



Staffordshire's School Games Toughest Challenge

In May 2021, Susie Stinton with Together Active and fellow SGOs from Staffordshire held the School Games Toughest Challenge - a festival of adventurous outdoor activities designed to challenge teams of secondary school pupils to develop personal, teamwork, and leadership qualities.

SGOs reflected on the feedback from the School Games Mark Framework. Whilst primary schools were on board with the School Games mission and vision, a significant proportion of secondary schools thought that School Games competitions were for the most-able students or to support their GCSE competition records.

The SGOs resolved to show secondary schools that School Games is for every child. At that time, Susie had been watching 'Bear Grylls: The World's Toughest Race' which inspired the team to host an adventure-type challenge where young people worked together to complete a series of challenges. The idea for the School Games Toughest Challenge was born



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Staffordshire's Toughest Challenge

Objectives

- Educate secondary schools who attended events with their most able students about the mission and vision of the School Games
- Engage students who normally choose not to be involved in activity and provide them with a positive experience of competition
- Support students who had SEND / particularly difficult experiences through Covid / other specific difficulties to improve their social connections, self-esteem, teamwork, leadership, and mental health awareness / stability.

Who was the target audience and how were they engaged?

Each SGO invited two secondary schools who either were not fully engaged in the School Games or who had historically only engaged in events for their most able pupils / GCSE groups.

The event was split across two days; a Build-Up Day to prepare students, and the Event Day. A range of activities included mental health awareness, knot tying, map reading, first aid, teamwork challenges, and a pupil voice workshop. The Event Day rotated teams through activities, with 6 overall challenges for teams to complete the Toughest Challenge: rock climbing, raft building, bell boating, bush craft, orienteering, and a first aid scenario.

Why was the activity unique?

Strategies were used across both days to ensure positive experiences of competition where had, including reflecting on pupil voice from the Build-Up Day to influence delivery on the Event Day.

The focus was on team challenge and encouraging participants to recognise that everyone has their own strengths / weaknesses and as a team they had to support each other. Participants were asked to reflect on and celebrate their achievements, which helped them to build trust and friendships within their teams.

What was the impact felt in schools and by CYP?

A total of 72 young people from 9 teams took part in the Toughest Challenge. Of the 72 who attended, all either had SEND, a very difficult experience of Covid, or struggled socially in school.

The team noticed a huge change in the participant's attitude from the start of the event - many were initially sullen, disinterested, and sceptical, but by the end the same students talked passionately about their achievements.

Why is this an example of School Games best practice?

The Toughest Challenge was not a competition or race between teams - challenges were carefully planned to push participants out of their comfort zone enough to gain a sense of achievement.

Instructors could make challenges harder for the more confident teams so they still experienced the challenge / sense of achievement. Teams were rewarded with a section of their certificate when they successfully completed a challenge - once they completed the whole event, they had a whole certificate.