

Tala Zayat Girls Active Committed Learner Winner, South Region



Tala, 13, joined Alperton Community School, in Brent halfway through Year 7. The rest of her year group had already made the tricky transition into secondary school, settled in and made new friends. Tala, however, faced the daunting prospect of arriving halfway through the school year without knowing anyone. The only new girl, she felt she stuck out like a sore thumb and that the rest of her classmates had already formed firm friendship groups. Originally from Syria, Tala didn't speak much English, which was an additional barrier to bonding with her new classmates. This made her feel shy, and she retreated into herself after struggling to make new friends.

One glimmer of light for Tala was her love of PE lessons. Her PE Teacher Rachael White suggested that she sign up for afterschool sports clubs. She was unsure at first, but after some gentle encouragement from Rachael, Tala's love for sport won out and she decided to give it a go. She would turn up at the changing rooms after school and change into her PE kit, regardless of what sport was taking place. She was determined to give everything a go. At first, she wasn't quite ready to chat to the others, but over time she made many new friends through sport. She grew in confidence and spoke up at the PE clubs which, in turn, helped her to find her voice in class. This had an enormously positive impact on her academic performance.

It hadn't gone unnoticed by her teachers that Tala was a really bright girl who simply lacked the confidence to untap her true academic potential. They were thrilled to see her schoolwork improve. Thanks to the Girls Active programme, Tala became even more involved with sport, spurring her continued progress in the classroom. As a result, Tala was nominated for a Girls Active Committed Learner award, recognising the improved commitment to learning as a direct result of increased sports participation. She now excels in all her lessons, aided by the fact that her English skills are improving day on day as she chats to her new friends. Tala has gone from being one of the quietest girls in her year group to someone with the confidence to take on leadership roles such as Form Representative. While Tala has tried everything, football is one of her favourites, which she says is not just for boys!

'Playing sport helped me to make friends and develop my confidence. When I started in Year Seven, I didn't know any one and I was really quiet. Speaking up at the PE clubs helped me find my voice in lessons. If it weren't for sport, I would still be the same shy girl I was when I joined the school. I am so grateful to Girls Active.'

'Since arriving from Syria, Tala has accessed every opportunity available to her,' says Rachael White, PE Teacher. 'She had minimal English, but was very interested in sport. She began showing up to the girls changing room after school, not knowing which club was on, but no matter what was happening, she would do it,' she continues. 'Tala has greatly improved her English, is excelling in all her subjects and taking on leadership roles such as Form Representative. She used to be so quiet but now she's a real leader. And when it comes to fixtures we can rely on her to take the captain role.'

