

# Goalball - The Morpeth Model

Building an inclusive socially engaging club atmosphere working with visually impaired young people



## The Club

Goalball UK operates a Satellite Club out of Morpeth School in Tower Hamlets. The club was set up by Alex Bunney of Goalball UK and is primarily aimed at young people aged between 11 and 15 who have a visual impairment.

The sessions take place on a Friday after school and are run by teachers at the school who are part of the visual impairment (VI)/ Special Educational Needs (SEN) Unit. The teachers have been trained by Goalball UK coaches to allow them to coach the sessions to the young people.

## The Aim of the Club

Alex set up the club with the main aim being to give young people with a visual impairment the opportunity to take part in regular physical activity. In general, Goalball UK believe that visually impaired young people don't have as much opportunity to participate in regular physical activity at school. They therefore wanted to raise awareness of Goalball in the school so that the young people are aware of the physical activity opportunities available for them. The club also gives these young people the chance to be able to represent their school and feel a sense of pride in belonging to a team, which some of them may not otherwise ever get the chance to do.

The club provides an inclusive environment where both sighted and visually impaired young people can participate together. The blackout eyeshades means that sighted young people can also take part on a level playing field. The club has one fully sighted young person who is part of the SEN unit at the school.

Goalball UK knew there was demand for a Goalball club at the school as taster sessions had been delivered with positive feedback. Goalball UK hope the club will encourage other schools to have a Visual Impairment offer for sport, and that Goalball UK could replicate the 'Morpeth model' elsewhere.

## Recruiting participants

Having previously delivered taster sessions to the school, Alex was aware that there would be at least 8-10 young people who would be interested in participating and/or joining the club.

All of the young people at the club are from Morpeth's VI/SEN unit. Despite wanting to extend the offer to visually impaired young people in mainstream schools in the borough, pupil transport and the time of the session means this is not possible.

## Ongoing Engagement

For the young people who come along every week to play Goalball, this is likely to be their only opportunity to be active; maintaining interest with the young people has not been an issue. Some of the young people also face very different challenges to their peers (such as their level of independence) and so physical activity can make a big difference to their lives. Alex states that they are excited to come along each week to develop their skills and progress in order to be ready to compete against other schools or clubs.

Having teachers from the VI unit coaching the sessions is also a positive in maintaining commitment as it means that the young people are already familiar with the coaching team. During school hours, the teachers are also able to encourage the young people to attend the sessions.

## The Challenges

Alex has been able to identify various barriers and challenges before they become an issue. One of these challenges is travel, as these young people are unable to travel individually and need assistance in getting to and from school. Although there is no travel needed to get to the sessions, as they happen straight after the school day, before they set up the sessions Alex and the teachers had to ensure that there was a minibus available to take children back at a later time. They were able to provide this on a Friday which prevented any potential barriers in relation to travel.



Parental support is also vital as the parents of these young people need to know that their child will be brought home and also that the sessions are suitable for them. Having the club straight after school on school grounds means that there is likely to be less worry and stress for the parents. As discussed previously visually impaired young people are typically less independent than sighted young people so without parental support, it is unlikely that the young person would be able to attend.

## What Makes the Club Successful?

- **Sustainable** - the club was set up with the aim of being sustainable so that the school could carry on with the Friday sessions once the 30-week programme stopped. The funding helped with equipment and up-skilling the school teachers.
- **In-demand** - with limited opportunities for visually impaired young people, there was a need for a physical activity they could take part in regularly. Alex knew the club would be successful because there is limited VI-specific opportunities available and the young people had already tried and tested the sport prior to the club being set up.
- **Inclusive** - Goalball is a great game for an inclusive environment as everyone wears the blackout eye shades. This means the young people are able to play against their sighted peers on a level playing field.
- **Sense of pride** - the young people are able to compete for their school against other teams which is a massive deal as most young people with a visual impairment may never have this opportunity. The sense of excitement and pride the young people have shows how much the club meant to them. Lasting impact- the ability and talent of one of the young people who started playing Goalball at the Satellite Club has seen him join a community club and be part of Goalball UK England Talent Pathway. They hope the club will provide other students with the first step on their Goalball journey.



## Got an idea for a Satellite club? Get in touch:

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