

Tackling inequalities with table tennis

Nottingham City Council and Metropolitan Thames Valley

Theme: Coronavirus, physical activity, target groups

Defining the Issue

The Coronavirus pandemic and national lockdown forced closure on many sport, fitness and leisure facilities across the country. Reduced access to physical activity opportunities comes with the risk of rising inequalities. To support with tackling the issue, table tennis kits were introduced into the immediate environments of families to participate and benefit from the sport.

Background

During the Coronavirus pandemic and national lockdown, it was important for Table Tennis England to adapt their Ping! offer to support active lifestyles and control the widening of inequalities across the country.

Approach

Table Tennis England collaborated with Nottingham City Council, who formed with Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing to provide local communities with the opportunity to participate and benefit from table tennis through the distribution of home table tennis bat, ball and net kits. This partnership was arranged as part of developing work with Active Nottingham and the Get Out Get Active programme, which aims to support individuals at risk or living with long term health conditions to get active.

In total, 85 home table tennis kits were distributed to families in the community where it was understood the outbreak would have the greatest negative impact.

Challenges

Engagement workers often found it difficult to encourage recipients of the kits to complete and return feedback forms, particularly where access to technology was limited.

To overcome this challenge, hardcopies of feedback forms were printed and packaged with the kits. Recipients were asked to share completed versions via a WhatsApp group, to reduce physical contact during this period.



Impact

For most families, this was the first time they had been exposed to table tennis.

“Many of these families would not of had the confidence to access table tennis provision within the community before, with cost and lack of knowledge of the sport being other factors.”

The table tennis kits provided opportunities for individuals to be physically active during lockdown, especially for young people while facilities such as local parks were closed.

“The table tennis kits were a welcome addition for families who were struggling through the pandemic for a number of reasons including extra financial strain, job uncertainty and extra childcare responsibilities. The kits have been a positive engagement tool to provide entertainment and relieve some of these strains during this difficult time.”

Where facilities have been closed, this initiative has been thought to contribute to diverting the potential for anti-social behaviour.

“The distribution of kits has allowed us to engage with young people and divert any potential for anti-social behaviour which may have come about from closure of local resources such as youth centres, community centres and parks.”

There was a strong expression of interest among recipients of the kits for wider table tennis provision within the community. As a result, arrangements have since been made for a new table to be installed within a community-use venue.

“We are currently developing Hill View Community Centre into a multi-purpose community-led hub and are hoping to grow the provision here, particularly as services begin to return to the centre.

“We have worked with Get Out Get Active Nottingham, to order and install a Ping in the Community package for our Hill View Community Centre. We look forward to working with local young people and community groups, such as an adult learning disability service, to grow engagement in table tennis at the centre.”

Key Learnings

1. The distribution of home table tennis kits has inspired target groups to get active during lockdown.
2. Table tennis has provided the opportunity to better understand local communities and divert anti-social behaviour.
3. Introducing table tennis into the immediate environment has created a new demand for regular playing spaces.

Further Information

For more information on the Ping! Project, visit www.pingengland.co.uk



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