

A photograph of two women playing volleyball. The woman on the left has long blonde hair in a ponytail and is wearing a red t-shirt. She is holding a pink volleyball. The woman on the right is wearing a black hijab, glasses, and a purple sports jersey with a white 'C' on the front. She has her arms raised in the air. The background is a blue wall.

**Innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic:
Volunteers and voluntary sports
organisations in England**

Case Study 2: Forming buddy groups to enhance engagement

Research report for Sport England

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Forming buddy groups to enhance engagement

Sport: Netball

Size of club: 150 members (including 27 adults and 123 under-18s)

No of volunteers: 15 in administration plus 60 match-day

Own premises/land: No, facilities hired by session

Age Range: 8-40

Paid staff: No

What is the innovation?

The club created a scheme called 'buddy up' which involved players from different age group teams joining mentoring groups. The players were deliberately mixed up, with adult and junior members. This meant that all club members could engage with members in other teams. A volunteer set up the technology for signing up to the groups online and a total of 11 buddy up groups were formed. These groups met regularly and supported each other. This was in addition to the normal team training that was maintained virtually.

Why was this innovation implemented?

During the Covid-19 lockdown, the club was concerned that players could be lost from the sport. The club committee met regularly to discuss how they could keep members and volunteers engaged.

What impact did this innovation have on the club as a whole?

Club members stayed involved and most restarted netball when restrictions allowed. Players reported feeling more connected to the club.

What impact did this innovation have on sports volunteers?

Volunteers were as busy with the virtual training, checking Covid-19 guidance and rearranging venues. Although the 'buddy up' system needed new volunteers to run each group, the players in each group became the leaders and are now poised to get more involved in the club.

What prevented this innovation from happening before Covid-19 restrictions?

Prior to Covid-19, the club had not done much to encourage wider engagement in the club beyond the boundaries of each team group. Although senior players occasionally popped into junior training nights, this had been very informal. The club intend to keep the buddy groups going after the Covid-19 restrictions ease.

What were the challenges of implementing this innovation?

Some of the older volunteers were not so tech-savvy, although they learnt to use video call software. Some members also did not have access to information technology equipment, although this was overcome by other members sharing old equipment.



Eight short case studies that showcase innovative practices in sports volunteering:

Case Study 1: Introducing technology to enhance participation

Case Study 2: Forming buddy groups to enhance engagement

Case Study 3: Using a survey of members to spark modernisation

Case Study 4: Using social media to attract new members

Case Study 5: Purchasing own land to offer an outdoor format of the sport

Case Study 6: Getting involved in the local community

Case Study 7: Implementing club membership management app

Case Study 8: Increasing Volunteer Inclusion and Diversity