simply being able to move at my own pace and breathe with no expectations. It makes me feel a part of something so much bigger than myself. Walking alongside the ocean reminds me how much bigger the world is compared to what troubles me. The horizon stretches further than anyone can see, this beach is only one small part of a huge sea, the same way my struggles are only a small part of a bigger picture out there waiting for me. I wish everyone could realise how small our struggles really are, and there's so much more waiting for us when you don't dwell on negativity. I still have a team alongside me just like sport, my community. The beach belongs to everyone. On any time or day you'll hear different languages, families and friends. Even though our backgrounds are different, we're all there for the same reason: to enjoy the same stretch of ocean. Physical activity doesn't have to look extraordinary to change your life. Sometimes it's as simple as walking beside someone who loves you unconditionally, (even if that person's yourself) and remembering that kindness still exists.

Where Strength was Born by Shreya



Where I Found My Place "Early is on time, on time is late, and late is unacceptable." Those words have been printed on the walls of my Taekwondo dojo for as long as I can remember. At first, I thought they were simply about arriving early. Now I know they represent something much greater: commitment, resilience and the courage to keep showing up. Those lessons carried me through the biggest challenge of my Taekwondo journey- my black belt grading. After almost five hours of patterns, self-defence, sparring and nine successful board breaks, I stood before one final board. My body was exhausted, but the voices of my teammates echoed through the dojo as they cheered me on. We came from different cultures, different schools and walks of life, yet in that moment we were one team, believing in one another. I took a deep breath and struck. The board split cleanly in two. Suddenly, it felt as though my mind had become a feather. Every doubt,

setback and challenge I had carried for six years simply drifted away. I had earned my black belt- but discovered something far more valuable. When I was younger, I struggled to find where I belonged. My mum and dad encouraged me to try different activities, hoping I would find one that felt like home. Nothing truly clicked until I walked into my first Taekwondo class. Training two to three times each week introduced me to people whose lives looked very different from mine. Some spoke different languages. Others celebrated different traditions. We attended different schools across Sydney and came from many cultural backgrounds. Yet in every class began with the same bow of respect and ended with the same encouragement to become better than we were yesterday. As a Fiji-Indian teenager growing up in New South Wales, that experience changed me. Taekwondo showed me that physical activity isn't just about becoming stronger; it's about creating connections. It became the place where friendships were built through trust, teamwork and shared determination instead of shared backgrounds. The dojo also transformed my mental wellbeing. It gave me confidence when I doubted myself, resilience when life became challenging and a community where I felt accepted. Whenever I step onto the mats, the stress of school fades away. replaced by focus, purpose and the support of the people training beside me. Today, as a black belt, I have the privilege of helping teach younger students. Watching a shy child slowly gain confidence reminds me of the person I used to be. If I can encourage just one student to believe in themselves the way my teammates and coaches believed in me, then every challenge I faced has been worthwhile. My coaches often remind us, "Loyalty is number one wherever you go." Those words live far beyond our dojo. They remind me that kindness, encouragement and respect have the power to unite people from every culture and every background. Through Taekwondo, I didn't just find a sport- I found my place.

A Mind in Motion by Sreshta



The holidays were supposed to be exciting. No alarms, no rushing to school, no deadlines. But after a few days, I found myself sitting on the couch, staring out the window as the hours slowly disappeared. I had all the time in the world, yet I felt like I was wasting it. I felt my eyes half-closed. I had been sitting there for the past five hours. What I thought would be fun had turned out to be... boring. When I stood up and

grabbed my ball, I didn't feel like the girl who was usually full of energy and loved sport. Who would have thought the holidays could become their own type of torture? I heard the door open and saw Dad carrying badminton rackets while Mum carried the shuttlecock, ready to play. Then Dad spoke. "Come, let's go out and play. It has been a while." "It's literally freezing outside!" I replied, my eyes wide open. "When did you become an old grandma? Come on!" Dad said enthusiastically. I looked outside. It would be nice to get some refreshing air after sitting in the same spot for five hours. "Fine, let's go." We walked down to the grass area just outside. As soon as I took my first deep breath of the fresh, cool afternoon air, the tight ache in my chest began to loosen. Dad handed me a racket, and Mum tossed the shuttlecock into the air. At first, my mind was still trying to adjust to what I was doing, and the feathered shuttlecock kept dropping past my racket onto the grass. But badminton requires intense focus. As Dad sent a high, arching shot over my head, I scrambled backwards, stretched out my arm, and felt the satisfying smack of a perfect connection. Suddenly, it turned into a fast-paced battle. We lunged left and right, our sneakers skidding across the lawn. I leapt up to smash a shot down, but Dad miraculously scooped it back up. We cheered loudly as our longest rally reached twenty consecutive shots. We didn't talk about plans or work. Instead, we laughed at our clumsy misses and cheered whenever we managed to keep a long rally going. Sweating out my frustration made me feel instantly lighter. By the time we went back home, my mind felt refreshed and quiet. New ideas started rushing in, and the boredom I had felt earlier had disappeared. Moving my body with my family gave me the reset I needed and reminded me that physical activity was not just about staying healthy it was about creating moments of connection and happiness.

Pushed into Stillness by Isabella

For most of my life, physical activity was more than a routine - it was the language through which I understood myself. As a national swimmer and dedicated soccer player, movement shaped my identity, my ambitions and the rhythm of my days. It gave purpose, connection and confidence. But two years ago, everything changed, and I learned how deeply physical activity supports mental wellbeing, especially when it is taken away. During a soccer match, I tore all my ligaments in my ankle, including my ACL. The moment I fell, I felt a sharp pain, but the emotional impact was far more devastating. Swimming had been my dream for years, and soccer was my weekly source of joy. Losing both at once felt like losing the future I had built my life around. In the days that followed, I moved through hospital corridors, medical scans, and conversations about surgery and rehabilitation. Each appointment made the reality clearer: my swimming career would have to stop and my recovery would be long and uncertain. The hardest part was not the injury itself, but the silence that followed. For the first time, I could not rely on movement to clear my mind or calm my worries. I watched my teammates train while I sat on the sidelines, feeling disconnected from the communities that had always supported me. My confidence faded, and I struggled with the weight of losing something that had once defined me. Even simple tasks, like walking to class, felt heavy. I felt as though I had been pushed into stillness, and in that stillness, I lost hope. But slowly, physical activity began to rebuild what had been broken. My physiotherapist encouraged me to start with gentle movement - short walks, supported steps, and slow exercises that felt almost too small to matter. Yet these small movements became my turning point. Walking allowed my thoughts to settle. The rhythm of each step softened the noise in my mind. I began to notice moments of clarity, moments where I felt connected to myself again. As rehabilitation progressed, I incorporated strength exercises and controlled drills designed to build stability in my leg. Each milestone, no matter how small, reminded me that progress is not defined by speed, but by persistence. My family supported me through every stage, and their encouragement strengthened our connection. Even though I could not compete, staying involved with my teams helped me feel part of my community again. What motivates me to stay active now is understanding that movement is not only physical - it is emotional. It helped me rebuild confidence, reduce stress and rediscover hope during one of the most challenging periods of my life. As I continue through Year 11, I carry these lessons with me, grateful for the strength, clarity and connection that movement restored.

Rackets, Rallies and Family Time by Nash



I connect with my family through physical activity to improve my mental health and wellbeing by going to a basketball centre that hosts fun pickleball activities to play with friends and families. As seen in the photo, it shows the basketball centre and two people with rackets, the person standing being me and the person running to the ball my little brother. This photo reminds me of the fun I had when playing the sport with my family instead of just staying home watching tv and doing nothing, being bored out of our minds. Pickleball is a good example of representing what physical activity is because it mixes with the involvement of running, quick movement, balance, coordination, and hitting the ball using your arms and torso, which are key essentials of what represents if an activity can be called a sport. It's also a sport for people to enjoy at any age, which makes it a great, recommended sport to have fun in without having to be extremely good just to be able to play it properly and can be able to be learnt at any age. Pickleball is also a good example for mental health and wellbeing because you'll need to have a sharp focus on where the ball leads to and react to where to move next, offering a mental break from stress related things on your mind. It also helps with making us more joyful and happy as researchers have proven that when we do physical activities such as running, or playing sport, it releases chemicals from our brains, helping us with our mood with the chemical being called 'dopamine' and 'endorphins' that we release, making us happier and giving our brains stress reduction as physical activity can lower stress levels dramatically, and from my experience, after leaving the centre and going back home, I felt more relieved, relaxed and I basically had a clear mind with no homework, exams or assessments swimming through my mind that was giving me stress and tired, making me in a way better mood then before I went to the basketball centre to play pickleball. The whole point of this word story was to show how I connect to my family, which I respond that pickleball is a great way to help connect and socialize with almost anybody because to even play pickleball, you'll have to play against somebody, and in this case for me, since I went out to play pickleball with my family, I connected with my family through physical activity by playing pickleball with them, also building up my confidence in playing the game and strengthening both my understanding of the game and my connection towards my family. Therefore, pickleball is not only a sport, but a great way to stay active and have fun, improving both physical health and mental health while also improving the extra stuff like confidence, memories and the closer relationship towards my family.

My Active Lifestyle by Sharani



Physical activity has always been more than exercise to me. It has become the way I connect with others, manage stress and improve my mental wellbeing. Whether I am playing netball, competing in athletics, running cross country and joining a game of cricket. I have discovered that being active brings people together in ways that words sometimes cannot. When I started high school at Macarthur Girls High School, everything was new. I was excited but also nervous about making new friends and finding where I belonged. Joining sporting activities

helped me feel connected almost immediately. Training, competing and encouraging one another created friendships with students from many different cultural backgrounds. Although we all have different traditions, languages and experiences, sport reminded us that teamwork, kindness and respect are values we all share. Being active has also taught me that leadership is about helping others feel included. As a Student Ambassador, I enjoy welcoming younger students and encouraging them to participate in school activities. During sports events and school programs, I love cheering on younger children, helping them overcome their nerves and reminding them that trying their best is more important than winning. Seeing a shy student smile after finishing a race or joining a game for the first time is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. Those small moments show how powerful encouragement can be. Outside of school, I also enjoy giving back to my community whenever I can. Volunteering at community events and supporting younger children has taught me that physical activity creates opportunities to build confidence, friendships and a sense of belonging. It is inspiring to see families from many different cultures coming together to support one another, proving that movement has the power to unite people regardless of their background. Like many students, I sometimes feel the pressure of balancing schoolwork, leadership responsibilities and extracurricular activities. Whenever I begin to feel overwhelmed, going for a run, playing sport and simply walking with friends helps me clear my mind. I return feeling calmer, more focused and ready to face new challenges. Physical activity reminds me that looking after my mental wellbeing is just as important as achieving academic success. Looking back, I realise that the greatest lessons I have learnt through physical activity are not about winning medals or breaking records. They are about resilience, friendship and supporting others. Every training session, every game and every opportunity to encourage a younger student has helped shape the person I am today. Physical activity has given me confidence, strengthened my mental wellbeing and allowed me to make a positive difference in the lives of others. For me, the greatest achievement is knowing that by lifting others up, we all become stronger together.