



## CLUB SUCCESS STORY

# 'A RESILIENT PARTNERSHIP PROJECT OPENING TENNIS UP TO YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES'

## *Riverside Tennis Club*

Riverside TC is Bedfordshire's number one tennis club and winner of Bedford Sports Club of the Year 2018. With nearly 500 members, Riverside is an active and inclusive club with nine floodlit courts, value-driven membership and clubhouse with bar, shop and café. There is coaching for all levels including a disability programme and Cardio Tennis.

## BACKGROUND

In early 2020, Team Beds & Luton facilitated a youth forum in partnership with Transitions UK, a charity working with disadvantaged young people, to discuss sport and physical activity in Bedford. Insight revealed that lack of confidence, low mood and limited offering for disabled individuals were among the barriers to leading more active lives. These young people favoured quiet, relaxing, accessible venues with affordable sessions and an awards or recognition programme. Team Beds & Luton, Riverside and Transitions UK partnered to create the Satellite Club Project 'Achieve'. The project provides inclusive physical activity with a specific focus on tennis (online and face-to-face) for young people with disabilities, delivered by Neil Frankel, Head of Disability Tennis at Riverside.



## INITIATIVES

- Team Beds&Luton provided the Satellite Club Project with £2500 of funding to support delivery until March 2021, including the project's initial launch via social media. The charity also co-ordinated the partners to collectively plan and deliver the targeted project, providing insight and an evaluation framework.
- Transitions UK managed the project, including marketing, ensuring the sessions ran weekly and obtaining feedback. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, Transitions UK created a safe online platform to secure the project's launch and delivery, allowing the young people to gradually build their confidence in the comfort of their own homes.
- Riverside planned and delivered each physical activity session, taking into consideration the individual needs of the young people and providing a fun and nurturing environment with a familiar coach. Riverside also supported Transitions UK with online delivery, building relationships with the young people ahead of face-to-face sessions.



## CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Just as the Satellite Club was about to launch, the government implemented social distancing measures in response to COVID-19. Undeterred, the partners immediately worked towards launching online instead, via a secure Facebook group, with attention given to mental well-being. Coach Neil quickly adapted the style and nature of the coaching to cater for limited access to equipment and the space/environment available to each participant in place of a tennis court.

Despite these challenges, the project launched very successfully online at the end of March 2020 and the first session attracted 21 participants. Both Transitions UK and Riverside were overwhelmed with the positive feedback and engagement from the young people. Currently, the online physical activity sessions run twice a week, alongside Transition UK providing workshops and online support and Team Beds&Luton monitoring attendance. The young people enjoy more structure to their week, social interaction with peers, a confidence boost from the comfort of their own home and a great rapport with coach Neil at Riverside.

*“The coach’s exercise routines are great because it gets you up and going and keeps your mind busy. It’s great for me because I can challenge myself to train harder and keep a positive mindset.”*

**Young participant**



## THE FUTURE

The Satellite Club will continue to run until March 2021 supported by funding from Team Beds&Luton. An evaluation framework will be used to monitor the impact and shape future projects. Once safe to do so, the project will deliver face-to-face tennis sessions at Riverside so young people can join the club or attend additional sessions. A small number of online sessions will continue to be offered to build participants’ confidence and self-esteem.

*“I am delighted with the partnerships and relationships we have formed. Neil is a fantastic, positive coach who is able to engage and reassure all young people involved. The overwhelming response from the group has really helped lift moral and boost spirits during this difficult time. We all look forward to meeting at Riverside and moving onto our face-to-face sessions.”*

**Transitions UK Project Lead**

Riverside and their partners have demonstrated resilience and innovation during uncertain times, proving that tennis can be played in any setting, tailored to individuals with various needs. This example, as well as many others, will hopefully encourage more coaches to look to deliver online content as Neil has done and keep more players active and healthy – mentally and physically.



## TOP TIPS

- Before planning and delivering any physical activity project, gather data from the target audience to help understand their behaviours and produce a project tailored to their individual needs
- For online sessions, you’ll need to find a suitable, accessible online platform, deal with potential subscription charges and guidance/upskilling of staff and parents
- Keep sustainability in mind. The Satellite Club Project will introduce a small fee in the future to ensure the project’s continuation, as well as being linked in with a local club providing participants with an outlet to pursue their engagement in physical activity
- Obtain feedback throughout to continually evolve the project
- Organisations and partners must work collaboratively, sharing learnings and insight to achieve the desired outcomes.



## FOLLOW US FOR MORE

LTA, The National Tennis Centre  
100 Priory Lane, Roehampton  
London SW15 5JQ

T: 020 8487 7000  
E: [info@lta.org.uk](mailto:info@lta.org.uk)  
[www.lta.org.uk](http://www.lta.org.uk)



@the\_LTA



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