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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Starting in January 2015, Tackling the Blues is a sport, physical activity and education-based mental health programme for primary and secondary school aged children and young people who are experiencing, or are at risk of developing, mental illness.

To monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme, weekly tasks, questionnaires and focus groups have been used to understand the mental health of the 300 children and young people (6-16-years-old) who have taken part.

The key findings of the focus groups are reported in this report and show how participating in Tackling the Blues has resulted in various benefits for children and young people and the organisations (schools and young carer groups) involved.

KEY FINDINGS

- All groups engaged in Tackling the Blues reported increases in self-confidence, self-esteem and reductions in anxiety
- The emotional literacy of children and young people improved and this helped them to better manage their mental health and relationships with others
- Tackling the Blues improved children and young people's self-evaluation, co-operation and emotional intelligence
- Supportive relationships established between mentors and participants were key to maintaining engagement, supporting mental health learning and building trust
- Autonomy and decision making skills were developed by providing children and young people with choice and ownership of the activities delivered

ABOUT TACKLING THE BLUES

Tackling the Blues is a sport, physical activity and education-based mental health awareness programme targeting young people aged 6-16 who are experiencing, or are at risk of, developing mental illness. The programme is delivered by Edge Hill University and Everton in the Community, and to date has engaged over 300 young people weekly in primary schools, secondary schools and community groups.

Tackling the Blues offers a range of interactive and engaging activities to recruit young people who, once engaged, participate in tailored educational and peer-led activities to tackle experiences of conditions associated with mental illness.

Weekly physical activity and classroom-based sessions include competitive and non-competitive activities which have been associated with positive behaviour change amongst those experiencing mental illness. The project has involved extensive consultation with young people and education workers who act as project collaborators, help recruit participants, and deliver peer mentor workshops.

“I would encourage other schools to take part in Tackling the Blues if they had the chance to do so. Our children have got to know other teachers and adults, responding to them in a different way through the more relaxed relationship they have with Tackling the Blues mentors. With us it is very much “This is Miss, I might not be able to behave in this way”. But when the children relax, they tend to open up a little bit more anyway, so Tackling the Blues gets different things out of them than we would.”

Primary school teacher
UNDEPINNED BY RESEARCH

Tackling the Blues addresses the increasing prevalence of mental illness among children and young people and the impact of workplace pressures on head teachers’, teachers’ and carers’ mental health. This has been identified as the biggest matter of concern currently facing educational professionals in the UK (ATL Union, 2014; NASUWT, 2015; The Key, 2015), where:
• 1-in-4 people experience mental illness annually
• 1-in-10 5-16-year-olds experience a clinically diagnosable mental illness
• 78% of 5-15-year-olds with anxiety or diagnosable depression are not in contact with mental health services
• Half of all adult mental illnesses (excluding dementia) are first experienced by age 14, and 75% by age 18

The design of Tackling the Blues is informed by scientific research conducted by researchers at Edge Hill University and insight from nearly three decades of local community work by staff at Everton in the Community. To identify the impact of the programme, this research and insight is informed by a number of methods:
• Focus groups with children and young people
• Validated questionnaires (KIDSCREEN-27)
• Semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers
• Focus groups with teachers, carers, and volunteer mentors
• Emotional Intelligence Scale, and Trait Emotional Intelligence questionnaires with all volunteer mentors

The data reported in this impact report, which focuses on data from the children and young people participating in Tackling the Blues, consists of:
• 30 focus groups completed with participants
• 123 participants interviewed as part of the focus groups
• Participants aged 6-14-years-old

Like all of our work with Everton in the Community, Tackling the Blues is underpinned by rigorous scientific research which helps us to identify the programme’s impact on the lives of children and young people, and the benefits for their schools and other community groups.

Professor Andy Smith, Edge Hill University

TABLE 1 PARTICIPANTS IN TACKLING THE BLUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Age of pupils</th>
<th>Number of pupils on roll</th>
<th>Age of pupils engaged in TtB</th>
<th>Number of pupils engaged in TtB</th>
<th>Religious affiliation</th>
<th>Pupils receiving free school meals %</th>
<th>Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3-11</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>54.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5 - 11</td>
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<td>8-10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2 - 11</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>37.6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3 - 11</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>6-14</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1 summarises the schools and young carer groups who have taken part in Tackling the Blues and outlines some of the key characteristics of their children and young people.**

TABLE 2 KEY AREAS OF IMPACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diet</th>
<th>Self-Evaluation, Co-operation and emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Self-confidence, Self-Esteem and Anxiety</th>
<th>Emotional Literacy</th>
<th>Supportive Relationships</th>
<th>Fun</th>
<th>Care and Safety</th>
<th>Help and Support</th>
<th>Mentoring each other – New Friendship Groups</th>
<th>Autonomy and Decision-Making</th>
<th>Comparisons to PE</th>
<th>Fun and Variety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Young Carers</td>
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**Table 2 provides an overview of the key areas of impact reported by the children and young people in each of the groups involved in Tackling the Blues.**
IMPROVING SELF-CONFIDENCE, SELF-ESTEEM AND ANXIETY

- All children and young people improved their self-confidence and self-esteem by participating in Tackling the Blues:

  "I'm more confident. I'll talk more, and in class I'm not as shy, but from this group, I've been confident like just talking. So I answer more in class and that, and get more involved."  
  "Yes, like him, getting more confident, because normally, I used to be one of them people who just barely spoke to anyone in school, and then when I had to come to young carers club, I got a little bit confident, because I spoke to random people that I didn't need to. And when Tackling the Blues came, I got more confident, because I'm speaking to people older than me, well, my age."  
  "In PE, when Miss'd say, "Oh, come and do an example of this", I'd be, "No"... But now I feel like I shouldn't hold back, I shouldn't be worrying about myself. I should just go out and... I always worry about doing it wrong, and people laughing at me and that. But no one does, because they're your mates and that."  
  "I'm more confident. I'll talk more, and in class I'm not as shy, but from this group, I've been confident like just talking. So I answer more in class and that, and get more involved."  
  "We've learned a lot. We've learned about feelings in class, and we've learned a lot outside... because you just put us with people we don't really talk to and don't get on with, but when we go together, you've taught us to respect our teammates and don't judge anyone. If they're not good at that game, just support them, just help them carry on."  
  "I've learned a lot actually. To try to know more people you have to try and work them, and also to work in a team, no matter who you're doing it with."  

- Children and young people also spoke of having reduced anxiety when speaking to others and in front of groups during Tackling the Blues sessions.

IMPROVED EMOTIONAL LITERACY

- The emotional literacy of children and young people improved and this helped them to better manage their mental health (including anger management) and relationships with others:

  "My anger, like I used to get angry all the time, and now I don't get angry as much anymore."  
  "I've learned about my anger, to control it, because most of the time I just want to punch a wall."  
  "I've learned about my friendship, like when I'm angry, like if I'm sometimes angry at S, so I've learned to be friends... I've learned to control your temper."  
  "Before Tackling the Blues I've not noticed a lot of feelings, but now that we're doing Tackling the Blues I've noticed that feelings a lot, because they can make you really ill just for a little tiny bit of something that's going on in your mind can cause a lot."  

- Tackling the Blues also enabled children and young people to become more aware of their own and others' feelings and emotions. This was attributed to both the physical activity and classroom based workshop sessions that children and young people participated in as part of the programme:

  "There was one game where you put different feelings, and you made us explain how we feel, and it helped me a lot to explain how I feel, because I don't often talk to people about how I feel, but I feel comfortable talking about it when I'm with you."  
  "Everyone's different, and even if they're different, it doesn't mean you've got to be mean to them. Everyone's different, but everyone's still friends, and it makes people get into physical activities, say like you didn't really like that kind of sports. Tackling the Blues makes them really into them, and doesn't force them to do it, it makes them just sort of motivates them into doing it, like it doesn't force them to do it, it just motivates them into doing it."  
  "Yes, I enjoy it, but it's not just fun, it's more like about getting to know more people, and getting to be like a better person, because the people you're grouped together with. It's just nice to know, and get to know different things about people that you never knew."  

- Every group reported learning about key aspects mental health topics and co-operation with others:

  "Everyone's different, and even if they're different, it doesn't mean you've got to be mean to them. Everyone's different, but everyone's still friends, and it makes people get into physical activities, say like you didn't really like that kind of sports. Tackling the Blues makes them really into them, and doesn't force them to do it, it makes them just sort of motivates them into doing it, like it doesn't force them to do it, it just motivates them into doing it."  
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- New friendship groups were established between children and young people by engaging with new groups which improved and increases in confidence.

SELF-EVALUATION, CO-OPERATION AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- All groups indicated that supportive, engaging and non-authoritarian between mentors and participants were key to maintaining engagement and learning throughout the programme.

- Mentor’s fun and non-authoritarian approach helped participants differentiate them from school teachers and to view Tackling the Blues sessions as fun when compared to ‘normal’ school lessons.

- They’re [the mentors] not like teachers. They’re just like people. They’re just like your mates… they’re more fun.

- “Before you came in I used to feel ashamed doing sport in case anyone said, ‘Oh, you can’t do nothing,’ but now when you’re doing games they go, ‘Oh, come on, you can do it’, and it makes me feel more confident.”

- “It’s better, because we get to more talk after it, like get together and speak to each other about stuff you don’t want to, and then they make you feel, the staff and your friends, make you feel like what’s up or something.”

- “I like it more because it’s better than normal PE… it’s not just like teachers. You can sort of relate to the people who are the coaches, because they’re not just teachers, they’re sort of like you can talk to them like in the same stuff that you talk about.”

- “It’s nice to know that there’s people looking out for you, and there’s people who… out there who care.”

- “Before you came in I used to feel ashamed doing sport in case anyone said, ‘Oh, you can’t do nothing,’ but now when you’re doing games they go, ‘Oh, come on, you can do it’, and it makes me feel more confident.”

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- “It’s nice to know that there’s people looking out for you, and there’s people who… out there who care.”

AUTONOMY AND DECISION-MAKING

- Autonomy and decision making skills were developed by providing children and young people with choice and ownership of the activities delivered which was something they most valued:

- “We always do activities, we all participate, and no one’s ever left out in the activities, and when we do the activities, we all make sure that we all get along with the activities and we like them, and we have discussions, like, ‘[participant] you like that?’ and he’ll go, ‘Yes’, and if they don’t, we’ll try and find something we all like. That’s what the staff do, help us.”

- “No, it’s got difference, because we’re in a cage, and we’re doing sports what you let us choose, but in PE he tells you what to do, and he doesn’t say, “What do you want to play?” … It’s like they’re telling us what to do, and in Tackling the Blues they don’t really do that. They say, “What do you want to play?” and then we decide.”

- “The choice and responsibility offered to children and young people was key to their enjoyment of the programme, and they highlighted how this was different to school lessons such as PE where choice and ownership of activities was not often offered to them:

- “If you don’t want to do something, or if you’re scared to do it, if you don’t think you can, they all try to give you confidence, they always push you to your limit, and they always find a way that’s suitable for you to enjoy it, and for you to get to not be as shy to do something that you didn’t really want to do, but it turns out that you enjoy doing it.”

- “You get to wear your uniform instead of a kit… you feel comfy in your own clothes instead of wearing your PE kit.”

COMBINING OUR EXPERTISE

Led by Edge Hill University’s Department of Sport and Physical Activity, Tackling the Blues works in collaboration with other parts of the University to ensure the project delivers maximum impact.

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Tackling the Blues has worked with the Faculty of Education to offer trainee teachers, in primary and secondary education, opportunities to work in the school and community environment to enhance their experience, qualifications and understanding of the mental health of children and young people and the wider children’s workforce.

Alongside their peers in the Department of Sport and Physical Activity, all students in the Faculty of Education have helped manage the design and delivery of peer-mentoring sessions, administration and support of research activities and have been provided with mental health and education related qualifications to enhance their experience of delivering Tackling the Blues. These qualifications include Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Schools and Colleges qualification, safeTALK, ASIST as well as receiving sport, physical activity, peer-mentoring and behaviour management focused training sessions.

INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE (I4P)

Tackling the Blues is supported by the Institute for Public Policy and Professional Practice (I4P), a cross University institute committed to working with practitioners, policy and decision makers, professionals working in a multiplicity of settings, the not for profit sector, community activists and residents. The Institute provides a space for working across the public policy field for critical and informed reflection; examine public policy challenges, practice developments and professional learning; and to inform the professional development of intending practitioners working and studying at the University.

Key to I4P’s approach is to encourage joint working and collaborative practice, which is invaluable to Tackling the Blues and its partners since it enables the sharing of resources and expertise and offers a critical review of the programme’s practice.

“Tackling the Blues is playing a significant role in the design and delivery of our new and developing programmes. The focus on mental health and wellbeing is a key strand of our provision within the Primary Area and the team from Everton and Tackling the Blues have contributed their knowledge and expertise to ensure that in developing these programmes we meet the needs of children, families and employers. The Tackling the Blues project itself offers a range of innovative work based learning opportunities for students and trainees across our Initial Teacher Training and broader Education programmes, equipping them to work with children, schools and families in relation to mental health and wellbeing.”

Dr Helen O’Keeffe, Head of Primary Education

“The twin ideas which shaped the setting up of I4P by the University – learning from practitioners and in turn informing what we do with our students – are captured by the Tackling the Blues Project. It illustrates what the ideal relationship between the University and research informed practice can be; mutually beneficial, challenging, driving innovation in curriculum development and learning and sketching out the possibilities of collaborative working. Tackling the Blues has provided a rich source of learning for I4P in terms of how we develop strong partnerships and how those partnerships can contribute to the wider development of innovative approaches to research and the exchange of ideas.”

Professor John Diamond, Director, Institute for Public Policy and Professional Practice
**EVERTON IN THE COMMUNITY**

Eveton in the Community (EiTC), the official charity of Everton Football Club, was established in 1998 in response to the many social and economic challenges facing Merseyside, with the aim of engaging local people in positive and inspiring community-based activities. Based at Goodison Park, the charity is committed to the delivery of high quality, inclusive social development opportunities. Its primary focus initially centred on the delivery of these activities through the power of sport for local Merseyside communities, however, as a direct result of its cumulative success it has broadened this remit to provide programme activity throughout the North West and North Wales.

A ground-breaking exclusive collaboration between Edge Hill University and Everton in the Community was established in 2013, helping benefit the local community through research-led projects and student work experience to help tackle various forms of health and social inequality, including inequalities related to mental health and illness.

In association with Everton in the Community, Edge Hill University launched a new MSc Sport, Physical Activity and Mental Health programme in September 2015, which is the first of its kind in the UK and Europe. The course provides students with a further understanding of the complex links between sport, physical activity and mental health through insight from academic experts, practitioners and other professionals. Students are also offered unique opportunities to develop expertise in the design and evaluation of programmes intended to promote mental health and wellbeing, and undertake applied work experience in this field. Continuing professional development opportunities are also available.

**BENEFITS TO YOU**

Tackling the Blues is proud to engage with many partners locally and nationally to provide them with an opportunity to engage in Tackling the Blues programme and other activities of benefit to them. These include:

- Mental health awareness support for children and young people
- Support for whole school approaches to mental health and wellbeing
- Nationally and internationally recognised mental health qualifications
- Scientific research activity designed to understand and improve the mental health of children, young people, school staff and carers
- Resources, CPD and training opportunities supporting the mental health and wellbeing of educational professionals
- Support with pupil premium contributions

Following the development of two successful projects in partnership with Edge Hill University, and in response to the increasing mental illnesses among young people, we developed an early-intervention project for young people experiencing, or at risk of developing, mental illness. The demand for the project was huge from the early stages and this has continued to grow demonstrating the real need for the project.

**Mike Salla,**
**Director of Health and Sport,**
**Everton Football Club**

**“**All our young carers have appeared to thoroughly enjoy the Tackling the Blues sessions. The sessions have been fun, creative and inclusive of all sporting abilities with their wishes and feelings being central to such activity. The positive role models and the support of the students in delivering the sessions has encouraged confidence and self-esteem, whilst reducing anxiety which has a major impact on the children and young people that attend our groups. The benefit of the Tackling the Blues sessions and team-building activities have given young carers the confidence to access wider opportunities in the community which has been evident during the summer holidays.**”**

**Young Carer Worker**

**“**We’re looking forward to continuing the important delivery and scaling up the programme to reach greater numbers.”**

**Michael Salla,**
**Director of Health and Sport**
**Everton Football Club**

**“**It was a fantastic evening to win such a highly-competitive research-focused and evidence-based award to recognise the creation and delivery of such an impactful programme which has made a real meaningful difference to 300 children and young people. We’re looking forward to continuing the important delivery and scaling up the programme to reach greater numbers.”**

In 2016, and held in association with Santander Universities, the Times Higher Education Awards were in their twelfth year and are widely recognised as the Oscars of the higher education sector, shining a spotlight on the outstanding achievements of institutions, teams and individuals working in UK higher education. Winners were chosen by a panel of judges including Alison Johns, chief executive of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, Joanna Newman, vice-principal (international) King’s College London, and Alana Bousatia, president of the National Union of Students.

**Tackling the Blues programme picked up the 2016 ‘Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community’ Award at the prestigious Times Higher Education (THE) Awards in London. The Higher Education Awards were presented at a ceremony hosted by actor Richard E Grant at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London. The annual awards recognise UK universities for exceptional teaching, research, student support, entrepreneurship, collaborations, and community outreach.”**

**Everton in the Community Executive Chair**
**Professor Deniss Barret-Baasdale MBE**

**“**It is absolutely magnificent to have been successful in securing this prestigious award and be recognised as being ‘best in class’ on one of the most high-profile stages for Higher Education for our work in mental health.**”**

**Optimal Partnership**

**Everton in the Community, added:**

**“**It was a fantastic evening to win such a highly-competitive research-focused and evidence-based award to recognise the creation and delivery of such an impactful programme which has made a real meaningful difference to 300 children and young people. We’re looking forward to continuing the important delivery and scaling up the programme to reach greater numbers.”**

In 2016, and held in association with Santander Universities, the Times Higher Education Awards were in their twelfth year and are widely recognised as the Oscars of the higher education sector, shining a spotlight on the outstanding achievements of institutions, teams and individuals working in UK higher education. Winners were chosen by a panel of judges including Alison Johns, chief executive of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, Joanna Newman, vice-principal (international), King’s College London, and Alana Bousatia, president of the National Union of Students.**
TACKLING THE BLUES FOR YOUR SCHOOL

HOW TO GET IN CONTACT

If you are interested in getting involved and learning more about Tackling the Blues, including the scientific research and broader benefits of the partnership between Edge Hill University and Everton in the Community, please contact:

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This was the first programme of its kind that we have engaged with, and we decided to receive support from Tackling the Blues with a specific cohort of children within the school. These children displayed a range of needs which we felt would be supported by the programme through its promotion of positive behaviour. We also felt that some children within the cohort somewhat lacked tolerance of others and would benefit from the drive to raise children’s awareness of their own mental health and that of others offered through Tackling the Blues.

Primary School Head Teacher

Edge Hill University