

On & Off the Pitch

The profound positive impacts of physical activity on mental health are widely reported. However, understanding how to draw these links as well as feeling able to talk about mental health in a non-clinical sports setting can be a daunting prospect, particularly when you're young.

Following a successful application to Awards for All - Wesport and 'Off the Record' (a young person's mental health organisation in Bristol) have delivered a project across 6 local sport clubs, aimed at raising awareness of positive mental wellbeing and health promotion for young people accessing sports clubs and engaging in physical activity. This training will support sports coaches and volunteers to promote the mental health and wellbeing of the young people they work with in their clubs. The project will consist of training for both coaches/volunteers and the creation of youth peer support structures within local sports clubs.

The Clubs included North Bristol Rugby Club, City of Bristol Rowing Club, Clifton Robinson's Hockey Club, and North Bristol Tennis Club.

North Bristol Rugby Club really embraced the project. It was a topic very close to their heart having had experience of mental illness within their coaching staff. Over 20 coaches came along and engaged in a training session run by Cat Taylor from OtR. They were relieved to understand that they were already doing a lot of positive things naturally as good coaches. Just remembering to ask 'are you ok?' at the start of a session was a simple but effective way of checking in with the juniors they were coaching.

"We've really enjoyed being part of this project. It's got me and the club as a whole, thinking about the mental wellbeing of everyone involved here. To know our views and recommendations have been taken seriously by the club is great. We just want to make sure we look out for each other a bit more and offer support when we can."



Wesport then facilitated a workshop for 9 of their junior members; they came up with lots of ideas on how they can support each other better. Three of the young people went on to support Off the Record run an awareness stand at their recent Club Open day which was really well received by players and parents from the club. They have now created a welcoming 'drop-in room' at the club for players to use before the start of the next season to take some time out. They have also designed posters to promote mental wellbeing and are getting these printed to display around the club.

15 junior members from City of Bristol Rowing Club attended a Saturday morning workshop. There was a great discussion on how rowing makes them feel, good and bad. We also talked about the club environment and there were suggestions on how they could look out for each other more and capitalise on the community feeling there is within the club and in particular support new members when they first

join. On request, we also ran a mental wellbeing awareness workshop for parents too as they were interested to know how to support their children more effectively.

As a result of the project, 4 clubs have now signed up to the SRA Mental Health Charter and committed to actions to encourage positive mental wellbeing of their members.



Quote from project lead, Lisa Wood:

"This project has helped sports clubs understand the huge positive impact they can have on the mental wellbeing of young people. Sports clubs are communities in their own right with some young people spending a lot of their time there. The role of coaches is crucial and the young people themselves can really support each other too. It has been great to see the clubs involved in this project really open up the conversation of mental wellbeing within the club and for the young people to have come up with some great actions with the club setting."

