

Community Outreach at Kelham Island Table Tennis Club

Theme: community development, inclusivity, disabled people, participation

Table tennis is a naturally inclusive sport, with the ability to connect communities and provide an opportunity for those from a wide range of backgrounds to participate, grow and excel in the sport. Kelham Island Table Tennis Club have embraced the inclusive nature of table tennis, running several sessions for groups of children and young people with additional needs, refugee and LGBTQ+ groups.

Background Information

Kelham Island Table Tennis Club in Sheffield was founded by Simon Athey and Liam Bardell in January 2023. The club operates from a room at the café owned by Liam attached to Kelham Island Museum and began in 2020 with the pair using the space to host games and competitions with their friends.

After watching a TED Talk by Tim Holtam at Brighton Table Tennis Club, Simon and Liam were inspired to grow their group within the city and reach out to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups within their community. Using their links throughout the city, Simon and Liam approached Sheffield Down Syndrome Support Group and set up a monthly session for children with Down's Syndrome, their siblings and parents.

Their aspirations have only grown, with the club now hosting several sessions for groups within the city each month, being open throughout the week for anyone to pop in and play, running a weekly social Bat & Chat session followed by their club night, and both Simon and Liam are now qualified Level 1 coaches.



- > Monthly session for children with Special Educational Needs, including Down's Syndrome
- > Monthly session for children with Cerebral Palsy
- > Monthly session for refugees and asylum seekers through a link with New Beginnings project
- > Regular sessions with various youth projects, including LGBTQ+
- > Regular sessions at Paces School for children living with Cerebral Palsy and other neurological disorders



case study

January 2024

The Impact

The uptake at sessions has been very successful, with the sessions for SEN children, children with Cerebral Palsy and refugee groups collectively engaging 30 participants each month, many of whom don't participate in other sporting activities. The impact of these sessions on the children and young people is evident through testimonials given by parents and members of staff at the charities and organisations the club work with;

Kelham Island Table Tennis Club provides children and young people with disabilities in Sheffield with the opportunity to participate in community based physical activity. The benefits of playing table tennis go beyond health and fitness. Not only is the club a place to develop skills, coordination, strength and fitness, but it's also a place to make friends, feel included, build confidence and make links with the local community. It's a step on from therapy, it's a chance to excel in sport, it's brilliant!
Jenny Featherstone - Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust



It's definitely made a significant difference for all of them, particularly for their physical and mental wellbeing and for most of them to be able to learn a new sport
Winnie Lutakome – New Beginnings Project



Simon and Liam are really good at keeping things moving, changing activities frequently and making it fun so the kids stay engaged. At the same time, the kids are learning real skills like serving and returning the ball properly. It's brilliant to also have a session like this that includes children with Down's syndrome ... My son absolutely loves attending – he's learning skills like waiting, turn taking and playing in a team plus getting the chance to be social and make new friends.
Sarah Hooker – Sheffield Down Syndrome Support Group

In addition, three players from the refugee group have since joined the club and plan to play in the league this year. Simon also notes the coordination improvements amongst children with Cerebral Palsy at the end of a session, as well as behavioural and social improvements amongst SEN children. Simon and Liam's passion for supporting the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in their community has led to many plans for the future, including establishing a Parkinson's group, female only session and regular young carers group.

That's the beauty of table tennis, everybody can play together. Hosting our groups is not a chore, it's a privilege
Simon Athey, Kelham Island Table Tennis Club



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