Secondary School Focus #2: Jo McDonald

Bio

Name & Type: Jo McDonald (Active Partnership), local secondary schools
Location: Humber
Impact Award Category: Secondary School Focus
Term: Autumn

Summary of Activity

In collaboration with the SGOs in Humber, Jo McDonald from the Active Partnership, identified a huge cohort of secondary school girls who either lacked confidence in sport, had become disengaged with sport, were body conscious, or felt 'belittled' by elite teams in school. Local and national insight from Active Lives data, SGO knowledge, and teacher testimonies revealed the drop-off in activity levels among girls during the move from primary to secondary school.

To remedy this, Jo held two events titled the Northbank and Southbank Carousels in collaboration with Local Authority Leisure Centres. This was aimed specifically at girls in years 9 and 10, but will be expanded to year 8 also, to give them the opportunity to attend an event outside of school and feel comfortable in the surrounding.

The main aim of the work was to allow the girls to represent their schools at a PE event, to introduce them to local authority leisure centres to offer the opportunity to try non-core PE curriculum activities, and above all to engage them in a range of physical activities in a non-pressured and light-hearted environment.

Activities included ta chi, curling, walking netball, Zumba, aerobics, spike ball, low net volleyball, and gym. These were delivered over the course of one day by various coaches and partners known to the AP including LA Sports Development at Grimsby Leisure Centre and Beverley Leisure Centre.

Given the event's success, Jo is now looking to introduce the activity in all academic year planning of the School Games, as well as introducing it across year groups. Schools and leisure centres alike were able to see the benefits of the School Games and will continue to be involved in activity.

Impact on Young People

While the girls arrived looking anxious, inhibitions reduced as the day went on and they were buzzing with rosy cheeks when they left. Jo says a number of girls approached her unprompted at the end of the sessions thanking them for a great event.

Initial feedback from the schools who attended was glowing, with many of the accompanying teachers saying their girls had really enjoyed the event and felt that doing activities that are not in the PE curriculum or competitive, such as the use of gym really opened their eyes to how physical activity can be unintimidating. Teachers, and by extension schools, were further engaged or re-

engaged towards the School Games offering and importance of the PE curriculum.

Rachel from Holderness Academy said: "*Thank you so much for Friday, my girls had a thoroughly enjoyable time and were buzzing on the journey home. Like I said it was the first time most of them had represented the school at anything, never mind a sporting activity. They loved all the activities on offer… We would definitely be interested in doing this again".*

Key Learnings

Jo recommends avoiding traditional PE activities, instead opt for activities such as tai chi to excite disengaged children. Keeping it light and low-pressured will also allow the children to access the wider benefits of physical activity and take them away from the competition element which perhaps posed a problem in the past. Jo says to make sure this is stressed in any opening briefs.

To ensure the children enjoy the activity throughout, work with coaches who have met the children before and know how to relate the activity to their everyday lives while keeping the activities pitched with many breaks.

Get your schools on board, talk to secondary colleagues and see what the data says in terms of those girls not engaged, they know who these girls are but don't always have the means within school to mix things up to help with their engagement.

How this could be replicated across the network

The recognition of one particular group who have become disengaged with physical activity and creating suitable opportunities to remedy that is something all members of the network can endeavour to do.

Jo's work particularly highlights how moving away from competition can engage those children, and how building relationships with local leisure centres can be really beneficial.

Jo said:
"It's an honour and a pleasure to be shortlisted for these awards and provides an excellent portal to be able to share some great ideas across the network for all to use"