

Table Tennis Employment Improves Mental Wellbeing

Theme: mental wellbeing, individual development

Defining the Issue

Approximately 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem each year, with 1 in 6 reporting a common health problem such as depression in any given week. Evidence suggests basic steps people can take to improve their mental wellbeing, including connecting with others, being physically active, learning new skills and giving back to others. Fred's employment as a Table Tennis Activator has helped improve his mental wellbeing, arguably through the taking of such steps.

Background Information

Before Fred was employed as a Table Tennis Activator for Cambridge City Council in August 2019, he was a primary school teacher for 20 years. Fred still tutors mathematics part time, as well as caring for his Mother.

Fred's love for table tennis started in his youth, having played at school and starting his league career aged sixteen – resulting in over 30 years of experience. Prior to his current employment, Fred's mental wellbeing was heading on a downward spiral;

"About a year ago I was heading into depression, I wasn't always eating properly, not sleeping well, not exercising as much as I should... I attended a couple of groups, talked about CBT and different therapies – most of which I thought wasn't for me. One week they talked about activation and breaking the negative cycle, by doing something positive. I thought this was the right thing for me, saw this job come up and applied as a step towards breaking the cycle I was in"

At the start of his activator role, Fred concentrated on engaging local people with the plethora of outdoor tables Cambridge city centre has installed over the years through the Ping project. As the winter months came, with people spending less time playing outdoors, Fred's concentration moved towards the Ping Pong Parlour set up in the Grafton Centre in late 2018.

Fred's role was initially funded by Table Tennis England in August 2019 for 12 weeks. After positive engagement with the community this funding was extended for a further 10 weeks, with Cambridge City Council also contributing to 10 weeks of activation.



The Impact

Since starting as an Activator, Fred has had an incredible amount of job satisfaction and impact on the local ping pong community – particularly since focusing on the popular Ping Pong Parlour;

“The sheer breadth of people I meet in the Parlour is amazing. I met someone who has early stages of dementia, someone with limited sight, people from all over the world of all ages”



Fred has also introduced different groups to table tennis through the Parlour, encouraging them to pick up a bat, learn new skills and start their journey to a more active lifestyle;

“I’ve led youth groups and disability groups in the Parlour. It’s so rewarding to have the opportunity to meet different groups of people around Cambridge”



The role has also had a significant impact on Fred’s mental wellbeing, helping to bring him out of the negative cycle he found himself in a year ago;

“I don’t know where I would be now if I hadn’t found this job. I eat better, I sleep better, I’m much more active. I promote and encourage so many others to take part and be active, knowing first-hand the pitfalls of inactivity. When I’m walking out the door I always have a smile on my face because of the people I meet. I leave the Parlour thinking I’ve made a difference and everyday has a highlight!”



Fred has shown that a physical activity activator role can have a positive impact on the individual’s wellbeing, as well as having a positive impact on the projects they support and the local community.



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