All About Aaron!

Aaron is in Year 4 at a local Catholic primary school in Wigan, who is in the process of being diagnosed for autism and is learning to control his anger. With limited communication skills, break and lunchtimes were a lonely place for Aaron with difficulty interacting with his peers. This all changed when Aaron was invited to represent his school at the local School Games athletics event. In the words of his mum:

"He doesn't usually communicate much, just the bare minimum, but his excitement was something I had never seen before."

Aaron's progress since the event is an inspiration to fellow young people who can access lifelong skills through participation in sport and physical activity.

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Objectives

- To increase the engagement of inactive young people into the School Games programme
- To provide the opportunity for young people to represent their school in an inter-school sports competition for the first time.

Who was the target audience and how were they engaged?

The aim of the activity was to support young people to find a passion for sport and physical activity. We worked with students who were either inactive, disengaged or had a low physical literacy competency, to find that passion and help them to represent their school for the first time in a fun, inter-school festival.

The School Games athletics event was designed with the School Games values at the heart of the competition, emphasising the importance of having fun when taking part. Key Stage 5 students from the Wigan Athletic Community Trust acted as positive role models for the participants by delivering a carousel of activities on the day.

Why was the activity unique?

The event details the importance of creating positive experiences for young people. Aligned with the School Games pledge of tackling inequalities, this event provides an initial opportunity for pupils to explore new sports and activities, whilst creating a sense of belonging through representing their school community.

Alongside the event, all finer details of the participants journey were considered. From reducing anxiety of participants by minimising waiting times, to taking the time to celebrate personal achievements as a group after each station, the participants were made to feel empowered throughout the process.

What was the impact felt in schools and by CYP?

The impact of the event was immediate for Aaron. Aaron's mum describes the immediate and substantial impact on Aaron's life:

"Aaron absolutely loved the sports event; he was so excited to tell me everything about it when he got home. He doesn't usually communicate much, just the bare minimum, but his excitement was something I had never seen before. Since attending the event, Aaron asked to join in the coding club after school and he also occasionally goes to Wigan Youth Zone. He also plays out in the street with other children. The event really helped him to progress with his social anxiety issues; I am so proud of how far he has come since the event. He has told me that he will be in the end of year show at school playing the guitar and speaking! Thanks to his newfound confidence and improved self-esteem, I believe he will be able to do it".

Why is this an example of School Games best practice?

The mission of the School Games is to make a positive and meaningful difference to the lives of children and young people through sport and physical activity. The School Games Organiser (SGO) created an opportunity which provided access to sport for young people that may have missed out, but most importantly has substantially and positively impacted their lives. Through reframing competition and utilising a targeted approach, young people like Aaron can continue to experience the positive experiences that sport and physical activity can bring.

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