

INQUIRY REPORT

Evidence from Birmingham Sports and Education Foundation

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1. Healthtastic

Birmingham Sports and Education Foundation [“BSEF”] has run a health-related programme called Healthtastic, which is similar to those run by many other BBL clubs. BSEF planned the programme with advice during the planning phase from the Birmingham Primary Care Trust and StreetGames.

The Healthtastic programme is a physical activity and healthy living programme geared specifically towards young people aged 8 to 15 in Birmingham with physical and/or learning disabilities. Young people with disabilities have an increased risk of becoming obese, due to a lack of physical activity and healthy living awareness. Birmingham City Council said in 2010 that approximately one in three people with a learning disability in Birmingham are obese, compared with just one in five people in the general population.

The objectives of Healthtastic are to:

- provide regular sporting opportunities and healthy living advice to young people aged between 8 and 15 years old in Birmingham with physical and/or learning disabilities;
- reduce the overall level of obesity among disabled young people within Birmingham;
- help young people with disabilities to develop an increased self-confidence to participate in different physical activities and motivate them to learn about the value of a healthy, active lifestyle;
- provide weekly activity and healthy learning activities free of charge to reduce cost barriers;
- provide participants with increased confidence to participate within a group environment, interacting with peers, and taking part in activities that previously felt uncomfortable; and
- improve awareness, knowledge and key skills, which enable the beneficiaries to sustain healthy lifestyles following the completion of the programme.

The project delivered over a 12-month period, offers five 8-week blocks at each centre for 15 to 20 participants, with a one-hour session per week, providing fun and physical activity and integrated health education sessions.

The physical activity sessions include body awareness activities, which use very simple and easy games using basic body movements that allow children to discover their own body in a fun way, as well as help promote the participants’ basic motor skills. Additionally, there is a leadership aspect that allows participants to lead specific sessions, which provides significant benefits to their confidence and soft skills.

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Each session:

- helps to create awareness around what represents a healthy balanced diet by understanding the five main food groups and why they are important to our health, as well as the correct proportions of each food group;
- promotes awareness and understanding of the harmful effects of smoking and alcohol in order to help deter young people from smoking and drinking;
- creates unique team and group focus activities that offer an alternative to competitive games, thereby teaching beneficiaries to play collectively by overcoming challenges together;
- is led by a highly qualified disabled and/or non-disabled trainer to increase the level of engagement; and
- is closed to the public, as participants are far less self-conscious when taking part in sport and physical activity privately.

The programme is run in two primary schools: Queen Alexandra College; and St Georges Community Hub and in the National Futsal Arena.

65 disabled children between the ages of 8 and 15 attended the sessions during the first year and the project’s initial cost was £13,691.58, which was funded by Pfizer,

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The project's achievements in the first year were as follows:

- The prevalence of obesity amongst the target group was reduced by 5%;
- More than 80 hours of basketball coaching was delivered with sessions attended 65 disabled children;
- More than 50% of the project's beneficiaries were signposted towards opportunities to continue their participation in regular disabled basketball coaching, as well as regular competitive basketball opportunities at Black Cats, a local club based in Kings Heath;
- Across each 8-week block participants significantly improved their knowledge about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and performed significantly better in post-project health quizzes; and
- All participants cited positive changes in confidence as a result of regular engagement in physical activity alongside peers with similar disabilities.

In addition to the many participants who benefited from the project, the impact was wider spread than initially thought. Indirectly, the families of the beneficiaries have seen the impact that physical activity has had on the lives of their children and have themselves become involved in basketball as a result. The health benefits provided have also been extensive and widespread amongst these families with many parents commenting on improved nutrition as a result of the knowledge that their children have gained.