



ENGLAND FOOTBALL COUNTY FA AWARD NOMINATION



**ENGLAND
FOOTBALL**

FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

WALKING FOOTBALL LEAGUE

LINCOLNSHIRE FA



WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

Lincolnshire has long had a walking football community which was both present & enthusiastic, yet entirely fragmented. Pockets of groups existed around the County, training in their own internal settings, but there was no direction or roadmap in place to propel walking football into one of the fastest growing formats of the game, as it stands today in Lincolnshire. Club managers & secretaries were becoming frustrated with a lack of local, organised opportunities, and players were left unfulfilled, tired of playing against the same players, on the same pitches, week in and week out. The project was needed to increase the number of opportunities to those above the age of 50, to increase the number of opportunities to play walking football, yes, but also to increase the number of opportunities they have to socialise, meet new people, and remain physically active.

The aims of this project were clear; to unite the walking local walking football landscape. In order to do this, we had to plan, develop, and provide a brand-new, local, structured playing opportunity which Lincolnshire could be proud of, creating an environment which met the needs of the walking football community in Lincolnshire, allowing them the chance to roll back the years, and play in a safe and enjoyable football environment. Football is a game for life, and through this project we could ensure that the people of Lincolnshire knew that no matter their age, gender, or location, opportunities were available to them – this, in essence, was an opportunity to complete our local player pathway.

HOW WOULD WE SOLVE IT?

We faced a challenging test, but at our disposal were a cohort of local individuals, full to the brim with knowledge and enthusiasm. To ensure the County FA harnessed this expertise appropriately, our first move was to immediately set up the Lincolnshire FA Walking Football steering group, a 10-person strong assembly tasked with supporting the development of local walking football. This gave them a voice, made them feel valued and like they were working towards a common goal.

We designed and circulated an insight survey to every affiliated walking football club in Lincolnshire, as well as to those recreational clusters we were aware of, and we used the findings of the market research to act as the spine of our offering. We formed a league committee which met weekly for around 6 months, and each committee member had their own roles & responsibilities, whether that be forming our league rules, booking Football Foundation facilities, or upskilling our member clubs on FA Technology.

We arranged 'Friendly Festivals' to ease players into playing against other clubs, ultimately acting as a transition point between recreational and competitive football. Our RDO also hosted three WF referee courses to ensure we had a pool of officials upskilled.



WHAT WAS THE RESULT?

The project outcomes were measured against two pillars, participation in line with the player pathway KPIs, and player satisfaction. We had 14 competing teams sign up to the league, across 10 member clubs. Every single team turned up to every single match day. In total, we had 207 players registered through the Whole Game System in our first season. Our second pillar was our player satisfaction surveys, which were circulated after each matchday. These allowed us to identify gaps in our offer and where we needed to align focus. We had over 125 responses across our four matchdays, with responses such as 'I think the format is excellent, welcomed opportunity to play in a competitive event, excellently organised and officiated'.

Following our successful England Accreditation application, we have committed to bringing it to life. At our first matchday, we invited a local mental health organisation to talk to players in-between fixtures about mental health, reporting systems and how sport can positively influence the human mindset. Our players now have the opportunity to rewind 30-40 years, pull their kit on, put their shin pads and boots on and play competitive football with their friends.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

In 2022, we have extended our divisions to accommodate for an Over 50 division on a Sunday morning, and our league now holds over 350 player registrations which evidently demonstrates the need for the intervention.

Our immediate aims heading into the 2022/23 season is to retain our current provision, and to lay groundwork into forming a smaller Over 70 division and eventually a women's only division.

If you, or somebody you know would like to be involved in the programme please don't hesitate to get in touch with jake.park@lincolnshirefa.com.

A BIG THANK YOU MUST GO TO OUR PROJECT PARTNERS:

- Jonathan Harper
- Gary Wildsmith
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- Marcus Chamberlain
- Steve Longden



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