

**LEARNING
FOCUS:**

**CHILDREN
& YOUNG
PEOPLE**



Achieve Thrive Flourish



**Creating positive
experiences for children
and young people**

Creating positive experiences for children and young people

The challenge:

Pitsea in Essex is an area which experiences higher levels of deprivation and social challenge. Despite having amazing assets such as the beautiful local park, parents reported they were concerned for children's safety and the lack of safe spaces to go. The park had developed a reputation as a no-go zone and parents felt it was not a space for them due to widely shared experiences of anti-social behaviour and numerous high-profile incidents.

The local primary school were doing excellent work supporting the wider community but identified a need for further support with local families. There was also a concern that when young people transitioned away from the nurturing environment of the primary school, there was a lack of continuity in support. A number of young people who were at risk of exclusion had no access to financial support or a gateway into recognised local sports clubs.

The solution

Achieve Thrive Flourish (ATF) is a locally trusted organisation funded through Sport England's place partnership investment with Active Essex and the Find Your Active Basildon partnership, providing dedicated support to under-served children, young people and families in South Essex.

This funding has supported various ATF programmes, supporting children and young people to have many positive experiences with sport and physical activity since 2020.

ATF is a charity that works with children and young people and their families and the wider community to build resilience, raise confidence and increase aspirations on an individual basis but also as a community, through sport and physical activity.

Together they have created a community hub model – where public, private and voluntary sectors routinely partner with local residents for everyone's benefit. This broad range of partners includes schools, councils, the Probation Service, sports organisations and housing associations.

The approach saw them tap into ready-made communities, such as schools, where young people who were most at risk of exclusion, were identified. Here, they spent time getting to know the young people and their families, to understand their needs, strengths and aspirations. Through this a support network was built, that was taken out into their communities, providing activities regularly throughout the week to really hold young people and prevent them falling into negative activities.

ATF is seen as a trusted organisation that acts as the bridge to help people get the wider help they need and help them navigate local systems that may otherwise be overwhelming. This includes access to training opportunities, services and support, counselling, parenting courses, support for parents of SEN, advice on housing, finance and much more.

Creating this sense of togetherness and teaching life skills through sport, as well as art, heritage and culture, they have seen a positive impact on anti-social behaviour in local communities.

An example in action

This way of working is well-established in Northlands Park (Pitsea) and has been instrumental in reclaiming this community asset from anti-social behaviour so families and young people feel able to use it again.

Northlands Park had developed a negative reputation among local people as an unsafe area, which they would not allow their children to visit.

Through ATF's 'Future Makers' programme, significant employment has come into the area with over 70 residents now involved in either volunteering or employment.

Match funding followed and the park received significant investment into the area which resulted in the development of new assets such as play equipment and play-courts.

The initiative has led to a change in perception, the park has been taken back by the community and ATF has created a network of community leads and young leaders supported by a 'Neighbourhood Connector' (a staff member assigned to support the area and project).

The 'Neighbourhood Connectors' programme will enable this approach to develop more places and spaces over the next three years, ensuring that the community can make use of such local assets, creating better places to live and more active lives.

The impact

Through their work with ATF, Active Essex and FYA Basildon are creating thriving communities for children and young people. There are many benefits as a result of these interventions and new ways of working. To name a few:

- Positive behaviours are beginning to outshine antisocial activity.
- Public spaces are increasingly valued and there is a greater sense of safety and wellbeing in local communities.
- People are developing new skills and young people from the communities are being provided with training and employment and a step on the employment path.
- Stronger prouder communities that are connected and care more for each other.
- Children and young people develop positive relationships with physical activity, through programming which makes them feel safe, valued and part of a community.

The learnings

ATF, Active Essex and FYA Basildon's advice when building the foundations of a new approach to place-based working with children and young people at its heart:

- Patience is key – system partners are facing their own financial issues.
- Go where people gather and tap into ready-made communities (e.g. schools, health centres, places of worship, interest groups).

- Strong governance and strategic sponsorship in place is key to creating local change – in this case from the Find Your Active Basildon partnership, which has dedicated local system leaders championing distributed leadership and the importance of the Essex and Basildon system taking asset-based approaches to working with local trust organisations and communities.
- Follow the energy and where there is engagement. As part of this, involve and develop positive local people for this to become sustainable.
- Success might first seem like a mess – make a start, try things, learn from mistakes, accept they will happen. Nothing new can be perfect.

The future

There are lots of interesting developments in the pipeline. Active Essex is delivering and developing a range of programmes. The work done to date ensures they now land in an area confident, that alongside those who immediately engage, they can build trust with systems partners and target those who remain in the margins. Additional ATF interventions include:

- [Positive Futures](#) – a peer led programme to support young people at risk of exclusion with YOS and education partners.
- [Future Makers](#) – volunteering and employment opportunities for those who have engaged in the programme.
- [Stronger for Less](#) – social prescribing for young people with the emphasis on community resilience.
- [Leapsprogs](#) – early years support for children while getting families active.

Advice for others

To those looking to create positive experiences for children and young people, ATF, Active Essex and FYA Basildon suggest:

- Consider which actors in the system can help you make positive change and bring them together to create a shared vision or purpose.
- Start from local aspirations, energy and strengths of a community, rather than fixating on what is wrong.
- Enhance the capacity and elevate the importance of locally trusted organisations' (such as ATF) role in turning the curve on inequalities preventing active lifestyles.
- Build trust and confidence with the community you are targeting through regular and consistent engagement and offer a low bar for communities to participate.
- Really listen to your community and put the young people at the heart of it. Offer opportunities for them to take the lead, if they want to and when they are ready.
- Identify key local people that can come together and work as a collective for positive change. This might be a young person, a parent, or a local person who has a passion for empowering their community. Ensure you play the role of enabler rather than the doer when local people want to make change happen.
- Provide opportunities for local people to become volunteers or paid staff, particularly to supporters who want to give back.

Further reading

[Northlands Park Basildon ATF Takeover](#)

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Sport England

SportPark

Oakwood Drive

Loughborough LE11 3QF

sportengland.org

