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A Malaysian outlet of the We Rock The Spectrum gym.

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We Rock the Spectrum gym for autistic children set to open in Melbourne

Richard Pearce, Preston Leader

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Australia’s first purpose-built gym for autistic kids will soon open its doors in Preston.

A franchise of We Rock The Spectrum gyms in the US, the centre is built for children with special needs, with specialised equipment including ziplines, swings and slides.

All equipment is designed by occupational therapists to aid the sensory development of children with processing disorders, and aids motor skill development and sensory processing.

The play centre also has areas for medical practitioners and allied health professionals to work out of, and aims to be a “hub” for families with children with disabilities.

Thornbury mum Sally Johnson will open the gym, which is now under construction, with brother and business partner Marcus, and says the gym will welcome kids of all abilities.

Ms Johnson’s seven-year-old son Digby was diagnosed with autism at age two, and Sally says since then she had struggled to find a place they felt truly included.

“I always wished there was somewhere I didn’t have to be explaining away his behaviour,” she said.

Ms Johnson said she often took Digby to parks and swimming pools at the crack of dawn or late at night to avoid other families, and after discovering We Rock The Spectrum in the USA was determined to bring it to Australia.

Braeden Hogan, spokesman for Amaze, the peak state body for people on the autism spectrum in Victoria, welcomed the gym and said it would fill a much-needed gap for many families.

Mr Hogan said all kids needed an opportunity to play and the gym would be a pathway for families to re-enter public spaces others took for granted.

“We see a lot of social isolation in kids on the autism spectrum and their families and this is a great way to build social support for them,” he said.

“It also offers kids a chance to use essential equipment for their development that may otherwise cost them thousands of dollars.”

While the gym was designed for children on the autism spectrum, it is available for children with all sorts of disabilities and the gyms in the US often have a 50/50 split of those with disabilities and those without, Ms Johnson said.

The first gym opened in 2010 and after becoming a franchise in 2014 there are now more than 60 gyms across the world.

For more information go to werockthespectrumaustralia.com



📷 Sally Johnson, Marcus Johnson and Digby are all looking forward to opening day. Picture: Luis Enrique Ascui



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