



BRISTOL DOWN SYNDROME FOOTBALL CLUB

Bristol Down Syndrome FC is a community club which runs every Sunday at St Paul's Academy 11-12am to enable children with DS to socialise, develop skills and play sport. It is a ground breaking club, the only club in Bristol with the closest being Swindon or Cardiff



Why is this important?

775 babies per year are born with Down syndrome in England and Wales. Those with Down syndrome will have a degree of learning disability and delayed development. 1 in 10 children will also experience additional difficulties such as Autism (ASD) or ADHD. Many may have additional health conditions such as hearing and vision, heart problems and thyroid issues. Physical development is slower resulting in poor muscle tone, therefore taking children with Down syndrome longer to reach developmental milestones.

Despite proof that sport helps by improving strength and muscle tone, developing motor skills and increasing social, emotional and cognitive growth there is limited provision for children with DS in Bristol. Access Sport, together with the club, has changed this, providing local sport and activity helping children and parents to socialise, to have fun in a safe environment, and improve their physical and mental wellbeing

The story so far...

Access Sport working in partnership with DS Active held two free community football events. These were promoted through parent and disability organisation networks to bring participants of all ages together to enjoy skill based sessions delivered by experienced disability specific community coaches. The group were split into different age groups and abilities to enable a positive and enjoyable experience for all. Through a parent consultation at the events, feedback and insight helped shape a regular club session, informing the appropriate time, place and ethos, breaking down the many barriers that stop young people participating. Partnering with DS Active helped reach out to more people, supporting and promoting the club nationally.

Access Sport has helped create low cost club sessions through volunteer engagement to help sustain the sessions, these have included university placements, those from a corporate setting

and also disabled volunteers, providing positive role models to the players. The charity has provided coach support and training, equipment, kit and competitive pathways, including participating at the DS Active national tournament. The club leader has won the 'Community Coach of the Year' award for his ongoing commitment to the team. Access Sport's partnership with Adidas provided new boots for all the players and a partnership with Bristol City FC has provided players kit to showcase at training sessions and events. Various players have also had the opportunity to complete work experience with Access Sport and other sports providers.

Club numbers

- ✓ 20 regularly attending weekly sessions. Ages 8-22 years
- ✓ 70% of regular participants aged 16 – 24 years
- ✓ 78% also regularly attend another Ignite club setting
- ✓ 90% of new participants retained
- ✓ 562 total throughput of participants attending
- ✓ 7 coaches and volunteers, 3 who are under 25, 1 who is disabled
- ✓ 3 times participation in DS Active National Football Tournament



Club feedback

'For the first time we have found a coach who really understands the way kids with Down syndrome can be taught. [...] enjoys going and feeling quite able. In mainstream sessions he is often left out. It gives [...] lots of self-confidence and success.'

'The football sessions are a big part of [...]’s weekly routine, he loves coming to the sessions and they are really helping to boost his confidence. As well as the obvious benefits of it being regular exercise for him, there are the added benefits of having the opportunity to socialise with other children, helping him develop his listening skills and helping him learn to follow instructions.'

'There is nothing else in the area which compares to this. He enjoys it. Important for his social skills, being part of a team, making new friends.'

'Because it allows for all levels, ages and abilities and allows them to all join in together and learn to accept each other's strengths and weaknesses. Everyone is included. The key people have been Access Sport for setting up the club and the coaches. The coaches are very committed to the club and do a great job ensuring everyone gets the most out of the sessions. They have all worked to gain a high level of understanding of the needs of individual members.'

