



# Greenhouse Sports Programme Principles



# An Introduction to Greenhouse Sports

Greenhouse Sports is a youth charity focused on using sport for development. Sport is our hook to engage young people and one of the vehicles through which we support youth development. But our purpose is not to create elite athletes or simply address physical inactivity. Rather, through sport and mentoring we create opportunities for young people to recognise their strengths and develop the psychological and social skills needed to thrive. Every year, Greenhouse Sports support at least 9,000 young people to attend school more often, improve their wellbeing, and raise their aspirations, transforming life chances in the communities that need it the most.

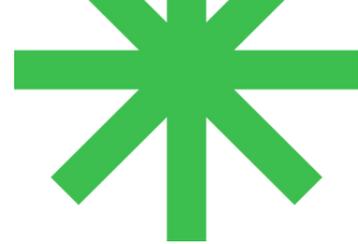


## Why We Focus on Sport

Sport is typically appealing to young people, especially those considered “hard-to-reach” (e.g., from areas of disadvantage; not in education, employment, or training). Sport is also recognised as a unique setting through which we can support young people’s psychological, social, and emotional learning, as well as support the development and transfer of a broad range of life skills. Specifically, when participating in sport young people are exposed to various situations which challenge their ability to cope and adapt. Such challenges can foster personal growth and positive adaptation if they are paired with appropriate support, helping young people to develop essential coping skills and rebound from setbacks.



# Our Approach to Supporting the Development of Young People



Traditionally, a deficit-approach model has been used when working with young people experiencing poverty or living in areas of high deprivation. Such an approach looks to intervene to address poor or problem behaviours (e.g., poor behaviour in class). However, while such an intervention-focused, deficit approach might address a specific challenge or behaviour, evidence suggests that any impact is often short lived and is limited to the one issue it set out to address.

Recognising the limitations of this deficit-approach, Greenhouse Sports aligns with a Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach. PYD emphasises young peoples' strengths and potential rather than focusing on problems or issues. It is grounded in the belief that all young people have the capacity for healthy development and successful transition into adulthood when given the right support, opportunities, and relationships.

Decades of research have demonstrated the benefit PYD programmes, particularly when delivered through sport, have on young people. For instance, PYD through sport programmes are associated with the development of a range of life skills (also known as psychosocial assets) such as teamwork, leadership, confidence and communication skills.

Furthermore, evidence shows these skills, although developed through sport, can transfer to different domains (e.g., school, social interactions, jobs). Subsequently, through the successful development and transfer of life skills, PYD through sport programmes result in a range of positive outcomes including, but not limited to improved wellbeing, increased academic engagement and attainment, reduction in engagement in risky behaviours and increased positive contributions to society.

Importantly, PYD through sport approaches are particularly useful for young people living in poverty/high deprivation. Young people living in such settings have often not experienced support to recognise their strengths, let alone develop them. Furthermore, young people living in deprivation are typically, due to systemic inequities and institutional injustices, confronted with more societal pressures, stressors, and risk factors throughout their daily lives than their peers. However, when sport is intentionally optimised as a positive learning context, young people from all backgrounds and contexts have opportunities to learn, develop, and grow.

**“Coach doesn’t just teach people how to play basketball, he teaches people how to be a better version of themselves.”**

Nina, year 9





## Who We Work With

At Greenhouse Sports we explicitly and purposefully work with young people living in poverty or areas of high deprivation. We know that poverty impacts on future life expectations and limits young people's opportunities. Specifically, poverty can result in young people:

- Underperforming in school compared to peers from more affluent areas due to fewer resources, less extra-curricular support and activities, lack of access to reliable internet or technology, fewer safe spaces, and limited engagement with trusted adults.
- Having poorer mental health and wellbeing, reduced self-esteem and concentration due to poor housing and living conditions.
- Experiencing higher levels of crime, gangs, violence, and anti-social behaviour, increasing exposure to negative role models and increased opportunity to engage in criminal and violent activities.
- Having fewer job opportunities or low-paid, insecure work, as well as more limited access to work experience and career guidance.
- Facing stigma in different settings and across society, increasing chronic stress and anxiety and resulting in disengagement from communities and society more broadly.

Overall, evidence is clear, young people living in poverty or areas of deprivation in the UK face a wide range of interconnected challenges that impact their education, health, wellbeing, and life opportunities. Our programmes are designed to provide young people with the skills needed to overcome such challenges and thrive both now and in the future.



# The Programme Principles



Drawing on the extensive academic evidence-base underpinning successful positive youth development through sport programmes, combined with an extensive knowledge of the young people we work with, we have carefully and purposefully developed our Greenhouse Programmes.

Underpinning all our programmes are a series of six core principles which we know are important to maximise our impact in the lives of young people.



## Strengths-based

Aligned with a PYD focus, we emphasise an ecological, systems-based approach to development ensuring that young people are provided with purposeful developmental opportunities within a psychologically and physically safe environment. In creating this environment, our focus is upon recognising, building, and nurturing young people's strengths, assets, and potential.

## Why?

A strengths-based approach is particularly beneficial for young people living in deprivation or poverty because it shifts the focus from problems to potential. Traditional approaches often frame young people in poverty as "at risk" or "problems to fix." Our approach challenges these narratives by celebrating strengths and achievements and empowering youth as contributors, not victims.

Furthermore, poverty can be isolating and disempowering. Our strengths-based approach creates inclusive, supportive environments where young people feel valued, heard, and connected to others. This builds their identity, sense of purpose, motivation to engage in positive behaviours, and trust in adults and institutions.

Finally, young people in poverty often face multiple, compounding risks to their development – such as unstable housing, poor access to education, exposure to violence, or chronic stress. Through our purpose built and delivered strength-based curriculum, we target the development of life skills and relationships that act as protective factors against such risk.



## Multi-component programmes

Greenhouse Sports programmes are delivered through an explicitly selected range of activities. Specifically, Greenhouse Sports programmes comprise sport-based delivery, integrated within PE and also separately through clubs before, during, and after school, access to competitive sport fixtures, 1-1/small group mentoring, selected enrichment activities, employability focused sessions, and holiday camps.

### Why

There is not a “one size fits all” for development. Although Greenhouse Sports works predominantly through sport, we recognise that this may not be sufficient to support the development of all young people or in all areas of their life. Different interests, experiences, and opportunities will influence what young people need to develop and reach their potential. Through the provision of multiple different opportunities, we maximise exposure to different environments and people, increasing the likelihood of engagement, learning and transfer of life skills, and enhancement in aspirations. It also provides exposure to multiple forms and sources of feedback, expanding young people’s confidence as well as their network – which is often limited through poverty.

With sport as the main focus, we have a clear hook and tool through which to attract young people, combined with a structure of support across varied settings. This is important because poverty has multiple impacts affecting a range of outcomes for young people. Through our multi-component approach, we tackle these interlinked challenges in an integrated way—for example: sport builds life skills, mentoring supports emotional wellbeing and behaviour, employability sessions build future pathways and enrichment trips broaden horizons and aspirations. By exposing young people to these different settings we also encourage the explicit reflection upon and subsequently transfer of life skills that are taught in sport settings into other settings.



## Year-round engagement

Greenhouse sports programmes are available to young people throughout the year (with the exception of two weeks in December). While the structure of delivery may vary during term times and holidays, the programme is always available to support ongoing and continuous support and development opportunities.

### Why

We know the challenges associated with poverty do not stop when school ends. While school can provide a protective environment and resource for young people, when the school term ends, our programmes take over. Without year-round support, young people who are encountering stresses and challenges associated with poverty may experience isolation, unsafe environments or negative peer influences. By providing a structured, purposeful programme through holidays we aim to mitigate against this. Additionally, for young people who benefit from the routine and structure of school, being able to access camps delivered by a trusted and familiar adult helps to ensure that the consequences of routine disruption are minimised.

Our year-round support also ensures that there is an organisation taking an interest in young people's safety and wellbeing through the holidays.

Our coach-mentors are highly trained to identify safeguarding concerns and raise issues regularly. Furthermore, young people know that they can access support from their coach-mentor outside the school term, allowing them to feel safe and secure. Ensuring this safety and support regarding any concerns minimises chances for harm to occur to young people.

Finally, young people living in poverty are often disadvantaged compared to their more affluent peers during the holidays who may have access to extracurricular activities, camps, and dedicated time with parents and family. Year-round support ensures young people in poverty also access enriching experiences that support personal growth, learning, and aspirations. This is important in preventing setbacks in progress that young people may face over holidays if their support and guidance is removed.

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## Multi-year, flexible engagement

Greenhouse programmes run for extended periods of time. In contrast to many development programmes that are offered in short blocks (e.g., 6 weeks, a term, a year), Greenhouse programmes are in place for as long as they are wanted. Our secondary school programmes are available to students for a minimum of four years – years 7-10, primary school programmes for two years – years 5-6, and community programmes are unlimited.

## Why

We adopt a multi-year approach because this is what is required to provide the long-term consistency, support, and development opportunities that are needed to overcome the deep-rooted challenges that young people in poverty can encounter. Over an extended period of time, there is time to allow young people to imagine and build towards more sustainable futures. Many of the challenges and barriers that young people in poverty face, such as lower academic attainment, mental health issues, limited social networks, are complex and entrenched within systems and organisations. It is only by providing support over multiple years, that there is time for coach-mentors to work with young people, their families, and their schools to address these complex needs and barriers.

The need for time is also important when considering that building relationships that are trusting and open does not occur quickly. All young people, but particularly those from areas of high deprivation, can lack trust in adults because of broken, unreliable relationships in the past and a system that does not value them. In this context, time is required for coach-mentors to demonstrate that they are there for the young people, across situations, settings, and their development. This eventually provides a sense of security that allows for meaningful bonds to develop and subsequent developmental change to occur.

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## Evidence-based and insights informed

Decisions underpinning who we work with, what we deliver, and how we deliver it is underpinned by the latest insights from the academic community and also updated regularly using our own data. This occurs through a dedicated insights team who are responsible for producing the evidence base to justify decisions made and evaluations conducted. This work is supported by an independent research board who draw on their ongoing and developing academic knowledge of key areas of interest.

### Why

We want our programmes to be effective and to have the most meaningful impact on young people. We do not want to leave this up to chance. An evidence-based design ensures that our programmes truly meet the needs of the young people we are working with and benefit from the decades of learning that has occurred through evaluation of other similar programmes.

This is particularly important for young people living in poverty, who deserve to receive programmes that are truly beneficial. Young people in poverty are often let down by services and systems that do not fully address or understand their needs and exposure to ineffective programmes can reinforce a negative perception of young people and in the worst cases may actually harm young people's wellbeing and future.

By drawing on an ever evolving evidence base, we ensure that our delivery is based on best practice and is ethical. We also use existing evidence to support the development of a clear framework for evaluation, with justified explanations for anticipated outcomes. When anticipated outcomes are not achieved, we are then well positioned to adapt our programmes and engage in a process of continual improvement.

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## Integration within schools and community

Greenhouse Sports does not exist in isolation. Coach-mentors are embedded within schools and the broader community. They work closely with pastoral teams and teachers to ensure that support and opportunities for development are integrated and consistent. Furthermore, coach-mentors work closely with parents to provide additional support and upskill the support parents and the broader community can provide. This is supported through our recently developed app -Greenhouse Connect - which provides a platform for engagement and communication between parents and coach-mentors.

### Why

Integrating our programme within the community and family is critical for sustained and meaningful impact on the lives of young people, especially those living in poverty. When programmes expand beyond one setting, they become more relevant and support expands. Young people are shaped by their environment and the behaviours and support they encounter across different environments will shape their values, skills, and aspirations.

Getting people in different environments on the same page, increases the depth and rate of positive development. It also supports the transfer of skills and learning across settings.

It is typical for young people in poverty to experience less consistent or reliable support networks or to feel they are let down by systems. Their local community and family are particularly important sources of support, so integrating them within our programmes builds a stronger network of support around the young person. This can subsequently have beneficial impacts on their mental health/wellbeing. Furthermore, if family and friends can reinforce the messages and ideas we communicate from the programmes, young people may be more likely to buy-into the ideas and maintain positive behaviours across different settings.



# Programme Delivery

At the core of the Greenhouse programme is the development of long-term, high quality, trusting relationships with coach-mentors who are responsible for delivering our programmes. These relationships are characterised by high levels of communication, mutual respect and whole-person' support. Coach-mentors take time to understand everyone on their programme and provide tailored support and mentoring to enable each participant to see their potential. The coach-mentors also work with the broader school pastoral team to ensure a broader network of support.

Furthermore, to create an environment that is appealing to young people, coach-mentors focus on addressing the basic needs of autonomy, competence, and belonging. Specifically, they strive to ensure that all young people feel empowered to take control of their participation, have the skills and abilities to succeed within the programme, and are welcome and valued for their contributions.

Coach-mentors receive training across a variety of areas to ensure they are capable of delivering our PYD focused curriculum both through sport and additional activities. Specifically, coaches are trained in topics such as trauma-informed approaches to working with young people, basics of mentoring, basic counselling skills, developing psychosocial assets.

# Why our coach-mentors are so important

Evidence consistently demonstrates that the presence of a trusted adult is extremely important in supporting positive development in young people, particularly those from areas of deprivation or poverty. Young people living in poverty often have less consistent adults in their life, particularly adults who believe in their potential. As such, the presence of a trusted and reliable coach-mentor can help to develop the self-esteem, perceptions of self-worth, and confidence of young people. Furthermore, acting as role models, the coach-mentors can support young people to develop healthy habits and display positive psychosocial skills. Tied to this, through the explicit focus on the development of life skills, over time the coach-mentors can enhance young people's capacity to thrive.

Coach-mentors can also become confidants for young people, providing them with someone to turn to when facing difficult situations or challenges, which can help them to avoid engaging in risky behaviours and also support wellbeing. Additionally, the coach mentors can help young people navigate some of the complexity associated with education and employment, including access to opportunities, which may not be addressed by others with whom they have less regular conversations or trusted relationships.

# Team

# For

# Life

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