

Para-Athletics - Havering Council

Making para-athletics more inclusive and engaging through ongoing steering engagement and effective coaching practices



The Club

The Para Athletics satellite club was set up by Havering Council to provide young disabled people the opportunity to take part in athletics each week. The club targets young people aged between 14-19 year olds. Approximately 12-15 young people come each Friday accompanied by members of their family, making the club a welcoming environment for all.

The Aim of the Club

Havering Council noted that Para-sport opportunities were lacking in the borough and wanted to provide more opportunities for disabled young people. The Council had previously run a Para- Athletics programme during the summer holidays in 2017 and had positive feedback from young people and their parents; many asked if Para-Athletics could be set up again.

The facilitator of the club, Jaimee, wanted to give these young people the opportunity to do something they may not normally do, and for some of these young people this may be the only chance they have to participate in physical activity.

Recruiting participants

Based on positive initial feedback, Jaimee and the team knew there was already a demand for the club and they had the contact details of those who had participated previously.

Aside from this, the team at Havering Council use various methods to attract new recruits to the club. They engage well with the schools in the borough, by going to school assemblies to talk about the programmes they run, as well as handing out fliers in schools and to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators. Furthermore, the team behind the Para-Athletics programme are engaged with the 'Disability Steering Group' meetings in the borough which connects them to other organisations or teams who are engaging with disabled young people.

Ongoing Engagement

The coach at the club, Sheila, has developed a really good bond with both the children that participate and also the parents themselves; she keeps in regular contact with the parents through text. Jaimee emphasises that Sheila is passionate, enthusiastic, and experienced in coaching disabled young people which is what makes the sessions so special. At the end of each session Sheila will always tell the young people what they have to look forward to in next week's session.

The sessions are also well-structured and engaging, with Sheila encouraging family members who are watching the sessions to participate as well. An example of this is having 'family relays' where children and their family can take part together. This has been encouraging for the participants as it means that their brothers or sisters can join them and have fun as well.

Getting feedback from the parents has also ensured that the club is meeting the needs of the participants and continues to engage them each week. The team encourage feedback and receive both positive and constructive feedback either face-to-face or through paper forms and e-mails. Although it is rare for them to receive constructive feedback, if this does occur, it would can be used to help adapt sessions.



The Challenges

With the nature of some of the disabilities, some sessions prove to be challenging as some children lose focus or become aggressive as they can't necessarily vocalise how they feel. Although there have not been any serious incidents, the coach is experienced and knows how to deal with any situations that could arise. Jaimee states that Sheila is very good at taking control of situations and calming the young people down if she needs to. Having the parents at the sessions is also invaluable, and Sheila encourages them to be actively involved in the activity as well; the parents can help refocus the young person if they become angry.

Although there are a consistent amount of young people at the club each week, a few may be unable to attend due to the parents' other commitments. As the club relies on parents' attendance, if the parent cannot attend, for example due to work and/or being tired, then the young person is unable to attend. However, despite being at the end of the week, Jaimee felt this was the best time to put on the club as there are already a few other sports clubs on during the week and so this encourages further opportunities for the young people to be active.

What Makes the Club Successful?

- **The coach** - having an enthusiastic, engaging, and passionate coach has helped the club to be the success it is. Sheila's wealth of experience and ability to engage the young people keeps them coming back. In addition, parents give positive feedback about her.
- **The communication** - communication from both the coach and the facilitator has been effective in recruiting participants and maintaining engagement. This has also meant that both Jaimee and Sheila have a good connection and rapport with the young people that attend, and also the parents.

- **Involving families** – the parents and siblings are also able to join in and help the session, which helps keep the young people motivated and focused.
- **Friendships** - the young people have become more confident and have built good friendships with the other participants who they look forward to seeing each week at 'Friday Night Athletics'
- **Familiarity** - the coach and the Havering Council team are familiar faces for both young people and parents. They run other clubs in the borough and ran the previous summer Para- Athletics club.



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

Email the team at:

grants@londonsport.org

Or call:

020 3848 4630