



Young Bunbury athletes Jayden Edwards, Shane Cristaldi, Alex Hagan and Alesha Hanczakowski with WA's most successful gymnast Allana Slater. Ms Slater spoke at the launch of the South West Academy of Sport, saying such initiatives were important for supporting development of athletes in regional areas by reducing stressful travel times.

South West Academy of Sports launched

SPORTS ACADEMY: The creation of a South West Academy of Sport became official last week with the presentation of \$100,000 funding from the State Government by South West minister Mark McGowan.

The presentation was on top of \$45,000 previously committed by the Government to establish the academy, which will boost sporting development through the region by providing high level support and training locally.

The academy will also help reduce the stress on families of up-and-coming champions presently forced to travel to the metropolitan area to improve themselves.

But SWAS board chairman Don Punch said there was still a long way to go to turn the initiative into a reality, with sponsorship from businesses needed to help fund the academy.

"State Government funding commitments will cover administration costs, but the development of sports programs for young athletes depends on support from the community and business sectors," he said.

"The SWAS model is similar to how the WA Institute of Sport and the Australian Institute of Sport operates. It provides the opportunity for business to be associated with youth, fitness, sport and promotion of healthy lifestyles in children."

Mr Punch said it was estimated up to \$400,000 would be needed in sponsorship. He believed business riding high on the economic boom of the region would be keen to support young athletes through sponsorship of the academy.

He said the new academy would work with an initial three sports and create scholarship programs to support athletes of sports not initially taken on.

Sports programs operated by SWAS would go out into the region dependent on appropriate sporting facilities, with a Bunbury-based administration centre.

Selection of sports taken on by the academy will be through an open expression of interest process expected to commence shortly.

"A key component for selection of sports will be looking at the existing talent development pathway and the role SWAS would be expected to fulfill," Mr Punch said.

"The academy will be a stepping stone to assist athletes going from the region to WAIS, AIS and other higher level competition."

He said a broad base of services would be provided, including skills and strength development, life skills, scholarships and career education.