

A large, stylized white graphic of a boxing ring is positioned on the right side of the image, set against a solid blue background. The graphic consists of a thick white line forming a circle, with a vertical line intersecting it from the right side, representing the ring's ropes and a corner post.

Case study

Oxfordshire Mind – boxing for children & young people

Project at a glance

- After being inspired by their experience of boxing, staff at Oxfordshire Mind developed a successful four-week course for adults blending a mental health workshop with boxing skills.
- They worked with local schools to adapt the course for young people, attracting hard-to-reach students who might not be aware of the link between physical activity and wellbeing.



200+
pupils
engaged



17
schools
involved

The challenge

After taking a boxing coaching course through England Boxing, Annie Sillence, Physical Activity and Wellbeing Coordinator at Oxfordshire Mind, saw first-hand the sport's potential to support mental health. Inspired by the results, she developed a four-week course for adults featuring a mental health workshop alongside boxing skills.

The course was so successful that Oxfordshire Mind decided to adapt it for young people in their local area.

“We wanted a way to reach students who wouldn't necessarily be involved in sports or formal mental health support”

Annie Sillence, Physical Activity and Wellbeing Coordinator

Oxfordshire Mind's response

“Boxing is different from other activities because it’s not something that’s generally taught in schools,” says Annie.

“That’s one reason why the course is successful, it brings something new and different to the pupils. Some pupils like the idea of mental health support but don’t really want to do boxing. Others just want to do the boxing! But eventually everyone comes away feeling the benefits of both. It has the power to attract different students for different reasons.”

When devising the course, Annie first spoke to a local school counsellor who thought the idea had potential.

Together, they talked through the problems being faced by local six form students. They also consulted young people to find out what they wanted covered in the sessions – subjects that ranged from body image to social media.



The results

Perry Trafford, Children and Young People Coordinator for Oxfordshire Mind, co-delivers the course with Annie and has helped adapt the course to be suitable for primary school and secondary school students.

After receiving funding from Active Oxfordshire, the local Active Partnership, the course has reached over 200 children and young people and been delivered in 17 schools across Oxfordshire.

“We run primary school and secondary school versions,” says Annie. “Often teachers request us to work with Year 9 students (13-14 year olds) because that can be a difficult time when they’re finding their identities and mental health problems can start to emerge.”

“At primary school we do more awareness-based prevention courses. We have also adapted the course to support pupils in Years 5 and 6 with the transition into secondary school and the challenges that this brings.”

Annie Sillence, Physical Activity and Wellbeing Coordinator



Learning

- **Leave a legacy**

“The course is very much part of a package,” she says. “We leave boxing equipment with the school and train up a member of staff so pupils can still get involved with boxing for their mental health. We also provide Mental Health First Aid for a member of the Senior Leadership Team, and Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity for all of the PE staff.”

- **Think holistically**

Presenting physical activity alongside mental health education, shows students how they work together. Pupils interested in physical activity benefit from mental health elements, and vice versa.

- **Listen to young people**

“Speaking with peer mentors and pupils was essential to understand what they wanted to talk about in the workshops,” says Annie. “We also ask feedback each week so pupils input on the workshops to ensure they’re tailored to their needs.”

- **Co-facilitation counts**

Delivering the course with a member of the school staff (e.g. school nurse) gives young people a trusted contact they can share their feelings with if they wish.

- **Work in partnership**

“Working in partnership with Active Oxfordshire has been key to the success of this project. The team’s support with developing and funding the project has been invaluable” says Annie.



Relevant support available

Mind's Children and young people information

Mental Health and Physical Activity Toolkit: Involving people with lived experience of mental health problems in the design and delivery of your work

Mind's Influence & Participation toolkit – involving people experiencing mental health problems in projects and services

