

Case Study: Area of Focus 1



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Project: Inclusive Sport
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Author: Sarah Robinson

This paper provides the case study for *Henshaws* – a disability sector organisation that **did not** have a substantial track record of previous service delivery in the field of sports participation. Interviews were undertaken with Henshaws Newcastle, participants in the project and the Newcastle United Foundation.

Background

Henshaws is a registered charity that supports people with visual impairments. Support is provided in a number of ways including care, advice and training. The work is predominately in the north of England with the Inclusive Sport project focused in Newcastle. The charity's vision is to 'create a pathway of support' effectively offering a service as an individual needs it, ensuring that they get what they need and are advocated for when required.

Prior to the Inclusive Sport funding the charity did not support individuals with a visual impairment into sport aside from knowing about concessionary rates at local leisure centres. However, Henshaws are aware that people with a visual impairment are not as physically active as sighted people and that diabetes and obesity are by-products of the less active lifestyle.

GETTING INVOLVED IN SPORT

Henshaws ran a programme called *Skill Step* that was a lottery funded 10 week programme that focussed on IT, looking for work, personal and social development. One individual on the programme was interested in football and got ~~work experience~~ paid employment at the Newcastle United Foundation [the foundation]. Part of the project was to get a team of visually impaired players together. Henshaws generated significant interest but mainly in adults and the programme was for under 14 year olds – which is primarily for whom the foundation receives funding support for. The youth project saw visually impaired children and their



parents being motivated by sports participation. The children were eating less crisps and sweets and focussing on fitness in order to play better football. Henshaws saw the positive outcomes of providing sporting support to the children and wanted to expand the opportunity to adults. However, the provision for sport for adults with a disability was still extremely limited.

A unique partnership

The unique partnership set-up between Henshaws Newcastle and the Newcastle United Foundation would not have been generated if it had not been for the one individual who accessed Henshaws for *Skill Step*. Henshaws has community services in Greater Manchester & Merseyside, but it is only in its North East service based in Newcastle that it has such a partnership. It was this partnership that applied for the Sport England's Inclusive Sport funding opportunity. An application that could only occur because of the knowledge held by both partners:

We sort of went through the application and thought, well, you know...I don't understand all this stuff and he's like [partner from the Newcastle United Foundation] well, that's this and that's what that means...They're asking me to do this because they want to show it's sustainable...I don't know what's a club mark...All these things which I'd never come across before and he helped us to kind of navigate some of that stuff.

Henshaws

The bid was successful and as a result, an adult team of visually impaired football players was formed from the interest initially generated during the *Skill Stop* project. A group of players who stated that prior to the project, there was no opportunity for them to participate in sport:

They've all said....that they wouldn't have done any sport at all or they certainly wouldn't have done football. They never thought they could do this because they didn't know there was somewhere they could go where they could develop the skills where they felt safe. Where someone understood their needs...

Henshaws

The project – Visually Impaired Adult Football Development

The funding allows for a fixed weekly session of football for adults with visual impairments, 48 weeks of the year. No sessions have been missed since the project started in January 2013. Over the year, the players have improved in skill and fitness and the team has now entered a tournament in Sunderland. Having a competition level to the project has allowed players to focus on improving their skills and become a more cohesive team – it has also provided a goal



– to win. By having a goal, the weekly sessions become more than simply a ‘pass-time’ for the players.

It exposes competition and highlights where [they] need to improve... [it] motivates [them] to be better.

Henshaws

In order to improve their skills and fitness levels, players are attending further training sessions and undertaking healthy eating classes. Spinning classes are offered after football and swimming sessions have been supported. Newcastle City Council has been working with Henshaws to develop the offer over time and has now become a major delivery partner.

Learning lessons and benefits

LESSONS

As Henshaws is not a sporting organisation the partnership with the foundation was imperative to the project’s success. The disability knowledge of Henshaws and the sporting knowledge of the foundation allowed them to overcome a number of initial barriers. For example:

- 1. Creating a game that can cater for different levels of sight loss:** Everything from selecting the team colours to the colour on the ball requires consultation. Ultimately, both were selected by the colour most visible to the individuals with the poorest level of sight;
- 2. Different levels of age, fitness and skill level:** The standard Friday session is open to all but further sessions have been provided for more advanced players, for example, those able to enter the tournaments. Additional fitness sessions were provided too as prior levels were not sufficient for the fitness required to play football for the hourly sessions;
- 3. Understanding the support requirements of players on and off the pitch:** This could be in terms of transport or in terms of level of coaching instruction if an individual had additional disabilities such as a learning disability;
- 4. Overcoming transport issues to the venue:** Learning public transport routes and pairing confident individuals with others in order to ensure all players could get to the venue safely took intensive resource at the outset of the project;
- 5. Learning the venue layout so that players can navigate the grounds safely:** This includes many things such as knowing where the changing rooms and toilets are, to how a broken lamp in a car park can cause great difficulty for a visually impaired individual to navigate their surroundings;
- 6. The lighting inside the venue can affect the accessibility of a game for some players:** The highly polished surface of the indoor space made it difficult to distinguish the ball for some players. Adjusting the lights between emergency and main lighting to establish the ‘right level’ was required; and



7. **Sharing spaces with other sporting activities can be detrimental:** Visually impaired football is a game played primarily on 'sound' so sharing an indoor space with another sporting activity can detract from players ability to participate.

BENEFITS

Benefits of the project can be seen across all the players. Increased confidence is cited as the most important of all. There were several examples of players who, because they did not want to miss a session, went 'outside their comfort zone' and began to leave their homes unassisted and use public transport.

X, who's coming in from Hartlepool, which is quite a long way...and X, another one actually, before this, they wouldn't travel on their own before. If they went out anywhere they'd go with their wife or their family and they'd go in a taxi. They wouldn't pass the gate on their own. Now X travels on his own from Hartlepool...there and back. He's severely sighted impaired. Uses a long cane. X similarly wouldn't travel anywhere on his own [he now uses the bus with another player].

Henshaws

Increased confidence has also led to some players taking on additional training courses, having improved family relationships and taking on other sporting opportunities. The football has acted as a gateway to Henshaws being able to provide other needed support:

So their confidence has increased. Their ability or their willingness to try other things out has increased.....X comes here to do IT training as well, so it's opened up. Now that he knows he can do this....that's the difference it's made...

Henshaws

Further benefits have seen players improve their stability and agility through the sport so they are now less likely to have an accident. Some players have lost weight and a couple of the players have improved their fitness sufficiently that they entered the Great North Run to raise money for Henshaws.

They're going to be stronger. They'll have more stamina. They're going to be healthier, but also the physical process of learning to play football makes them more stable on their feet. Makes them more agile. They're less likely to have an accident because...on some of the training [is] about not straining your muscles...That's going to bleed into everything in their lives really.

Henshaws



Meeting the intervention outcomes

Henshaws project is an excellent example of a partnership created between a disability and a sporting organisation that has enabled disabled people to see sport as a viable lifestyle choice for them.

The Team

The figure below is the Henshaws Visually Impaired football team wearing their new uniforms. The team raised the money for their kit which was selected to be visible to all the players both indoors and out.

Figure 1: Henshaws VI Football Team, Newcastle



For further information

On the project, please contact: Eamonn.Dunne@henshaws.org.uk

On the Inclusive Sport Evaluation, please contact: Sarah.Robinson@cfe.org.uk

