



SOCIAL ACTION FOOTBALL TO PROMOTE COHESION

DUDLEY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Aldrich Gonsalves , June 2023



Aldrich Gonsalves, Youth Social Action Apprentice, wanted to host an event where students, from across the colleges he has worked with during his apprenticeship, could collaborate.

Having ran successful recreational football clubs at Halesowen and Dudley College, he decided that football would be the focus of an event. Whilst hosting these recreational clubs he had developed a brilliant rapport with the students and found that football was really good at bringing people together no matter their identity.

During his first year in the job, Aldrich supported a football tournament at Halesowen College hosted during the month of Ramadan which aimed to educate students about Ramadan. Aldrich was inspired by this event and used the lessons learnt from the previous year to replicate the event but on a larger scale and from the perspective of students with them making the decisions and taking ownership.

Dudley College student, Shoaib Iqbal who is Muslim, along with his football team colleagues of varying faiths, led on the starting ideas for the tournament. They wanted a venue away from any participating college, citing no unfair advantages! But still somewhere that felt safe and offered the right facilities.

Shoaib explained to his peers why Ramadan was important and how it was observed. They agreed that this should be shared with all the participating teams and anyone in attendance at the tournament and that everyone should eat at the breaking of fast for the day, together.

Food was of course another important decision to be made, together the students decided that a good option would be pizza and potato wedges.

They all agreed that this may dispel any misconceptions people had that only certain type of foods could be consumed when breaking fast.

Finding a venue was a challenge as many places were at a very high cost or didn't have the appropriate space for spectators. One of the students mentioned that he'd recently been to a local university in Wolverhampton to find out more about their courses and that he'd toured their facilities which^{the} seemed to fit requirements. The other students agreed that if the venue met the criteria, they should go for it as it also helped promote going to university after college. They took a trip to visit the venue and even struck a deal on the hire costs while there.

"As a spectator, the Ramadan Tournament was thrilling. The small-sided matches only lasted ten minutes, but the play was intense, end to end, and every goal sent the crowd into frenzied excitement. I'm not even into football but I thoroughly enjoyed it".

**Sophia Daly,
Student Liaison Officer,
Dudley College of Technology**



With things going to plan on the organisation side of the project, Aldrich still had the task of encouraging students from other colleges to form teams to enter. This was easier at Halesowen where he had already been working alongside their staff to host a football club for their English speakers of other languages (ESOL) cohort. They were happy to participate.

At Walsall and Wolverhampton College, Aldrich knew that the key to ensuring students sign up to play in the tournament primarily rested on finding a few students to take the lead on promoting it. He was able to do this by asking students he had previously worked with on other projects.

The tournament took place and was a great success. All four colleges entered a team and enjoyed it immensely. The atmosphere on the evening was electric, with many spectators in attendance as well as the players.

Taking ownership of this project, the students faced and overcame challenges such as finding an inclusive venue and managing the complex logistics of food catering. The social impact of the tournament was significant. It was not just a sporting event, but also an opportunity to raise awareness about Islamophobia and educate participants about the physical and mental effects of fasting.

This endeavour allowed students to progress into other opportunities, as they developed practical skills like event organisation, negotiation, and problem-solving. It was truly embedded into the students' lives, giving them a platform to promote their faith, learn about the challenges of organising a major event, and foster a spirit of camaraderie and friendly competition.

In terms of inclusivity, there were efforts made to create an all-female team, although this proved challenging. However, the inclusion of three female participants from Wolverhampton College was a positive step forward and will hopefully pave the way for a full female team in future tournaments. The event also sought to make provision for all faiths, ensuring the availability of prayer rooms and late opening hours to accommodate the fasting period.

The students' initiative to design and produce their own t-shirts for the tournament was a testament to their creativity and resourcefulness. This hands-on experience would have provided valuable insight into design and manufacturing processes. All the participants in the tournament were happy to wear the T-shirts which gave the impression they respected the idea behind the tournament and were happy with the design.

Written by: Aldrich Gonsalves

"I was happy to be asked to participate in this event, it's an excellent initiative to bring different communities together. I've loved seeing the young people interact, learn more about Ramadan and respect one another for their individuality and ability".

Abhiraj Singh, a member of the local Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick, volunteered his time to act as referee.



"The thing I love the most about this tournament is the sense of community created. Everyone comes together to share their passion and love for football"

Aldrich Gonsalves, Youth Social Action Apprentice



*Referee holding a football and smiling for photo.
Students posing for a photo during an indoor football game.*