

SPORT TACKLES THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING CRISIS – ACCESS SPORT CIO

Summary

As a member of the Sport For Development Coalition Access Sport CIO is responding to the request for submissions for case studies, learning and evidence on 'sport and physical activity, COVID-19 and the mental health and wellbeing crisis'.

The impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of children and young people has been well documented – as has the positive impact that sport and physical activity can bring.

This paper sets out specific examples of how our work has contributed to the positive mental health and wellbeing of participants and volunteers during the period March 2020 – April 2021 (i.e. from the first national lockdown in the UK to the present day).

About Access Sport CIO

As a sports charity, we specialise in creating exciting and accessible new sporting opportunities for disadvantaged and disabled young people.

In order to provide some context for our submission, in the year to 31 March 2020 we supported **7043** participants of whom **2,918** were female, **2,035** were disabled and **3,093** were from ethnically diverse communities.

- ⇒ **25** young people trained to act as leaders in their communities
- ⇒ **302** young people upskilled through our Coach Clever course
- ⇒ **342** new regular volunteers and sports coaches were recruited and trained to support community organisations
- ⇒ **135** community sports clubs were developed, across London, Bristol, Manchester and Oxford
- ⇒ **183** Special Educational Needs centres and Pupil Referral Units were engaged through outreach sessions
- ⇒ **28** disabled young people completed quality work placements

Our work during the pandemic - overview:

In March 2020 when the first national lockdown prevented Access Sport and its community sports clubs from delivering face-to-face sessions, we focused on increasing our capacity to deliver support online – e.g. by developing an inclusive activities webpage with practical ideas for keeping disabled participants active at home, running parent support workshops and 'BMX' fitness classes online and helping clubs continue to connect with participants via Zoom. We also developed a new 'lockdown bike club' which focused on supporting community cycling clubs within our Making Trax National Network.

Throughout 2020 we continued to increase our digital support but we also knew that some participants were struggling with accessing the internet, and for many this type of support wasn't enough. Working in partnership our Disability Inclusion Team delivered sports equipment and activity booklets to families with disabled children, so that they could stay active at home and enjoy a boost to their mental health and wellbeing. Towards the end of 2020 and into 2021 we have returned to live sessions (where permitted in accordance with Government guidelines), and we have also continued to provide many aspects of our digital support.

Please see below specific examples and case studies taken from the past year:

1. Flyerz Inclusive Hockey

Launched in 2011 by Access Sport to make hockey more inclusive, Flyerz is a national movement which now counts nearly 50 hockey clubs all offering disability-inclusive participation.

a) **Flyerz Surveys - findings show positive impact on mental health of participants and families/carers:**

In early 2021, Access Sport sent a Flyerz Participant Survey to all Flyerz hockey clubs. Please note the survey is still in-field so we do not have complete and final data. However, we can share the following preliminary findings from the 37 responses received so far across 5 clubs (Tunbridge Wells, Wakefield, Harborne, London Wayfarers, and Falcon Flyerz):

- Results so far demonstrate the negative impact of the pandemic on wellbeing:
 - 59% of respondents indicated that **their mental wellbeing had worsened** during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns
 - 76% of respondents indicated that **their connections with friends had worsened**
- The results make a very strong case for Flyerz really supporting our participants and their clubs through this difficult time:
 - 78% of respondents reported that **support from their Flyerz club and community had a positive impact on their mental health** during this time
 - 73% reported that Flyerz had **a positive impact on their connections with friends**

Our Parent/Carer Survey 2020 (for which we had 31 responses) shows that participation in Flyerz has a positive impact on not only the wellbeing of participants, but on the wellbeing of their wider family group:

- 87% of parents/carers said that **their child's wellbeing has improved** as a result of being part of Flyerz
- 68% of parents/carers reported **improvements in their own wellbeing** as a result of their child attending Flyerz

b) **Tunbridge Wells Hockey Club – Flyerz enables participants to ‘stay connected’, which boosts mental wellbeing:**

Tunbridge Wells Hockey Club has a Flyerz section and Francis Bridgeman, the volunteer coach, is one of Flyerz most passionate advocates. When the country went into lockdown in March 2020, Francis worked tirelessly to support his most vulnerable participants, immediately dropping off equipment to every Flyerz member, establishing online Zoom sessions and doing everything he could to support continued participation and social interaction from the home.

These online sessions caught the eye of the national media and were profiled in The Telegraph and on BBC news, resulted in an England Hockey Innovation award, and attracted a host of celebrity participants including Kate and Helen Richardson-Walsh and none other than Basil Brush!

In spite of the national lockdowns, Francis has also managed to add new players to the Club – so players who first joined online are now playing in-person! **Please see video here which shows the positive impact of these sessions on participants:** <https://youtu.be/TWNeSK34Khc>

*"I think we'll actually know each other better, understand each other better
and be that much closer"*

Francis Bridgeman, Volunteer Coach, Tunbridge Wells Hockey Club

2. Winter Warriors – 62% of children and 59% of parents/guardians felt an improvement in their mental health.

Winter Warriors is a collaborative initiative between Access Sport and Nova Sports & Coaching, to donate inclusive multisport equipment and activity booklets to families across our projects, with a focus on reaching disabled children and their families.

The Access Sport team designed the Winter Warriors initiative to support families to remain active during the winter months, whilst community clubs were closed for the holidays or shut due to pandemic. As part of the initiative families with disabled children received one of our activity booklets with over 30 different inclusive activities to suit all abilities, ages and home situations. Some families were also able to choose between a standard or sensory multi-sport equipment box containing things like bean bags, different balls, tennis rackets and skipping ropes.

The booklets encourage individual and whole family activity, as well as including wellbeing ideas like baking, quizzes and outdoor scavenger hunts to ensure families had a range of activities to do to support their physical and mental wellbeing. We reached over 1000 families with this initiative. **Please see video here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YevWNvxJNl8> **and infographic (attached).**

"It really cheered everyone up to receive the pack".

3. Access Sport Young Leader of the Year – Josh Jones, Bruntwood Park BMX Club

Josh Jones is a nine-year old BMXer who rides at South Manchester's Bruntwood BMX club, part of Access Sport's Making Trax Club Network. Josh has high levels of anxiety which regular BMX cycling helps him to manage.

In the summer of 2020 when sessions at Bruntwood resumed after lockdown 1.0, Josh found himself unable to participate on account of living in Oldham which was still under travel restrictions. Josh's mental health began to deteriorate with him going without food and describing the feeling of having 'dinosaurs in his stomach'. Knowing that many other young people were suffering in similar ways, Josh and his mother Charlotte launched a petition and lobbied local authorities to try to amend the guidance regarding young people and sport. The campaign was successful in persuading Oldham Council and British Cycling to revise their guidance on restrictions, meaning Josh and many others were able to ride outdoors again and improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Please see Josh's video here: <https://youtu.be/oLUhINPZyn0>

"It makes me happy seeing my friends and riding my bike" – Joshua Jones, aged 9.

4. Woolwich Inclusive Yoga

Access Sport's award-winning Disability Inclusion Programme has been running since 2011, engaging disabled participants, upskilling disability inclusive coaches, volunteers and young people and supporting community sports clubs to become more inclusive.

In 2020 the Access Sport Disability Inclusion team began working with Woolwich Inclusive Yoga club, helping the club get up and running and then helping it move to online sessions during the first lockdown (including by purchasing yoga mats for the children). **Please see case study attached.**

"It has been a wonderful privilege to teach and watch the children's confidence on and off the yoga mat grow with each session"

5. Volunteering - "I think for me it's helped my mental health a lot, especially around lockdown"

We also wanted to highlight the benefits of volunteering on mental health and wellbeing. Volunteers are the backbone of grassroots community sports clubs and their contribution can have a profound impact on local communities. Team100 is Access Sport's volunteering project, developing and testing new approaches to community volunteering. Funded by Sport England, Team100 is empowering local people to get their community active. Access Sport's Team 100 programme piloted three successful projects in Charlton and Burgess Park (London) and Easton (Bristol).

In 2020, The Social Investment Company (TSI) completed an external evaluation of our Team100 project. They interviewed volunteers to find out more about their experience of volunteering and how volunteering has supported their wellbeing during Covid-19:

- Half of the volunteers interviewed mentioned that they started to volunteer because of the pandemic.
- For some, they said it was important to have something to do during their downtime.
- For others, volunteering was the best way of keeping motivated, getting out of the house and keep their children busy.
- *"Volunteering definitely made me feel better about being between contracts because the freelancing world is harsh. It was a big confidence boost when I really needed it.(...)" (TSI Report)*
- Andy Moulton volunteered with Team100 Charlton at the start of the pandemic after being furloughed from his job. Andy collected and delivered meals to residents weekly. Andy was very thankful for the opportunity to volunteer. *"It was just something that gave me a personal little boost every Friday that I could go out and help people struggling to get food. (...) Every week, I used to look forward to Friday's."*
- Josephine Ocaka (Team100 Burgess Park) has been regularly volunteering and supporting Burgess Sports with their food delivery programme and virtual run. Josephine said *"I think for me it's helped my mental health a lot, especially around lockdown"*.

*"It was just something that gave me a personal little boost every Friday that I could go out and help people struggling to get food. (...)
Every week, I used to look forward to Friday's."*

6. Spotlight on our current work: Mental Fitness Matters – Championing Good Mental Wellbeing within Community Cycling Clubs

- Access Sport's Making Trax Programme is a multi-award winning programme launched in February 2011 to create a thriving youth cycling scene in London. The programme achieves this by creating community clubs, developing new cycling facilities, new coaches

and new volunteers and delivering directly to community partners such as schools, pupil referral units and disabled people's organisations.

- Making Trax has since expanded across London, Bristol and Manchester and we are now developing a network community cycling clubs across the country. We currently have 50 members of our National Network, from bike clubs in Walthamstow to Cornwall, and we work closely with these clubs to develop them, including supporting them to engage with a wider demographic of participants and advising them on social impact and capacity building.
- In early 2021, some clubs within the National Network expressed concerns that participants may be experiencing mental health issues connected with the Covid-19 pandemic and they wanted to know how they could support them. In response, the Access Sport National Network team is developing a toolkit to share with clubs, which encourages clubs to assess their mental health awareness and sign-posts them to key mental health resources, including online mental health courses and psychological first aid training.
- We recognise that the community cycling clubs within our National Network, including the individual club leaders, are in a unique position to engage directly with participants who may be suffering from a range of mental health issues linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. This key piece of work will have a far-reaching impact, increasing the capacity and confidence of those clubs in providing vital support to individuals. If we continue to see positive results, we will also consider extending this work to our Disability and Cycling Inclusion clubs.
- We are currently considering how we will measure and report on impact in this area, including for example: the number of clubs that complete a self-assessment; improvements in self-assessment score vs baseline; clubs, coaches and volunteers who have been upskilled; clubs that make a public commitment about mental health; mental health awareness events/activities by clubs; clubs with mental health champions and mental health action plans written; clubs that have connected with their local Mind services; case studies & impact reports; quotes and testimonials. We are also looking into the use of wellbeing surveys.

"We want to help clubs create a culture for good mental wellbeing and feel confident supporting people experiencing mental health problems - so they can thrive inside and outside the club"

- Access Sport

For further detail on any of these projects, please contact: amy.debroise@accesssport.co.uk

Appendices: Woolwich Inclusive Yoga Case Study, Winter Warriors Infographic.