

## **Update on the Community Engagement work within Yorkshire Tennis in 2023**

The purpose of the Community Engagement team is to define and implement practical steps to support the widest possible access to playing tennis in Yorkshire. Such initiatives will help to promote participation in communities that have traditionally not been so involved in playing tennis.

In 2023 we started by openly asking clubs to be involved. As a result several pilot projects have and are being established to broaden the appeal of tennis to minority groups, particularly minority ethnic groups. This directly supports the LTA goal to open tennis up to people from all backgrounds.

While we are only at the start of this journey some great progress has already been made and we are learning a lot. Some examples can be seen below. However, if you have any better ideas or suggestions or would like to join our team of volunteers please email [marketing@yorkshiretennis.org.uk](mailto:marketing@yorkshiretennis.org.uk).

### **Disability specific programme - Open Court**

This programme provides disability specific sessions including learning disability tennis, wheelchair tennis, visually impaired tennis and deaf tennis. The programme is also expanding into other long- term health conditions such as mental health and dementia. Louise Assioun is leading the team for Yorkshire Tennis. She is an expert in inclusive sport and activity and is committed to changing the attitudes, techniques and skills of people within educational and sporting environments.

### **Inclusive Tennis at Graves Tennis Centre, Sheffield**

Graves has been a site of wheelchair tennis for many years but lacked focus. With Joseph Newman-Billington recently joining Graves as Tennis Manager, he brings along a wealth of experience having been around top wheelchair athletes during his time at Loughborough University.

Graves now runs regular wheelchair tennis and recently introduced a block of sessions for adult beginners in partnership with Ben Howarth Coaching from Brentwood Tennis Club. The plan is to become a hub for wheelchair tennis and offer a range of services including individual lessons, group sessions as well as hosting local and regional competitions.

To support this Graves organised a Tennis Open Day in September which included wheelchair and visually impaired sessions. Feedback from the event is being used to develop future opportunities for inclusive tennis.

### **Encouraging diversity within clubs**

Alice Robson was the 2020 LTA National Development Coach of the Year and is now Head Coach at Ackworth TC, Barnsley LTC and Slazenger TC. She is piloting a number of parks being linked to local clubs within low socio-economic areas. Children aged 4 to 8 are offered an affordable six-week introduction course at the local club which is a nice way to introduce players and their families to the club. The pilot aims to see if this initiative helps to break down barriers and make people feel welcome within tennis clubs so that players continue their tennis journey.

Alice's 2020 award citation highlighted her passion for, and success with, engaging women and girls in tennis. She's now also using this experience to focus on encouraging more females to get into and stay in coaching by working on the inclusion and diversity of the workforce.

She's been instrumental in setting up the Yorkshire Females Coaches Network where female coaches regularly meet and discuss any issues they may have, build their confidence and come together to inspire the next generation of female coaches.

### **Brentwood achievements with disability tennis**

The club, with Ben Howarth tennis coaching, has won several awards in recognition of its achievements with disability tennis including LTA Yorkshire Club of the Year and Yorkshire Disability Award Winner in 2021. The range of Ability Tennis programmes has expanded significantly over the last couple of years to now include sessions for:

- Children aged 5 to 16 years and their families with an intellectual or learning challenge
- SEND for kids open for children aged 5 to 11 years with a neurodiverse way of thinking
- Walking Tennis for everyone and beneficial for anyone with long term health conditions including heart disease, diabetes and cancer
- Getting as many people with a visual impairment trying out tennis
- Adults who have extra life challenges with their learning through autism

### **Developing Young Tennis Leaders supporting Inclusive Tennis Competition**

Susy Puskas runs this programme to provide opportunities to help young players increase their confidence and knowledge of rules and regulations. Young tennis leaders and volunteers have helped out with an Inclusive Tennis Competition and a Visually Impaired Tennis event at John Charles Centre for Sport in Leeds.

Feedback showed that these young tennis leaders are interested to learn more about supporting people with additional needs and enjoy helping out at events.

I'm sure you'll join me in congratulating all those taking such positive action to open up tennis. With such enthusiasm and passion I am sure we will succeed.

Kind regards,

Nat Wright

Chair of the Community Engagement Team for Yorkshire Tennis

