



Insight driving innovation and impact

Supporting Girls with Autism Case Study: Clare Mount Specialist Sports College

May 2022

Believing in every child's future

Introduction

The Youth Sport Trust national Lead Inclusion School network has developed a toolkit for schools to Support Girls with Autism, focusing on helping to make PE and sport inclusive and enjoyable for all.

Background

Clare Mount Specialist Sports College is a Secondary Special School in the Wirral. The school is a specialist centre for young people with autism. Jon White, the Inclusion Lead at the school has been involved with both a project, funded through Sport England entitled ' Find Your Tribe' and in the creation of a Supporting Girls with Autism toolkit. The school has a large proportion of male students, with only a fifth of the student population being female. Clare Mount is involved in a number of Youth Sport Trust projects including Girls Active Stepping up for Change¹. The school prioritises PE, sport and physical activity and sees the value it has for their young people.

Activities

This year, to develop the project within their school, Jon extended the Supporting Girls with Autism work to link it with a mentoring scheme for the young people. This has enabled the girls to participate in regular sessions working with a YST Athlete Mentor, Jenna Downing. It has helped shift the focus from predominantly sport to leadership and mentoring which has appealed more to those participating.

Fourteen girls are now trained as mentors through the funding from this project. Instead of conducting focus groups at the start of the project, Jon used the focus group approach as an opportunity for the girls to reflect on how they had found the mentoring sessions and what they wanted to do next on their leadership journey.

Key learnings that have emerged from the focus groups included a strong theme about not making the young people feel forced into a decision and reinforced the importance of choice.



As part of the Champion Mindset programme, Jenna Downing, World Champion inline skater and British Champion, has mentored 15 of our girls in an 8 week long programme. The girls have had a fantastic time and gained invaluable skills along the way.

¹ <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/programmes/girls-active-stepping-up-for-change#:~:text=Building%20on%20our%20work%20with,a%20critical%20time%20of%20change.>
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Focus Group Questions

- How do you feel about Champion Mindset with Jenna? Did it go well? Did you enjoy it?
- How do you feel about helping other girls to get involved in PE lessons and sport?
 - What is it about PE and sport that can make people feel anxious?
 - How can we get around these feelings?
 - What can we do to help people feel comfortable?

Young people were selected for the project together with the support team and form tutors who have a good understanding of the girls and their needs. This helped to ensure that the right young people were targeted. This collaboration and partnership working was key to making the project a success.

'just being asked is such a shock to so many children that they pour out what they want to say' Jon

In previous years, Jon has worked with students from a local university to use their expertise and support to conduct the focus groups. This year he has identified a teaching assistant within the school who will be trained up to run the intervention and focus groups next year. Running the focus groups himself this year has given him a good overview of the work and helped him to get to know the girls better.

Case Study Example

A local high school has been supported by Jon to use the toolkit. The special needs coordinator (SENCo) at the school explored attendance patterns in girls with suspected autism at the school and to identify key young people for the project. The Supporting Girls with Autism toolkit was used as an intervention to work with this group to understand more about their barriers and how they can be improved.

By improving the attendance rates for these young people there is a natural impact on their overall attainment.

Benefits

Improvements have been seen in young people's levels of confidence and willingness to engage and hold eye contact. Friendships have developed amongst young people in the group as they have begun to understand each other better and challenge their preconceptions about each other.

On a whole school level, there has also been impact since the inception of the project with more awareness of the value of focus groups and student voice across the school.

Jon is also working across schools in the local area to promote the value of the work as they are finding the prevalence of undiagnosed autism in mainstream settings is increasing.

'It is really important to help schools to find out what is working and what isn't and get adept at using the toolkit regularly to consult' Jon

YST RESEARCH

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) is a national children's charity passionate about creating a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits that come from play and sport. YST Research offers research, analysis, insight and evaluation services to organisations with an interest in the wider children and young people's sector. Our research expertise is focussed on improving the wellbeing of children and young people through sport and physical activity.

Our specialisms include:

- Education, PE and school sport
- Community sport / clubs
- Early years settings
- Life skills and employability
- Activism and volunteering
- Health (physical, social and emotional)

For our latest research findings, visit

<https://www.youthsporttrust.org/news-insight/research>

By working with us, you are supporting us to achieve our mission to improve children's lives and their future.



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