

BEYOND THE BASELINE – THETFORD ACADEMY



THE NEED

- 1 in 4 children don't feel that they belong at school. Participating in sport in school is associated with higher levels of wellbeing, including belonging
- Only 47% of children and young people in the UK meet the Chief Medical Officer guidelines of recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.
- Improved leadership skills and increase confidence helped young people to gain additional volunteering positions
- Programmes promoting leadership development provide young people with numerous benefits including knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes
- 39% of young people recognise that being a good leader is important to getting a good job
- Three quarters of parents of children 18 or under think that sport and play helps mental wellbeing (74%)
- Children who report more positive attitudes towards physical activity are happier than those who do not report as many positive attitudes towards physical activity
- Young people from low affluence families are less likely to be active compared to those from medium and high affluence families

THE PROJECT

Beyond the Baseline

The programme uses tennis, and inspirational tennis mentors to help young people fulfil their potential. Delivered in partnership with Youth Sport Trust and their team of Athlete Mentors.

Schools identify a maximum of 25 young people to make up a project group, targeting students that are disengaged and need additional support to help raise their aspirations. Selected students will preferably have an interest in sport and being active and will be enthused by taking part in a tennis specific programme.

Once the project group is in place schools are allocated their Tennis Mentor for the programme. These are former and current professional tennis players trained to support the development of the young people through delivering visits that inspire and nurture students' aspirations. The mentors share their stories of how they achieved success, teach tennis skills, and deliver classroom-based workshops that focus on employability skills (specifically personal, social, creative and thinking skills).

The Tennis Mentor delivers 3 half-day visits over a term and following this the project group will plan, organise and deliver a tennis project for other young people in their school or community (where possible creating a link with their local tennis venue).

THE IMPACT

Thetford Academy

Thetford Academy is a coeducational secondary school and sixth form with academy status and is a part of the Inspiration Trust family of schools, which spans Norfolk and Suffolk.

Danny Burton previously worked for Youth Sport Trust, where he first heard about Beyond the Baseline, since moving back to teaching, he has taken the project with him and applied it at several schools across East Anglia as he believes it **“can be a really powerful tool”**. He is currently the curriculum lead for P.E. at Thetford Academy, where he has run the Beyond the Baseline project for the last three years.

After using the Beyond the Baseline programme initially as **“a catalyst to get some young people involved in sports leadership”**, Danny has developed the programme to benefit their student resource base. The group is made up of approximately 30 students who have a special need, most common of which

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is mild autism. He now uses Beyond the Baseline as an opportunity to **“get them involved in tennis and to give them some confidence and competence in something slightly different.”**

He says, **“The joy of the project is that you start on a blank canvas, think OK, where do I want it to go this year and where can it make the biggest impact for our young people.”**

Being a large school with roughly 1400 students (300 per year group), facilitating P.E. lessons can be difficult, teaching year groups in half cohorts, so teaching 150 students at one time, there was a large contingent of young people who had no confidence or competency in physical activity, some having come from much smaller, nurturing primary schools.

Last year the P.E. department was restructured to include a fifth group of students, which includes those facing barriers when it comes to engaging with sport. Those barriers may include; deprivation, lack of social confidence, disengagement and autism. One of these groups were made up of 18 students in Year 7, new to the school, they became the Nurture group.

A leadership group with 10 Year 8 students was then created, previously the leadership group has been older students (Year 10s and 11s), but this year Danny selected students who had come through Year 7 and showed some leadership qualities. It's important to note that not all these students had been sports leaders before but are now regularly taking part in the school's leadership academy.

A few of the Year 8 students in the leadership group had been part of the Nurture group the previous year, with Beyond the Baseline being **“the springboard for them getting involved.”**

The Mentor – Jade Windley

When asked what the impact of having the athlete mentor involved was, Danny responded, **“It's brilliant, I've worked with Jade now for 6/7 years and it's probably the main reason I continue to do the project. It's so powerful. I've worked with athlete mentors in the past and I'd say Jade is the best one I've had.”**

He goes on to discuss the importance of continually having the same athlete mentor has led to them developing a succinct working relationship. One where they both understand how each other works best, they can bounce off one another and importantly Jade knows the school and the students.

The first barrier for Jade, according to Danny, was **“none of the leadership group are tennis players, we're going to be doing this tennis festival, and nobody knows how to play tennis.”**

Jade was quickly able to squash that when she gave the group lots of fun and engaging games and ideas to try. As an athlete mentor she encouraged the idea that they weren't just going to be setting up games of tennis, they're getting people active and having fun and they just happen to be using tennis as the medium through which to do it.

The Project

In April came the first visit from athlete mentor, Jade, where she met the Nurture group and ran some team activities, building confidence. Then the second visit Jade touched base with the Nurture group briefly to say hello before working with the leadership group and co-creating the festival style event which they would run for the Nurture group in the third session.

Jade started with communication games developing the Nurture groups social skills and then building in we've got some movement. To further build confidence, Jade introduced a game where the students would create different shapes with rope, while wearing a blindfold. On this Danny said, **“the fact that she had these really unconfident young people wearing blindfolds was amazing and by the end of that first session, they clearly built a relationship with her quite quickly.”**

The group then got the tennis nets and rackets out and began playing lots of rallies, games with cones and challenges, including 'how many keepy uppies can you do in a minute?'

All the activities were linked to working together and communicating with other people. Between each task there was an opportunity for people to ask questions or to sit down and have a chat, **“It was all very informal, which was nice”** added Danny.

At the beginning of the second session Jade quickly said hello to the Nurture group before working with the leadership group. Together they had an hour in the classroom where she told them a bit more about Beyond the Baseline and gave them some resources and food for thought. Then the leaders headed outside and began planning and leading the festival style event, essentially a rehearsal for the following session when they would be running the session for the Nurture group.

The leaders successfully led the Nurture group through the festival style event. The leaders enjoyed it so much that towards the end of term they arranged another inter-house tennis festival. This time for 60 students!

"It was great to see how those young people could translate what they'd done with Jade, with small group of 18 to a group of 60, they looked at the logistical challenge and had the confidence to say "Oh, yeah, we can make that work" and that wouldn't have happened if it weren't for Jade."

Danny goes on to discuss how important it was breaking down that initial barrier, **"It doesn't matter if you can't play tennis, we're developing leadership and tennis is just the medium for us to do it."**

The idea of leading a second, larger event came from the young people involved. The school emphasised that this was a great example of co-creation, the students weren't only involved in the decision-making process but started it. **"They said "we could do it. We can make it work" and so I let them crack on and they did a really good job, they catered for a lot of young people and there was a real buzz to it."**

Nell and Lucas

When asked if there were any students in particular that benefitted significantly from the programme, two sprung to mind, Nell and Lucas.

"Nell is physically very small, but incredibly able, she's a talented netballer, but does because of her size, doesn't have the confidence to communicate and is often overshadowed by the other students because of her size."

"Lucas is a very keen young person who doesn't quite have the social confidence to translate it. He's the kind of student who volunteers answers and helps to carry kit out but can be segregated because he's not one of the 'cool kids'. When he's working with younger people, he's brilliant. You can see he's got that nurturing trait that, the bit you can't teach. He's very empathetic and supportive. He's great at recognising when to step in and help someone."

Lucas and Nell are two of the four students from last year's leadership group who are regularly part of the school's leadership academy. They now support multi-sport outreach to the local primary feeder schools for Thetford Academy.

Several students still proudly wear their Beyond the Baseline T-Shirts during P.E. sessions!

Context

When asked if he would still be able to run a project like Beyond the Baseline without the funding from the LTA Tennis Foundation, the response was, **"It would be more difficult. Jade's tennis knowledge is better than the whole of our P.E. department!"**

He then goes on to say that while he could run a version of the programme, he wouldn't be able to use tennis effectively, **"I love teaching tennis, but it didn't get the time that other sports did when I was training, and it never has done since".**

The school re-emphasised the importance of the athlete mentor, **"Having Jade's subject knowledge was really good. Having an athlete mentor anyway is a really good catalyst to get people motivated in a slightly different way. The fact that the motivation is coming from a different person, with a different voice, from a different context is really powerful."**

Danny also admits that if he were to do the programme himself, he might not have used the student resource base, which resulted in involving the Nurture group. He went on **“having the branding of the project, and saying, we’re going to do this programme with the LTA and with Youth Sport Trust. We’ve got three days with an athlete mentor. It just made it look and feel a bit different and a bit more important than just the school-based leadership project.”**

When discussing any other potential barriers for the programme ‘time’ was highlighted as a significant hurdle. **“Fortunately,”** he says, **“I’m in a role where I can create time and get my lessons covered to be able to facilitate projects like this, but in other schools that’s quite difficult”**

When asked the value that the programme holds, specifically for students in the local area, Danny responded, **“It’s huge. We’re in a deprived area with no tennis club as an exit route. Also, every P.E. teacher is keen to have tennis on the curriculum, so if we can give the students the fundamentals to be able to play the game or the confidence to be able to hold a rally, then they can access it. That’s our goal is here at the moment.”**

To conclude, Danny summarized the project. **“For me, Beyond the Baseline has always been about inspiring people to be more confident and competent in physical activity and using tennis as a vehicle to do that. We’re not trying to create the next tennis player, but we are trying to get people enjoying the love of the playing tennis and being confident playing tennis with their peers.”**