

JYDEN'S STORY: VOLUNTEERING SUPPORT LEADS TO FIRST STEPS IN CAREER

It is widely acknowledged that taking part in regular sport and physical activity can have hugely positive effects on both mental and physical health. However, for children and young people in the care system there are often fewer opportunities to participate in such activities.

Care experienced children and young people in the UK are disproportionately affected by poorer mental and physical health than their non-looked after peers and are less likely to reach positive destinations.

Sport Aberdeen runs the award-winning 'Looked After Project', one of the first of its kind in Scotland, in partnership with the city council educational and social work organisations. The city council and educational project aims to upturn statistical norms and create a level playing field for children and young people in care by promoting healthy mental attitudes through sport and physical activity.

JYDEN'S STORY

Since the age of eight Jyden has been in care, spending time within an Aberdeen residential service and also with foster parents and has an additional support needs diagnosis.

Jyden started with the Looked After Project in 2016, taking part in skateboarding at Transition Extreme and then moved on to one-to-one sessions where he was able to engage with an activity of his choice, often football.

In school he was not engaging with subjects outside of PE. A plan was made based around his love of sport, sparked after joining the project, where Jyden was given the opportunity to try new and different sports for the first time in his life, through Sport Aberdeen.

As a means of encouraging him to manage his behaviour better in school, Sport Aberdeen identified a volunteering role within a local primary school, hoping that this sense of responsibility would help. Jyden started assisting with a lunchtime tennis club, and after a few weeks the head teacher offered him a post helping with football.

Jyden went from standing at the side nervously, to leading the sessions on a weekly basis. After taking on a role at Kincorth Sports Centre, along with his time at the primary school, he clocked up a staggering 100 hours of volunteered work, earning him the Saltire Award for volunteering.

During a presentation for the award, Jyden was offered an official role as a casual leisure attendant at Kincorth Sports Centre and is thriving in the role, thanks to his hard work and commitment and the support that all of the venue staff continue to offer him. He has well and truly become part of a fantastic team.

"THE EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN REALLY GREAT, AND I AM VERY THANKFUL TO SPORT ABERDEEN."

- JYDEN



Above: Graeme Dale, Head of Sport and Active Communities and Scott McNab, Project Activator (Looked After Children) at Jyden's presentation.

"It has been so rewarding to watch Jyden develop and overcome challenges. The support of the amazing team of people around him has enabled him to achieve his goals. The whole experience has had such a positive impact on his life and clearly highlights how empowering both sport and volunteering can be for young people, something that Sport Aberdeen champions throughout the city.

"Going forward it is my hope that we can support more care experienced children and young people in the same way and start developing a pathway, leading to positive destinations, inspiring people and changing lives through sport and physical activity, which can clearly be seen through Jyden's story." - **Graeme Dale**, Sport Aberdeen Head of Sport and Active Communities

"THE IMPACT THAT THIS WORK HAS HAD ON JYDEN IS PHENOMENAL!"

THROUGHOUT THE JOURNEY HE HAS BECOME VERY CLEAR IN HIS LONG-TERM FOCUS AND THIS IS DOWN TO THE WORK HE DOES WITH SPORT ABERDEEN AND HIS MENTORING FROM THE LOOKED AFTER PROJECT COORDINATOR."

- **IRENE STOVE**
Principal teacher targeted support