

# Lay Witnesses For Christ International - UK Inclusive Basketball Club

Promoting commitment  
and lowering barriers to  
participation for young  
disabled people and those  
with special educational  
needs



## The Club

Lay Witnesses for Christ International (LWFCI-UK) is a faith-based organisation who operates a weekly basketball club out of their United Reform Church in Bromley for young people in the community.

The club was funded as a Satellite Club by London Sport and is aimed at those aged between 11 and 17 with a focus on inclusivity. This means the club attracts young disabled people who have Special Educational Needs, as well as those who do not.

The club has recruited around 34 participants in total, and the sessions typically bring in around 15 children each week, seven of whom have autism.

The facilitator of the club, Jenny, noted that whilst some clubs may typically segregate these young people, LWFCI's basketball club is inclusive and encourages all participants to, "be kind to others; have fun; be helpful; and to try their best to engage in sport and get fit for life."

## The Aim of the Club

The club's focus on inclusivity by providing sports for all young people, stemmed from Jenny's aim to try to minimise barriers for participation of young people who are disabled or who have learning difficulties.

Having a child that has Special Educational Needs herself, Jenny believes that there are limited opportunities for participation in physical activity for disabled young people and those with special educational needs, therefore identifying a need for an inclusive club.

Aside from this, a secondary aim was to have a community-friendly club where young people can learn a new sport, have fun, and make new friends.

The delivery team at LWFCI wanted to remove the element of competitiveness, which can potentially deter some young people from participating in physical activity, to encourage other young people to participate.

Throughout the course of the sessions, the coach and delivery team emphasise that physical activity can be fun, a place to make friends, whilst also having physical and mental benefits.

In trying to fulfil this aim, the coach and facilitator encourage young people to bring new friends along to a session (which is free for the first session and £1 per session thereafter which is affordable for low income families) and reward the young people with extra shooting time at the end if they do bring a friend.

### Recruiting participants

Collectively, the volunteer workforce, including coaches, volunteers and facilitator at LWFCI are one of the biggest strengths of the organisation. Alongside, Jenny and the head coach, the team consists of an additional volunteer coach and an outreach volunteer.

Having an outreach volunteer has proven invaluable in recruiting new participants to the club. From handing out flyers in local schools and fast-food shops, to having a positive working relationship with the council, outreach efforts are a key benefit to the club where 34 children have been recruited.

LWFCI make use of the 'local offer' in Bromley which helps signpost provisions and services for young people with Special Educational Needs. E-mails to community centres in the surrounding areas also assists in recruiting young people. Jenny stated that having these links with the community and council has been effective in recruiting young people but also ensures the club fulfills its aim of being a community-friendly place where all are welcome.

### Ongoing Engagement

To sustain participant engagement, LWFCI uses various methods. In keeping with the goal to make the club friendly and fun, the team encourages young people to bring along friends to the sessions.

This has worked well at the club as the young people are motivated by having their friends there and it gives them a sense of belonging and ownership.

In addition, the team communicates well with participants' parents by sending positive messages post-session with regards to good behaviour and performance of the young people that attended. As well as this, they send weekly texts reminding the young people to bring along friends.

This flow of communication is key to sustain engagement with parents and encourages them to give their feedback on the session. For example, if there were any aspects of the session the young people did not enjoy, they can give their view on what they enjoyed less and why they felt this was the case. Sessions are then adapted as a result of this feedback.

The location of the club is also helpful in sustaining engagement. The United Reform Church is in a central location in Bromley beside the bus station which helps minimise potential barriers to participation, such as transport or participant safety.



## The Challenges

The success of the club has not always come easily; after only a few months of the club running, the head coach was unfortunately signed-off with a back injury. This meant that the team had to find a new coach and quickly. It was difficult to find a new coach with the allocated budget which they had, but having a partnership with a coaching agency (they had used for previous projects) meant they didn't have to do all of the work themselves.

To ensure they had a coach that had the right level of experience that suited the needs of their current participants, the club had to pay more to have this coach. The initial funding did not cover this, so the team had to approach the LWFCI board to use some in-house funding, which was successful.

Unfortunately, the process of finding a new coach meant that a couple of sessions had to be cancelled. Also, when the new coach was found, he had to change the session time from 6-7pm to 5-6pm; this meant some participants could no longer come to the sessions as it conflicted with other commitments.

The facilitator initially recognised that this would be an issue for some participants, but a compromise was needed to keep the club running. Fortunately, the new coach was quick to build rapport with the young people and understand their needs.



## What makes the club successful?

- **Communication and presence** - talking to the young people both inside and outside of the sessions is important to maintain ongoing engagement. Connecting with the young people and checking-in with them during and after the sessions helps encourage and support them to continue with the sessions.
- **Community representation** - being a member of the community in which you are delivering the club helps build a connection with the young people. They begin to feel a sense of belonging both at the club and in the community.
- **Participant ownership** - encouraging young people to take ownership of the club and make it enjoyable for themselves by bringing friends means that they see the club as their own and not just a sports club.
- **Partnerships** - having links to other organisations within the sporting sector gives further opportunities to help develop and sustain the club. Examples include when other sports organisation have helped with funding applications or being able to give support by running free training sessions.
- **Passion** - the whole delivery team are passionate and motivated to make the club a friendly and fun space for young people to play basketball in.

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

Email the team at:  
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Or call:  
020 3848 4630