

EFDN



Project: Special Champions League

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Practitioners Guide

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Introduction to Special Champions League

The Special Champions League (SCL) is an inclusive football programme developed by Special Olympics and the European Football for Development Network (EFDN) for young people aged 15 and older with intellectual disabilities. It provides a safe and supportive environment for participants to enjoy football, enhance physical activity, confidence, self-esteem and mental well-being while promoting a sense of inclusion.

Each year, EFDN organises European Football Festivals across various locations in Europe. These events create opportunities for participants to engage in football at their own skill level, connect with their peers to form friendships, and integrate into their communities. Prioritising enjoyment and relationship-building over competition, the festivals reflect the philosophy of Special Olympics, emphasising social inclusion and personal development.

The project also benefits participating clubs and the wider intellectual disability community by allowing organisations to expand their networks, strengthening the relationship with Special Olympics Europe / Eurasia, and encouraging the exchange of best practices. Moreover, participating organisations serve as benchmarks for inclusive sports initiatives and act as catalysts for further development in this field.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, this initiative focuses on integrating young people with intellectual disabilities into community life and increasing their general physical activity levels. By following strategies outlined in this guide, practitioners can deliver inclusive football sessions that provide both physical and mental benefits to their participants.



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Objectives

The Project's vision is to establish an inclusive **football movement** that provides frequent and accessible sporting opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The project's goal is then to provide opportunities for individuals over the age of 15 with intellectual disabilities **to improve their physical health, increase their confidence, meet new people, learn about others, and establish social bonds.**

This initiative is driven by three primary objectives:

1. Provide safe, inclusive and active environments where young people over the age of 15 with intellectual disabilities can come together and play football at a level they are comfortable with.
2. Provide regular opportunities for young people over the age of 15 with intellectual disabilities to socialise with young people who do not have intellectual disabilities.
3. Foster and enhance cross-sectional partnerships for the establishment of a Special Champions League methodology across the football industry.

The Aims of the Practitioners Guide

To achieve the above mentioned objectives, the main aim of the practitioner guide is to further disseminate about the Special Champions League project. The Special Champions League Guidebook is designed to help organisations set up and run football programmes for individuals with intellectual disabilities. It provides clear steps for planning, recruiting, organising events, and managing resources to ensure success.

Hence, the target audience would be any individual or organisation with the aim of reaching and addressing people with an intellectual disability and providing them with a football programme that also caters for the social side of sports, allowing them to feel included, boost confidence, support mental well-being and allowing them to further connect with others.

The guidebook also helps organisations understand how to overcome challenges like finding the right staff, recruiting participants, securing venues, and organising matchdays. It offers practical advice to ensure that activities are well-run and professional, while always putting the needs of participants first.

By sharing successful examples and approaches, the guidebook inspires other organisations to take action and raise awareness about the abilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities. It promotes greater acceptance, inclusion, and opportunities in sports and society.

Overall, the Special Champions League Guidebook supports organisations in creating football programmes that make a positive and lasting impact for participants, their families, and the wider community.



The Consortium

The Special Champions League project includes a wide array of football clubs delivering the Special Champions League methodology. Their input was vital in developing this Practitioner's Guide.

The Partnership includes the following organisations:



European Football for Development Network (EFDN) – Netherlands



Special Olympics Belgium



Special Olympics Europe Eurasia Foundation



SL Benfica Foundation – Portugal



NEC Nijmegen – Netherlands



Werder Bremen – Germany



Bayer 04 Leverkusen – Germany



SC Huesca – Spain



KAS Eupen – Belgium



NAC Breda – Netherlands



did you know?

Being able to better integrate people with intellectual disabilities into society is a key aim for the EU. According to (Ecorys, 2008), around 15% of the EU population do have some form of disability. People with disability are less likely to participate in organised sport as they encounter significant barriers to participation. Notably, this leads to consequences in health and a reduced life expectancy. The dissemination phase included four European Special Champions League Match Days hosted in Lisbon, Leverkusen and Breda, culminating in the Special Champions Festival in Ghent. These events showcased the abilities of young people with intellectual disabilities and inspired other organisations to adopt socially inclusive practices.

The World Health Organisation (, 2010) has defined Intellectual Disability as:

A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning) which started before adulthood, and has a lasting effect on development. Disability depends not only on a child's health conditions or impairments but also and crucially on the extent to which environmental factors support the child's full participation and inclusion in society.

Here you can find a few more statistics about the relationship between people with intellectual disabilities and their participation in sports.



Overview of Disability Statistics:

- An estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability. This represents 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 of us **(WHO, Disability and health, 2023)**
- Some persons with disabilities die up to 20 years earlier than those without disabilities **(WHO, Disability and health, 2023)**
- Persons with disabilities have twice the risk of developing conditions such as depression, asthma, diabetes, stroke, obesity or poor oral health **(WHO, Disability and health, 2023)**
- Health inequities arise from unfair conditions faced by persons with disabilities, including stigma, discrimination, poverty, exclusion from education and employment, and barriers faced in the health system itself **(WHO, Disability and health, 2023)**
- In Europe, individuals with intellectual disabilities often encounter significant barriers to participating in sports, fitness, and wellness activities. This limited access contributes to notable health disparities and a reduced life expectancy compared to the general population **(Ecorys, 2008)**

Statistics on the Positive Impact of Sports:

- People with disability are less likely to participate in organised sport compared to the general population **(Ecorys, 2008)**
- Individuals with lower cognitive abilities compared to the general population benefit the most from exercise interventions **(Ludyga, 2021)**
- Sport intervention programmes have shown to be successful in improving the levels of physical, psychosocial health, and increase social inclusion in populations with intellectual disabilities **(Scifo, 2019)**
- Social participation positively affects the quality of life of people with disabilities **(Jespersen, 2019)**
- The percentage of female athletes participating in the 2023 Special Olympics World Games was the highest ever: 48.1% of the overall athlete numbers **(Olympics, 2023)**



The Special Champions League Methodology

The Special Champions League Project's methodology was developed through the identification, testing, and refinement of best practices across its consortium. This collaborative approach ensured that the methodology evolved throughout the project lifecycle, adapting to the diverse experiences and challenges encountered by all project partners. The final methodology serves as a practical framework for achieving the objectives of the project and delivering a lasting positive impact on participants and organisations.

Development of the Methodology

The methodology was formulated to enhance the design and delivery of educational-football programmes aimed at social inclusion. It contributed to the creation of this Practitioner's Guide, as well as other educational resources, including training manuals and research reports on best practices. The methodology was tested and refined to ensure it was effective, scalable, and applicable for use by clubs and organisations across Europe. These resources provide a foundation for future projects, establishing a valuable legacy for the Special Champions League.

Practical and Inclusive Approach

Unlike other initiatives that offer broad toolkits requiring significant adaptation, the Special Champions League methodology provides a clear, step-by-step practical framework. It is designed to be directly implementable by educators and coaches working with young people with intellectual disabilities. Key elements include:

- **Systematised Processes:** The methodology structures the delivery of activities, ensuring consistency and effectiveness.
- **Practical Toolkit:** Supplemented by webinars and in-person training sessions, the toolkit facilitates the preparation of educators and coaches.
- **Adaptability:** Learning strategies and educational materials, such as online resources, workbooks, and manuals, were diversified to meet the varied needs of participants and staff.

Enhancing Staff Capabilities

The project emphasised the professional development of staff delivering the programmes. By diversifying teaching methods and integrating both formal and informal education strategies, the project improved staff capacity to engage young people effectively. This approach aims to leave a long-term impact on participants and educators alike.

Data-Driven Development

To build the methodology, the project employed various data collection methods to identify the critical success factors of existing practices. This data, combined with testing results, informed the development of the Practitioner's Guide, which provides actionable recommendations for practitioners across Europe. The guide supports the development of local programmes that:

Promote health-enhancing physical activities.

- Foster socially inclusive communities.
- Encourage meaningful participation of young people with intellectual disabilities.
- Deliver unified sports sessions involving participants with and without disabilities.

Collaborative Consortium

The consortium of international partners brought together a wealth of experience in delivering social inclusion and disability-focused initiatives. Special Olympics Belgium and Special Olympics Europe Eurasia Foundation provided specialist expertise in designing sports programmes for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This collaboration enabled the creation of an innovative methodology that was tested and successfully implemented across eight communities in five European countries.

European Scale and Dissemination

The project's European scope extended its impact beyond local communities. Six transnational meetings facilitated collaboration and the sharing of best practices among partners. These interactions were essential for co-creating a replicable methodology.

The dissemination phase included four European Special Champions League Match Days hosted in Lisbon, Leverkusen and Breda, culminating in the Special Champions Festival in Ghent. These events showcased the abilities of young people with intellectual disabilities and inspired other organisations to adopt socially inclusive practices.

Lasting Impact

By focusing on the abilities and potential of young people with intellectual disabilities, the Special Champions League created memorable experiences for participants and their support teams. This unique approach highlighted the importance of inclusion and left a legacy of resources and methods that can inspire and guide future initiatives across Europe.



Why Should You Set Up An Intellectual Disability Team In Your Organisation?

Establishing a football team for individuals with intellectual disabilities within your organisation is a profoundly rewarding initiative with far-reaching benefits. Beyond offering opportunities for physical activity, such a team promotes social inclusion, enhances mental well-being, and creates a sense of community and achievement for participants and staff alike. Here's why your organisation should take this important step.

Promoting Social Inclusion

Creating a football team for individuals with intellectual disabilities helps break down barriers and stereotypes. It gives the participants a feeling of belonging, allowing participants to connect with others, build friendships, and feel valued within their community. By organising inclusive activities and unified sports sessions where individuals with disabilities play together your organisation can demonstrate its commitment to diversity and inclusion. This, in turn, helps to create a more accepting and understanding environment for everyone involved.

Enhancing Mental Well-Being

Engaging in sports like football has a significant positive impact on mental health. For individuals with intellectual disabilities, participation in a football team can boost self-confidence and self-esteem. The opportunity to learn new skills, achieve personal goals, and be part of a team fosters a strong sense of accomplishment. Additionally, the camaraderie and encouragement from teammates and coaches create a supportive atmosphere that reduces feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Supporting Physical Health

Regular physical activity is vital for maintaining overall health, and football provides a fun and engaging way to stay active. For individuals with intellectual disabilities, as for anyone else, participating in a football team can improve cardiovascular fitness, coordination, balance, and motor skills. The structured nature of football training and matches encourages discipline and consistency, helping participants to develop healthy habits that can last long-term and benefit the life quality of the participant.

Building Life Skills

Football offers more than just physical benefits; it also teaches valuable life skills. Participants learn teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and perseverance. These skills can be applied beyond the pitch, helping individuals to navigate other aspects of their lives more effectively. Coaches and mentors play a key role in guiding

Strengthening Your Organisations Community Impact

By setting up an intellectual disability football team, your organisation positions itself as a leader in promoting social change. Such initiatives demonstrate a commitment to creating opportunities for all members of society, aligning with values of inclusivity and equality. This can enhance your organisations

s reputation, foster goodwill within the community, and open doors to partnerships with like-minded organisations and stakeholders.

Inspiring Others

The success of your intellectual disability football team can inspire other organisations and individuals to take similar steps, creating a ripple effect of positive change. Showcasing the abilities and achievements of your team members helps to challenge misconceptions and highlights the potential of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Setting up a football team for individuals with intellectual disabilities is not only a meaningful way to contribute to their physical, mental, and social well-being but also an opportunity to create a lasting positive impact within your organisation and community. By taking this initiative, you can help individuals reach their full potential while promoting values of inclusion, respect, and unity. The benefits extend far beyond the pitch, creating a legacy of empowerment and opportunity for all involved.



How to Plan Your Intellectual Disability Football Project

Recruiting staff

Creating a football team for individuals with intellectual disabilities helps break down barriers and stereotypes. It gives the participants a feeling of belonging, allowing participants to connect with others, build friendships, and feel valued within their community. By organising inclusive activities and unified sports sessions where individuals with disabilities play together your organisation can demonstrate its commitment to diversity and inclusion. This, in turn, helps to create a more accepting and understanding environment for everyone involved.

Collaboration with Schools and Universities

Strong partnerships with local schools and universities provide valuable support for inclusive project. Regular communication with school management and active participation by sports teachers can help integrate activities seamlessly into the community. Moreover, school teachers may already have experience dealing with this participant group, allowing the project to be able to benefit from their experience. Collaborations with universities, such as offering internships, not only provide students with practical experience but also supply additional resources to support project growth.

Volunteer Recruitment and Engagement

Volunteers play a vital role in the delivery of programmes not just around sport, but wider society more generally. This is also the case for a Special Champions League delivery. Many partner clubs have engaged volunteers to improve their inclusive programmes. Passionate individuals can often be recruited through personal networks or by engaging with the local community. Volunteers may also have considerable experience with the target group, for example they may have a background in areas such as youth care, education and social services, and encouraging them to be a part of the project means that they bring in valuable skills. Encouraging parents of participants, or other community members already present at the training sessions, to assist can also strengthen the volunteer base. Word of mouth and referrals from existing staff or coaches are effective ways to expand the volunteer team.

Dedicated Staff for Project Management and Growth

Employing dedicated staff is essential for managing activities and ensuring the programme's success. Full-time coordinators can oversee and structure sports sessions tailored to the needs of participants. As projects grow, it may be necessary to recruit specialised staff in areas like communication, project management, and coaching to allow the project to continue to grow and to ensure long-term sustainability. Equipping staff with additional training and tools further enhances their capabilities and ensures they can meet the unique challenges of such initiatives.

Utilising Existing Club Resources

A key way to successfully recruit staff, and to ensure the sustainability of the project and organisation, is to successfully continue to utilise the already present resources of the club. Many successful projects reintegrate existing trainers and staff that are also involved in other related initiatives. By building on their familiarity with the organisation, processes and topic, the clubs can build on their experience and efficiently expand their programmes without having to start from scratch.

All in all, there are many ways in which staff can be successfully recruited, and each partner within the consortium differed in their approach to this topic. They have used the above strategies to successfully recruit their staff and deliver the programme. We recommend for each organisation to analyse their unique situation and utilise the above ways according to their needs. As part of this, it can be beneficial to mix different strategies to find the most optimal solution.



Engaging Participants

Equally important to the recruitment of well-prepared staff, is the engagement of those who are the true protagonists to this type of project. While particularly the first phase of the project can be very difficult when it comes to engaging participants, this process became smoother over time when the next phases started. This was due to various reasons experienced by the partners including effective communication, community engagement, and also positive word-of-mouth.

Community Outreach and Partnerships

An effective starting point for many partners was the reaching out to organisations that focus on people with intellectual disabilities. Partners could then visit these organisations and connect with potential participants first hand. This also shows a great way in which Special Champions League managed to further connect with other organisations for the benefit of the project. Collaborations with schools, particularly those with inclusive educational systems, allowed some partners to reach a diverse group of children with and without disabilities. Partnerships within the local community, such as amateur clubs, also facilitate initial recruitment efforts.

Word-of-Mouth and Reputation

For the first phase in the project, a strong reputation in the community can be immensely powerful to connect with the target audience and engage them in the programme. Then the reputation of a successful delivery, and the corresponding positive word-of-mouth facilitates the engagement process for further deliveries. Positive experiences shared by current participants and their families help to organically expand on the project. Hence, rather than needing to invest significant resources to attract participants, people may reach out to you if they are interested in participation.

Tailored Selection Criteria

Some partners implemented specific selection criteria, such as age or the ability to participate in international activities to align with project goals. This did not mean that those unsuitable would be excluded from participation – quite the opposite, they are still encouraged to enjoy and participate in the local delivery. This helps to further expand on the project and make the impact more powerful as the needs of the community are carefully balanced against the needs of the project.

Marketing and Communication Strategies

It can also be key to make effective use of marketing tools, such as social media, websites, and other promotional events. They allow to raise awareness and encourage participants. Hosting events, as part of the delivery, at notable venues also generates excitement and engagement, further attracting participants and their support networks. This in turn also allows you to better use social media and websites, again leading to more awareness and higher participation.

Integration into School Systems

The delivery can also be successfully integrated into school curricula to create a more structured pathway for participation. While this can be difficult and need close collaboration with the local schools, offering football as a subject or activity does allow students to explore their interests in the sport. Age-appropriate sessions, where football gets combined with other exercises, helps to maintain engagement across different developmental levels

There is not a single Do-it-all strategy when it comes to the engagement of participants. First and foremost it is important to get a clear understanding of the needs of the local environment and community within which you operate in order to best address their needs. The above strategies allow you to explore ways within which you can connect with potential participants, and it is encouraged to try out multiple ways to allow for the most success.





Equipment and Venue

Establishing suitable venues and securing the necessary equipment are crucial steps in setting up a football programme for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These elements not only ensure the smooth functioning of training sessions and matches but also create a professional and welcoming environment for players, coaches, and supporters. This process often involves overcoming logistical challenges and establish collaboration with local stakeholders. Below, we outline key considerations and strategies for securing venues and equipment based on shared experiences.

Venue Availability and Selection

Finding an appropriate venue for regular training sessions is a common challenge. Many sports facilities are heavily booked, particularly during peak hours such as weekday evenings, which are often preferred by coaches and players due to their availability. In some cases, collaborations with local sports clubs or organisations have proven beneficial. Long-standing partnerships can secure regular access to fields, even if these venues are primarily used for other sports. Renewing contracts annually with these facilities ensures continued access to the necessary spaces.

Flexibility and creativity in venue selection can also help mitigate scheduling conflicts. Schools, community sports centres, and venues that are less in demand during certain hours have been utilised effectively. Collaborating with these organisations not only secures training spaces but can also strengthen ties with the local community. Accessibility is a key consideration choosing venues that are well-connected by public transport or located near major roads ensures convenience for players and their families.

Equipment Procurement and Management

Securing equipment for training and matches requires thoughtful planning and resourcefulness. In some cases, surplus materials from football academies or professional clubs have been donated, providing a cost-effective solution for acquiring high-quality items. These include footballs, cones, and other training essentials. Additionally, some organisations have leveraged partnerships with local sponsors to purchase new kits and gear, ensuring players have professional-standard equipment.

For training sessions held during the day, where pitches may otherwise be unused, some partners have been able to secure exclusive access to fields and equipment.

This arrangement minimises competition for resources and allows for uninterrupted sessions. In cases where organisations operate under the umbrella of larger sports clubs, equipment and clothing are often managed centrally, with costs covered through internal arrangements or by the club itself.

Collaborative Approaches and Creative Solutions

Strong partnerships are integral to overcoming challenges related to venue and equipment availability. Collaborations with local sports associations have enabled access to suitable venues for match days, including facilities with multiple pitches required for tournaments. Identifying venues that are not part of regular match operations such as fields located near highways or accessible by public transport has been particularly effective.

Some organisations have also benefited from their broader involvement in the community. Departments actively engaged in schools or extracurricular sports activities are often better equipped with training materials, as these activities provide additional resources and opportunities for collaboration. Such engagement can also enhance the visibility of the programme, helping to secure more support and access to facilities over time.

Securing venues and equipment for intellectual disability football teams requires a proactive and resourceful approach. By securing partnerships, making effective use of existing resources, and creatively addressing logistical challenges, organisations can create a stable foundation for their programmes. These efforts not only facilitate the development of players but also contribute to the broader goals of inclusion and community building.





Sessions

A big part of delivering a Special Champions League project is providing the target group with fun, engaging and challenging football sessions. Through different football exercises, the participants can improve their physical health, learn to work in a team, and gain self-confidence. Moreover, the sessions create an inclusive space for personal growth and social interaction.

A general session should on average take around 60-90 minutes, depending on the age and expected attention span of the participants. During this session, to keep engagement and focus high, it is recommended to choose different types of exercises

Below, for each part of a session a variety of example drills is provided to suit different training objectives. This is beneficial, as a varied structure caters to different learning styles and abilities, helping participants stay motivated and engaged. By switching between activities, the participants can stay focused and are provided with a session that is well balanced with skill development, physical exercise, and fun. This approach also lets participants experience different aspects of football, from technical drills to teamwork exercises, supporting well-rounded growth in an inclusive and encouraging environment. Each drill is clearly outlined with key details, including objectives, instructions, and the benefits it provides for the participants.

As you can see, each activity includes a difficulty level. The difficulty levels are explained in the table below.

Difficulty Level	Description
1	Easy exercises that can be performed by beginners, and that don't require difficult motorial movements.
2	Slightly more difficult exercises that are challenging for beginners, and that require more difficult motorial movements.
3	More advanced exercises, challenging for beginners, and require difficult motorial movements.
1-2-3	This exercise can be made easier or more difficult, depending on the level and motorial skills of the participants.

Warm up activities

Warm-ups are essential for preparing SCL participants physically and mentally. They help prevent injuries, improve coordination, and create a structured transition into training. Additionally, warm-ups enhance focus, reduce anxiety, and encourage social interaction in an inclusive and supportive environment.

It is recommended to do the following 5 basic warm-up exercises before starting the training session:

1. High Knees – Jog in place, lifting your knees up to waist height to activate leg muscles and improve coordination.
2. Heels to Butt – Jog while flicking your heels up towards your glutes to warm up the hamstrings and improve flexibility.

3. Knee Rotations – Stand with feet together, bend your knees slightly, and rotate them in circles inward and outward to loosen the joints.
4. Leg Swings – Hold onto a partner or object for balance and swing one leg forward and backward, then side to side, to improve hip mobility.
5. Crossover Steps – Step sideways by crossing one leg in front of the other, alternating directions to warm up hip muscles and improve coordination.

Below are three suggested methods for incorporating effective warm-up activities into a drill.

Cone hunting



Level: 1-2-3



Group size: 8+



Duration: 10-20 min



Club: SV Werder Bremen



Venue / Location: Football field



Topic: Dribbling/Warm up



Collabs / Partners: -



Equipment needed:

- Tall cones that will be upturned
- Cones to mark the field of play

Staff needed:

One or more coaches

Main objective(s) of the activity:

- Easy and quick build-up
- Few materials
- Easy to explain

Outcome(s)

- A playful competition

Description of the activity

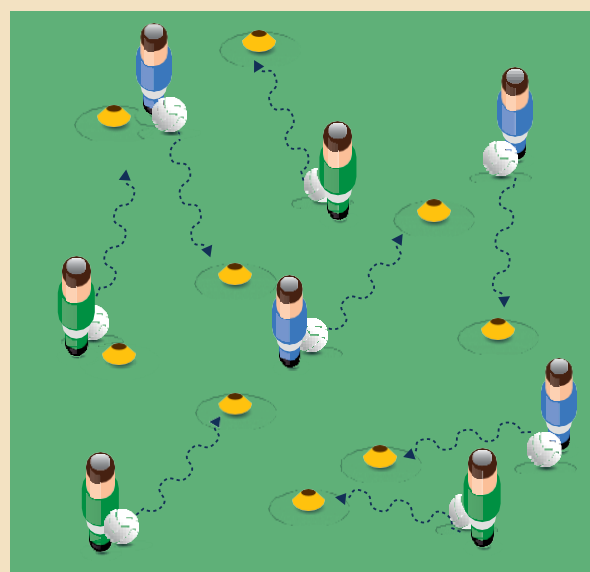
Two teams are formed, with one team attempting to overturn as many cones as possible using their hands, while the other team aims to put them upright quickly. After each round, lasting from 30 seconds to 1.5 minutes, the tasks switch, and the next round begins.

Positive points

Two teams are formed, with one team attempting to overturn as many cones as possible using their hands, while the other team aims to put them upright quickly. After each round, lasting from 30 seconds to 1.5 minutes, the tasks switch, and the next round begins.

Impact on participants

Promotion of:
Dribbling and passing skills, Orientation on the field & Sprinting



Variations of the activity

Possible variations after one or some rounds include:

- Players can attempt to throw a ball at the cone
- Players can try to kick the cone using a ball

Things to consider

Possible variations after one or some rounds include:

- Players can attempt to throw a ball at the cone
- Players can try to kick the cone using a ball

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity

- Be patient with players with disabilities and give them more time if necessary
- Reorganise teams if one is too strong



Technical Actions Square



Level: 1-2-3



Group size: 6



Duration: 10 min



Club: Fundação Benfica



Venue / Location: Football field



Topic: Warm up



Collabs / Partners: -

Equipment needed:

- 2 balls
- 4 markers/cones

Staff needed:

One or more coaches

Main objective(s) of the activity:

Development of driving and passing actions

Outcome(s)

Improvement of individual technique

Description of the activity

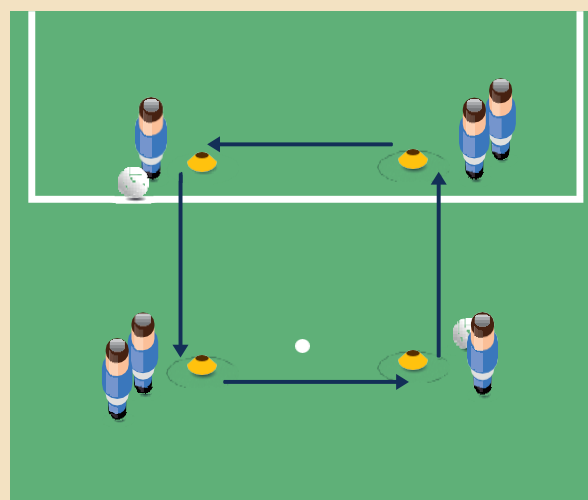
The exercise is performed in a clockwise direction with two balls simultaneously. In the first phase, the player with the ball drives to the player on the mark to their left, handing them the ball and occupying their position. In the second phase, driving is replaced by passing.

Positive points

It was a very simple exercise to do

Impact on participants

Lots of contact with the ball



Variations of the activity

- Add one more ball
- Place obstacles (cones, marks, etc.) between the corners

Things to consider

Create a number of squares if you have a lot of players to avoid some from being inactive for too long

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity

Too many/too few players to make the activity effective



Passing Warm-up Drill



Level: 2



Group size: Even number



Duration: 5-10 min



Club: -



Venue / Location: Football field



Topic: Passing/Warm- up



Collabs / Partners: -

Equipment needed:

- Cones

Staff needed:

One or more coaches

Main objective(s) of the activity:

- Enhance passing accuracy
- Develop movement Off the ball
- Team coordination
- Build quick decision-making skills

Outcome(s)

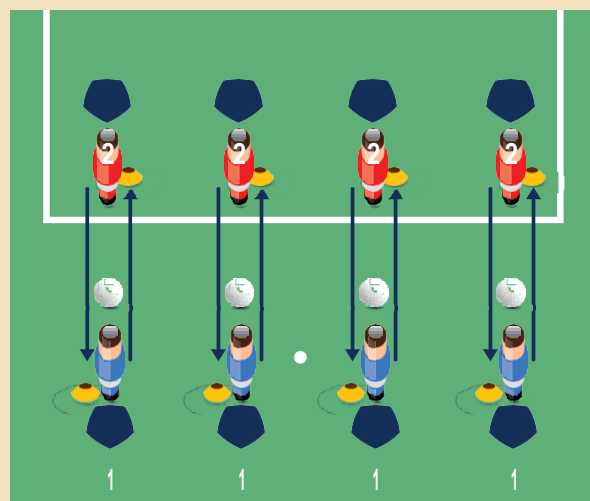
- Improved passing skills
- Enhanced agility and movement
- Better teamwork
- Quicker decision-making

Description of the activity

- **Pass and Move:** Each player passes the ball to the player directly across from them and then follows their pass by moving to the next cone (often done in a circular or straight-line motion).
- **Rotation:** The drill encourages constant movement, with players rotating to ensure everyone practices both receiving and passing.

Positive points

- Warmup
- A lot of touches
- Every player moves at the same time



Variations of the activity

- **One-Touch Passing:** Players are required to pass the ball with only one touch, increasing the difficulty and speed of the drill.

Things to consider

- Pass quality
- Communication
- Player focus
- Movement timing

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity

- Coordination issues
- Quite intense activity for a warm-up



Passing Drills

ball control, teamwork, and communication, providing a smooth transition into more intense training.

Below one passing drill is suggested, suitable for different levels.

Technical Actions Square



Level: All



Group size: 5, 10, 15, 20



Duration: 15-20 min



Club: -



Venue / Location: Football field



Topic: Passing/Controlling



Collabs / Partners: -

Equipment needed:

- Cones
- Balls
- Bibs

Staff needed:

One or more coaches

Main objective(s) of the activity:

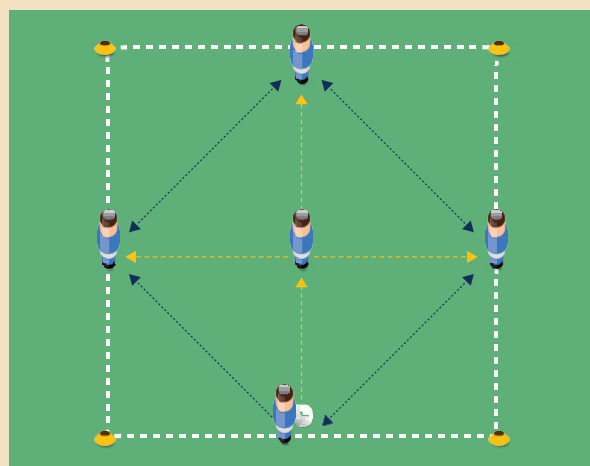
Improve players passing and control

Outcome(s)

- Improved high tempo
- No sloppy passes

Description of the activity

- Area: 10x10 meters, gates 1 meter
- 5 players, use mannequins or cones for middle area
- Pass to the middle player, with max 2 touches he plays it out to any of the 3 other outside players, they lay diagonal to another player and process starts again.
- Rotate the middle player every two minutes- can play competition middle player gets point for 2 touch play and scoring through outside gates.



Variations of the activity

- Stationary Passing: Players stay at their cones without moving after passing. The focus is on making accurate, short passes to the next player in the sequence.
- Pass and Clap: After making a pass, the player claps their hands to signal that they are ready to receive the ball again. This simple action helps keep them engaged and focused.
- Use Both Feet: Encourage players to alternate feet when passing the ball. First, they use their dominant foot, then try with their weaker foot on the next turn. This helps in developing basic coordination and comfort with both feet.



- Encourage Communication: Players should call out the name of the player they are passing to. This introduces the concept of communication in the field in a fun and simple way.

Positive points

Improves basic passing, builds confidence, enhances coordination, and encourages communication.

Impact on participants

- Builds confidence
- Improves basic skills
- Enhances teamwork
- Fosters love for the game

Recommendations to share

- Keep sessions short and fun
- Praise effort over results
- Use simple, clear instructions
- Rotate players to different positions
- Encourage teamwork and communication

Things to consider

- Keep it fun
- Use simple language
- Encourage effort
- Focus on technique
- Maintain a slow pace
- Watch attention span

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity

- Before: Difficulty in maintaining focus and enthusiasm
- During: Frustration with skill level, potential boredom
- After: Retention of learned skills, maintaining interest in future sessions.

Dribbling drills

Dribbling drills are a good next activity after a passing drill for SCL participants, as they shift the focus to individual ball control and coordination in a manageable, inclusive way. These drills build on the spatial awareness and accuracy practiced during passing exercises while encouraging

participants to develop confidence and creativity in one-on-one situations at their own pace.

Below one dribbling drill is suggested, suitable for different levels.





Dribbling game



Level: 1-2-3



Group size: 10



Duration: 15 min



Club: Fundação Benfica



Venue / Location: Football field



Topic: Dribbling



Collabs / Partners: -

Equipment needed:

- 2 goals
- 4 balls
- 6 markers/cones

Staff needed:

2 Coaches

Main objective(s) of the activity:

To develop dribbling abilities

Outcome(s)

Improvement of individual technique

Description of the activity

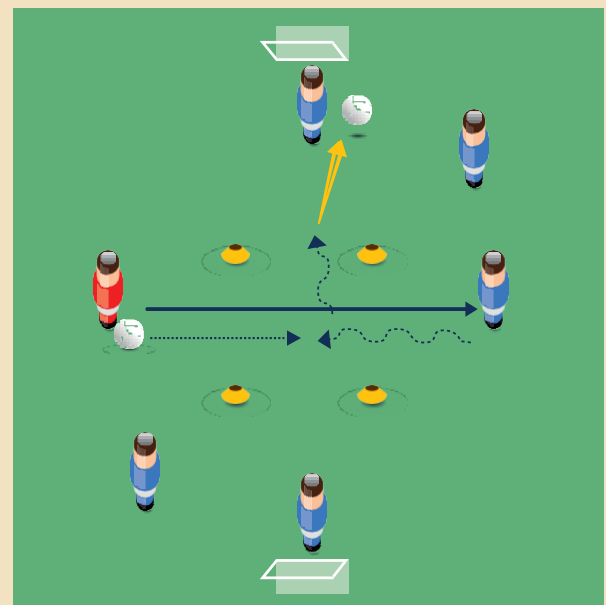
The red player 2 executes a pass to the blue player 2. Subsequently, the blue player 2 is tasked with advancing the ball to the red square. Upon reaching the square, they must navigate past the player who delivered the pass and proceed to conclude the play by scoring in one of the two goals. Following this sequence, the players switch queues to continue the exercise.

Positive points

- Encouraging players to showcase creativity in feints
- Highly competitive drill

Impact on participants

Opportunity for the player to surpass the opponent and score a multitude of goals



Variations of the activity

- Substituting the pass with a driving action
- Prescribing a specific feint technique
- Establishing a distinct goal or target

Things to consider

When players are not of similar levels, the less fit participant may lose motivation due to the challenges faced and a sense of inability to keep up with others.

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity

If the square is too small, clashes between players may occur



Shooting drills

Shooting drills are great before match drills as they are fun, boost confidence, and let participants practice scoring in a relaxed setting before transitioning to game scenarios. Below three shooting drills are suggested, suitable for different levels.

Football activity

	Level: 1-2
	Group size: 8
	Duration: 20 min
	Club: KAS Eupen

	Venue / Location: Football field
	Topic: Shooting
	Collabs / Partners: -



Equipment needed:

- 16 cones (4 colours)
- 1 goal

Staff needed:

1 coach

Main objective(s) of the activity:

Practice of fast reaction, dribbling and finishing on goal

Outcome(s)

Improvement of individual technique

Description of the activity

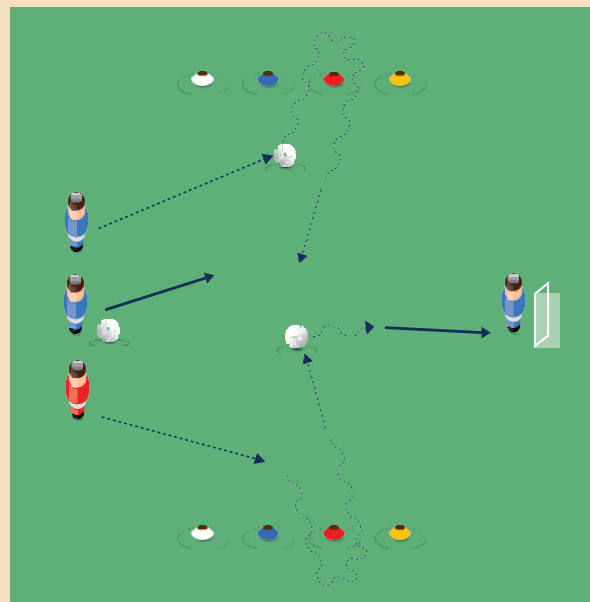
The coach instructs a colour, and the players are required to dribble around that specified colour before being granted the opportunity to take a shot on goal.

Positive points

- Dribbling
- Finishing on goal
- Fun Highly competitive drill

Impact on participants

Feeling of motivation



Variations of the activity

Progression involves providing specific directions or techniques for dribbling around the cone.

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity

The number of goals scored by players or a team may create a competitive environment. The rule of awarding a point to the first player to score could lead to rushed or overly aggressive play.



Dribbling drills

Dribbling drills are a good next activity after a passing drill for SCL participants, as they shift the focus to individual ball control and coordination in a manageable, inclusive way. These drills build on the spatial awareness and accuracy practiced during passing exercises while encouraging

participants to develop confidence and creativity in one-on-one situations at their own pace.

Below one dribbling drill is suggested, suitable for different levels.





2:2/3:3 Game



Level: 1-2



Group size: 12



Duration: 15 min



Club: NAC Breda



Venue / Location: Football field



Topic: Game training



Collabs / Partners: -

Equipment needed:

- 4 cones/markers per field
- 1 ball per field

Field size: 14mx10m (2:2) and 16mx12m (3:3)

Staff needed:

1 or 2 coaches

Main objective(s) of the activity:

Specific game training 2:2 or 3:3

Outcome(s)

Better ball contact

Description of the activity

In this game format, the game is played in a 2v2 or 3v3 configuration. The teams have the opportunity to score by dribbling over the opposing side's line. Emphasis is placed on maximising ball contacts, and substitutions are recommended every 2 minutes. If there are eight or more players, a second pitch should be set up.

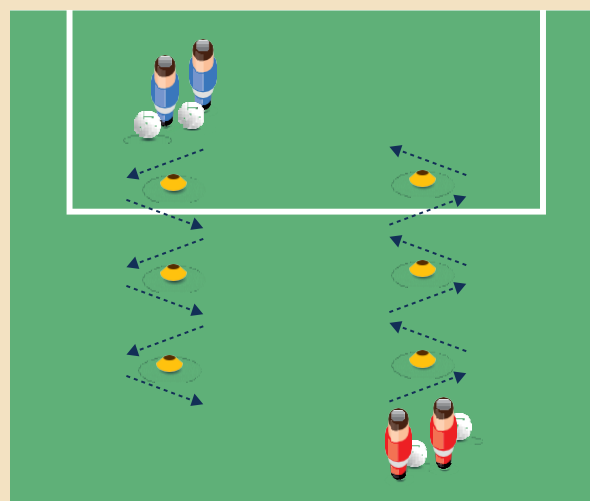
Coaching moments involve being stimulating, motivating, and enthusiastic.

Positive points

The players work well together

Impact on participants

Players learn to work together, pass the ball, and keep track of the ball all the way to the goal.



Variations of the activity

Players are encouraged to engage in the game (e.g. minimum touches) before being eligible to score.

An additional option is to permit one extra player to participate.

Alternatively, a player from the team in possession of the ball can join the game.

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity

In order to accommodate varying skill levels among players, the instruction is to create teams that are evenly matched.



Social Activities

Apart from football activities, there are other activities that go beyond the pitch. All workshops, guide visits, and courses are part of social practices beyond football itself. Integrating both types of activities into the project builds a flexible learning procedure, a multifaceted approach to football and a sense of belonging. Therefore, it is recommended to have this initiative.

The activities are developed by each partner with their own approach to the project. Having organized and well-established goals for social activity may influence the participants' adherence to the project. These are some examples of non-football social activities conducted by the partners:





Healthy habits workshop



Level: All levels



Group size: 20 people



Duration: 1h



Club: Fundación Levante UD



Venue / Location: Classroom or indoor hall/space



Topic: Nutrition



Collabs / Partners: -

Equipment needed:

- 1 room
- Projector
- Computer
- Food cards

Staff needed:

Session leads/co-ordinators and supervising staff

Main objective(s) of the activity:

- Learn the basics of nutrition
- Learning to eat like an athlete

Outcome(s):

- Improved ability to make food choices
- Improved awareness of nutritional habits

Description of the activity:

Session leader conducts a workshop where they explain fundamental aspects of sports nutrition. The workshop is divided into two parts: theory and practice. With a duration

of an hour, athletes gain knowledge about food groups, the significance of hydration, foods that should be limited, and guidelines on how to maintain a proper diet during championships.

Variations of the activity:

Athletes who are going to compete in championships have improved when it comes to preparing their own food.

Impact on participants:

The positive impact extends to all athletes in our school, providing them with valuable insights into habits, applicable in both their sporting endeavours and daily life.

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity:

Ensuring the level of the session meets the needs of the players and participants. Presenting the topic in a way that recognises that people with disabilities face additional challenges to maintaining healthy weight and ensure no shame is attached to the conversation.





Levante UD Museum



Level: All levels



Group size: 30 people



Duration: 45 min



Club: Levante Foundation



Venue / Location: Valencia



Topic: History of Levante UD



Collabs / Partners: Diputació de Valencia, Generalitat de Valencia, Ajuntament de Valencia, Caixa Popular, L'éleman, Enfrío, Marcos Automoción, Gastroedictos, Timpers, Amariló, EFDN, Erasmus+

Equipment needed:

No materials are needed, beyond what is provided by the museum itself.

Staff needed:

- 1 coach for every 5 players
- Museum guide

Main objective(s) of the activity:

- Learn about the history of Levante UD
- To encourage social relations between the athletes
- Positively encourage the growth of a feeling of belonging to the club

Outcome(s):

The response from athletes and families was excellent. They left the activity knowing more about the club.

Description of the activity:

The players visit the Levante museum to learn about the history of the club from a guide.

Variations of the activity:

Level of knowledge about Levante UD

What worked well:

The duration of the activity is arranged to ensure their participation. The accessibility of the museum is also taken into consideration.

Things to consider:

Ensuring the level of the session meets the needs of the players and participants. Presenting the topic in a way that recognises that people with disabilities face additional challenges to maintaining healthy weight and ensure no shame is attached to the conversation.

Impact on participants:

The impact is positive because anything that involves group activities favours the personal development of the athletes.

Challenges and/or risks you could face before, during, and after the activity:

The challenge was to get a large number of athletes to sign up, as it could be related to the feeling of belonging to the team.

Recommendations to share:

Activities that encourage social interaction with some direct link to the team will contribute to a growing sense of belonging. This is something to keep in mind for the athletes we work with.





Monitoring

Effective monitoring is a key component of a project. Tracking the process, gathering feedback, and addressing challenges are all necessary actions to monitor the project's progress and ensure its ultimate success. At NAC Breda, the main priority was to maintain regular communication with participants and their parents, so they made sure that someone was always available to answer questions and receive feedback from the families. Additionally, the club utilised surveys provided by EFDN to collect structured insights and evaluate the project's impact. Fundación Levante instead, focused on documenting all activities related to this project inside their annual non-financial report. They regularly tracked participation and attendance and held meetings with families at the beginning, middle, and end of the season to review progress and gather

feedback. While Fundación Alcoraz chose a more personal approach conducting interviews during trips and training sessions with both players and trainers. Werder Bremen relied on participant lists as their primary tool for monitoring the project. Attendance was recorded for every training session and match day, enabling the team to track how many children were reached each month. Furthermore, these lists allowed them to identify when a child missed several sessions consecutively, and, in such cases, the club proactively contacted the participant or their parents to understand the reasons for their absence and offer support. Additionally, Werder Bremen utilised questionnaires to collect feedback from participants, helping them to continuously improve the program.





Challenges

When implementing a project of this size, it's inevitable that challenges will arise. Sometimes these difficulties may be predicted, making it easier to come up with a proper solution. However, others may emerge unexpectedly and be challenging to handle. The following aspects provide valuable insights about the challenges that the SCL faced, as well as approaches that tackled them. Partners have helped us visualize what issues they encountered, contributing to the application for similar projects in the future:

Recruiting participants

Challenge: The number of participants might not be enough or even too much for the partner structure. The project should present a sufficient number of participants in order to function properly. Another variable that might affect the participants adherence to the project is their scepticism about the project, which leads to limited engagement.

Solution: Having a good communication plan and engagement with the local community is crucial to recruit participants. Always make sure that the communication is aligned with the project and aiming to reach more people. Collaboration with the local community (i.e. schools, institutes), provide clear conditions and examples to the public, and explain the program's activities and benefits transparently must be part of the recruitment process. If the number of participants is higher than expected, providing a waiting list and other opportunities can benefit the interested participants.

Recruiting staff members

Challenge: Staff recruitment may be challenging due to a lack of people coordinating. Trainers, managers, and people inside the structure are essential to the development of the project.

Solution: Engage the community in the project, by incentivizing volunteers to work in the project. Locals and participant's family members could participate by volunteering themselves. Additionally, having people who are aware of approaching the disability context may be crucial for developing the project correctly such as trainers, communication staff, project managers, and others who have some knowledge regarding people with disabilities are key to the initiative.

Scheduling trainings and finding venues/ locations

Challenge: Depending on the number of participants, scheduling training and finding locations to implement the project may be difficult. Participants' school and work commitments can be obstacles to the project's organization. Finding venues that are convenient and comfortable may also present difficulties for participants, especially for those who live far away or lack transportation to attend the facility.

Solution: Provide a flexible schedule for all the participants by including different training sessions that better suit the availability of participants. Stay in touch with partners and local organizations that can provide facilities and venues that match the availability of participants, and possibly transportation options for the participants. Planning a strategical location to ensure that participants can reach the venue and managing the schedule according to their availability are key factors in the success of the project, as they help maximize participation and minimize logistical challenges. Therefore, it is essential to provide a location that is accessible to participants and ensures their safety and inclusion.

Funding

Challenge: Receiving funding from partners and managing the project budget are common difficulties faced by project coordinators. Limited budget resources can affect financial expectations and management throughout the program. These processes are often complex and highly competitive.

Solution: Funding streams from the EU and fundraising campaigns are positive initiatives for building a solid funding base. Seeking sponsorships and partnerships with organizations that align with the project's goals can also be beneficial. It's crucial to establish local and community involvement to ensure long-term sustainability and effective resource allocation (i.e. municipalities, local pitches, storage, hotels, transportation, etc.).



Equipment

Challenge: Participants may not have sufficient money to afford proper equipment. Additionally, the location may not provide equipment, making it more difficult to conduct activities. These resources limitations may not only affect the players but also the staff members, as they too need equipment to conduct the project.

Solution: Partnerships, sponsors and local communities may help the project logistically. Strengthening contacts in order to obtain resources may ease the equipment logistics for players and staff members.

Integrating participants and applying tasks

Challenge: Participants may present different disabilities and backgrounds. Integrating them into the football environment is challenging (this includes tactical and technical aspects), mainly due to their diverse development and cognitive abilities. Categorizing groups and, at the same time, trying to include all the participants in training sessions can be demanding.

Solution: Create mixed-ability groups may foster inclusivity and ease participants' integration. Making an initial assessment can be crucial to understanding and categorizing different skill level groups, leading to a more effective approach. Providing balanced games and task adaptation facilitates participants' adherence to the project and brings better activity results.

Language Barrier

Challenge: There are participants who do not speak the same language as the one spoken at the location where the project is held. Additionally, communication issues other than the language itself may be present.

Solution: Peers and parent support are important for providing information about the project to the participants. Translating official documents (i.e. official sheets, post, banners) is a key to ensuring the inclusion of all nationalities in the project. Additionally, encouraging social collaboration and creating a positive atmosphere are key factors in tackling language barriers and communication issues.

Educating and transmitting the values of sports

Challenge: Educating the players and positively impacting them must be developed correctly. Transmitting the importance of sports and how they foster social inclusion may be challenging but necessary to conduct this initiative.

Solution: Conducting workshops and activities that educate participants on respecting teammates, and how to address coaches, opponents, referees and fans politely may present a positive starting point of participants' education. Focusing also on equality and non-discrimination in these events enhances individuals' values.

Monitoring and evaluating

Challenge: Incomplete or inconsistent data collection can be demanding and for a project that is always aiming to improve and involve more people, the data collection is crucial. Lack of tools and assessment opportunities can make it difficult for staff members to monitor the activities.

Solution: Train staff to assess and be accurate in collecting data. Provide useful tools and programs (i.e. Upshot) and always check for mistakes and missing information. Assigning a team member dedicated to monitoring and evaluating could be a good option.

Challenges may appear differently for each participant, which is why having prior knowledge and how to address them efficiently is crucial. It's important to be aware of the entire structure that composes the project, consolidate current data, and improve future perceptions.





Partnerships / Sponsors

Establishing partnerships and securing sponsorships are essential components for the success and sustainability of programmes that promote inclusion and development through sports. While finding sponsors or collaborators can sometimes present challenges, careful planning and strategic networking can yield significant benefits, both for the project and the participants.

Creating Sustainable Funding Streams

To ensure the longevity of projects beyond their initial funding periods, some organisations have implemented innovative strategies. For example, introducing environmentally friendly initiatives, such as using deposit-based systems for event materials, can create an ongoing source of revenue. These funds can be directly reinvested into the programme, supporting its sustainability and fostering a sense of shared responsibility between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Building Networks and Collaborations

A robust network of collaborators is invaluable for identifying opportunities and securing resources. Establishing connections with schools, care institutions, and community organisations often provides access to participants, facilities, and additional expertise. Educational institutions, particularly those focused on special education, are critical partners for identifying individuals who would benefit most from these programmes. Engaging directly with key contacts, such as sports-oriented teachers or special needs educators, can ensure effective collaboration.

Collaborating with organisations that share similar values enhances the overall impact of the initiative. These partnerships not only provide material support, such as training facilities and equipment, but also create opportunities for participants to experience personal growth through workshops, mentoring, and other enrichment activities.

Engaging Sponsors

Attracting sponsorship often involves demonstrating the value and impact of the programme on society. Potential sponsors, whether public institutions or private companies, are more likely to invest when they see how the project aligns with their social responsibility goals. By presenting the societal benefits of inclusion-focused initiatives, organisations can highlight the value they bring to both

participants and the wider community.

For organisations with strong brand recognition, leveraging existing channels to grow a fan base can make sponsorship outreach more effective. Increasing visibility and engagement with stakeholders helps establish credibility, making it easier to secure financial or material support.

Optimising Resource Use

Maximising available resources is another critical aspect of sustainability. In some cases, existing connections with sports clubs, associations, or municipalities can provide access to free or subsidised facilities. Additionally, organisations can repurpose materials or equipment no longer in use by other departments, reducing the need for new purchases.

Partnerships with schools or community groups often yield additional benefits, such as the ability to share expertise, organise joint events, or pool resources to better meet the needs of participants. These collaborations create a mutually beneficial environment, where both parties contribute to and benefit from the success of the initiative.

Long-Term Benefits of Partnerships

Partnerships and sponsorships are not only instrumental for funding and resource allocation but also serve to enhance the overall experience for participants. From providing essential equipment and facilities to offering educational workshops and social activities, the involvement of committed partners enriches the programme's impact.

Sustained collaboration also fosters a sense of community and shared purpose among all stakeholders. Participants benefit from the synergies created by a well-organised network, while sponsors and partners strengthen their social image and community engagement.

The success of inclusive sports programmes relies heavily on the strength of their partnerships and the creativity of their funding strategies. By cultivating meaningful collaborations, optimising resource use, and actively engaging sponsors, organisations can build a solid foundation for long-term sustainability. Ultimately, these efforts ensure that participants continue to experience the social, mental, and physical benefits of inclusion-focused sports, enriching their lives and the communities they are part of.



Communication

Communication is a vital process for ensuring smooth progression to the project and for reaching a broader audience. This aspect of the project englobes various methods of disseminating information to the public, including news, schedules, activities, and results, aiming to reach participants, families, communities, and partners. The

methods of propagating information may depend on each partner's strategy and their approach to the communication plan.

Project partners` developed strategies in sharing information that caught public attention through different platforms:

External Communication

Social media

Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok and LinkedIn are examples of social media channels that were used in this project. It serves as the main tool for messaging, mostly due to its accessibility and ease of information dissemination. All the partners have their own account; they posted frequently to gain more attention to the project.

Website

The project got its own website, where most of the information comprehending all of the aspects of the project is posted (i.e. schedules, results, activities, deliverables). Additionally, most of the partners have their own websites and they developed webpages to consistently post reports, deliverables, and content.

Communication sector

Having a sector committed to building the best strategy and approach to the communication part brought crucial outcomes in propagating the project to even more people.

Usage of images and videos

Posting pictures and videos on different platforms was one of the main approaches to information dissemination. Pictures contained project information or training schedule, together with educative videos and after match films, may be one approach to follow to increase media propagation.

Community engagement

Local broadcaster, newspaper and TVs channels demonstrated to be successful tools in this process. Engaging into other community initiatives can be an asset for the communication campaign.

The approach to the content

Promoting the content with passion, treating it with professionalism and respect helps to develop a smooth communication trajectory in order to reach the population.

The outer communication was mainly done by these initiatives. The inner communication, which is the approach with the participants and their families, were done by similar ways:



Internal Communication

WhatsApp

The main platform to communicate with participants and their families (especially if the participant is a minor). Creating groups to facilitate communication will show an ease in sharing project information and results. It is important to note that some parents of the players also have intellectual disabilities. Therefore, some parents may need extra attention, and you must be careful to formulate sentences correctly without ambiguities that could cause confusion.

Email

Another platform to communicate with participants. More formal than other communication channels, but also effective when propagating project information.

Training sessions

A face-to-face strategy, which is highly effective. It can be done by simply talking or distributing sheets to the participants.

Creating a communication plan is essential for project development. Each partner approached according to their comfort and ease. Focus on how the message is being delivered will impact significantly in the project outcome.





Women and Girls

Although inclusion of women and girls with disability in football is progressing daily, barriers still exist that need to be addressed in order to raise awareness and promote social change within the community. The SCL is a crucial project to advocate for women and girls' visibility throughout the context of disability. The benefits of this project may increase participation in women's football.

There are some aspects to consider in strengthening the project's impact, including the interventions developed by project partners increase women and girls' participation in the football context that could be a useful tool for similar interventions to the SCL:

Build a comfortable and welcoming environment

Partners confirmed that creating a trustworthy and inclusive environment can increase the participation of women and girls in sports, while also providing a safe space for those who have a disability.

Addressing potential barriers

Learning and educating others about cultural and social norms is crucial to promote awareness and to foster inclusion in the football context. Furthermore, addressing a non-discriminatory and supportive environment may benefit individuals' sense of belonging and engagement to sports.

Staff approach

The staff represents a huge importance in individual development and personal growth. A group that demonstrates a positive attitude towards the project, helps to build a supportive environment. Additionally, strengthen staff members that have a previous knowledge on how to intervene with disability and women's football indicate a competent procedure to the project.

Collaboration with local communities

Start movements towards women inclusion through sports, engaging communities (i.e. schools, organizations, etc) and encouraging mentorship programs can reach a wider audience and keep the barrier for girls to sign up as low as possible.

Appropriate structures and resources

Increasing their resources towards women's football to create an accessible environment for all genders and people who have a disability may influence personal improvement.

Social media visibility

Show to the community results and achievements done by the participants, provide role models and collaborating for a friendly environment can foster community engagement to the project.





How To Set Up an International Matchday

Organising an international matchday for the Special Champions League requires meticulous planning and coordination. The following steps outline the essential aspects to consider, ensuring a seamless experience from teams' departure in their home countries to their return. This guide also incorporates the Special Olympics' football competition and tournament management pillars to ensure professional standards are met.

1. Pre-Event Planning and Team Preparation

Team Selection and Expectations

- **Team Profile:** Clearly define the profile of participating teams and players well in advance:
 - Gender: Specify whether the tournament is for male, female, or mixed-gender teams.
 - Age Groups: Indicate the age range for participation (e.g., 8-12, 13-15, 16-21, 22+).
 - Ability Levels: Outline the expected ability levels (Level 1-2 for higher ability, Level 3-4 for lower ability, or mixed levels).

Team Training:

- Ensure all teams have trained together for at least 12 weeks.
- Promote balanced team composition with players of similar ability levels.
- Require all teams to arrive in professional football kits and appropriate footwear as per FIFA regulations. At least strive this as much as possible, but be aware that some clubs might not have the financial resources for this.

Coach Requirements:

- Each team should have at least one licensed football coach.
- Coaches must be trained in the specific needs of players with intellectual disabilities.

Logistics Coordination

- **Travel Plans:** Coordinate flight and transport arrangements for teams, ensuring all participants arrive on time.
- **Visa and Documentation:** Assist teams in acquiring necessary travel documentation, including visas and medical clearances if required.
- **Accommodation:** Reserve accommodations that meet Special Olympics standards:
 - Maximum four participants per room.

- Single beds, clean facilities, showers, and inclusive catering (breakfast and dinner).

Communication

- Distribute a detailed event handbook, including schedules, competition rules, and contact information for key organisers.
- Collect team assessment forms for pre-divisioning preparation.

2. On-Site Setup and Divisioning

Arrival and Orientation

- Provide efficient airport and hotel transport services.
- Organise a welcome briefing to introduce the event agenda, competition structure, and facilities.

Divisioning Process

- Conduct pre-competition divisioning to group teams based on age, gender, and ability level.
- Utilise team assessment forms and conduct observation matches.
- Engage professional coaches to oversee divisioning and ensure fair grouping.
- Allocate a maximum of 20% of the event's total time to divisioning activities.

3. Competition Management

Matchday Operations

- **Competition Format:** Select an appropriate format (e.g., 5-a-side, 7-a-side, 8-a-side) based on the number of teams and available time.
- **Game Rules:**
 - Use Special Olympics Football Rules.
 - Ensure all referees are qualified and trained in these specific rules.
- **Match Organisation:**
 - Schedule matches with sufficient rest periods (at least one match's duration).
 - Limit total playing time per team to 100 minutes per day, with all players guaranteed at least 25% match time.
 - Incorporate a ranking system following FIFA guidelines (points, goal difference, goals scored, head-to-head).



Facilities

- **Football Fields:** Prepare fields suitable for the selected competition format, equipped with necessary football equipment.
- **Logistics:** Provide changing rooms with showers, rest areas, and catering facilities offering snacks, lunch, and drinks.

Awards Ceremony

- Follow Special Olympics standards for award presentations:
 - Distribute gold, silver, and bronze medals for the top three teams and participation medals for others.
 - Involve players only on the award stage, coordinated by an MC and accompanied by music.

4. Social and Rest Activities

- Dedicate rest periods for players, especially those with special needs, between matches.
- Organise social events such as music, dance, or other interactive activities to create connections among participants outside the football field.

5. Departure and Follow-Up

- **Transport Coordination:** Ensure smooth transitions from accommodation to the airport for return journeys.
- **Feedback Collection:** Distribute post-event surveys to gather feedback from participants, coaches, and organisers.
- **Documentation:** Share event photos, videos, and highlights with teams and stakeholders, emphasising the successes and lessons learned.

By adhering to these guidelines, the Special Champions League international matchday can provide an enriching and memorable experience for all involved, promoting social inclusion and the capabilities of young athletes with intellectual disabilities.





Budget

To effectively structure a team for a project like the SCL, it's essential to account a startup budget to establish a team of people who have intellectual disabilities. The number of participants per organization should be approximately (24 or 48) individuals per team.

Please note that this financial analysis is related to establish a team and not related to the tournament itself. Additionally, the costs may vary depending on the geographical location of the partners. The following prices are breakdown based on general needs for forming a team regarding the Dutch economy:

Player Kits and Equipment:

Proper football attire is crucial for developing a sense of belonging among the players and ensuring appropriate conduct during training and throughout the project.

- Shirts: €40 /person
- Trousers: €30 /person
- Socks: €8 /person
- Sweatshirts/Jackets: €50 /person

Exercise Equipment:

This equipment items are essential to organize training sessions. They make the experience more immersive and engage participants to activities.

- Bibs: €5 /bib
- Cones: €10 /set
- Balls: €20 /ball
- Goal: €150 /goal

First Aid:

Making safety a top priority is essential. A first aid kit provides immediate care for any injuries or health issues during sessions, promoting a safe and responsible environment. If a defibrillator is not already available at your venue, it should also be included in your budget.

- First aid kit: €30 /kit

Training Venues:

Securing an appropriate and accessible venue is vital for this project. This cost includes the rental of football pitches and social areas, creating an ideal environment for participants to train.

- Outdoor pitch (mid-range): €50/hour
- Indoor pitch (mid-range): €90/hour
- Mean: €70/hour

These are estimates of the overall necessities involved in structuring a team for the SCL project. Other expenses, such as medical and mental health professionals, as well as indirect costs, may also benefit the organization and impact the startup budget. However, this analysis should be sufficient to provide partners with a solid starting point for developing a team

	24 players	48 players
Shirts	€40 x 24: €960	€40 x 48: €1920
Trousers	€30 x 24: €720	€30 x 48: €1440
Socks	€8 x 24: €192	€8 x 48: €384
Sweatshirts/Jackets	€50 x 24: €1200	€50 x 48: €2400
Bibs	€2 x 24: €48	€2 x 48: €96
Cones	€10 x 4 sets: €40	€10 x 8 sets: €80
Ball	€20 x 24: €480	€20 x 48: €960
Goal	€150 x 2: €300	€150 x 4: €600
First Aid kit	€30 x 2: €60	€30 x 4: €120
Venue	€70 x 12 hours/month: €840/month	€70 x 12 hours/month: €1680/month
TOTAL	€4840	€9680



Inclusion beyond Special Champions League

Social inclusion goes far beyond the football field; it shapes communities to a more dignified environment. The Special Champions League prepare an environment where well-being is key. It provides equal opportunities to the participants, ensuring that everyone gets the same opportunity, treatment, and integration. Presenting, as well, equal outcomes, where everyone is put in a condition to a better quality of life, which can impact their adherence to physical activity and increase mental health sustainability.

The project serves as a tool to develop inclusion in different communities. Building a positive environment that can

reflect their future behaviours, showing that people with intellectual disabilities are capable of developing a role within the society and cause a positive impact, by breaking stereotypes and inequalities. The self-confidence and decision-making that the project provides inspires themselves to show the community what they can do and the difference that sports programs can provide to everyone. Leading to visibility through the whole Europe about the importance of social inclusion for people with disabilities. Gather national and international changes acknowledges the impact of the project, fostering cultural awareness and self-empowerment inside new communities. Below is a number of testimonies on how the project impacted them.





Toeleden naar structureel voetballen



Name: Lucas



Age: 13



Gender: Male



Role: Participant



Club: NAC Breda

Brief description of the Case Study:

Lucas trained at a football club but stopped because he was going through a tough time. With good support from school, he was able to make progress in terms of self-confidence. Additionally, appropriate medication also helped him feel confident enough to take the step to play football at NAC Breda. Lucas really enjoys it, and all the photos and videos are proudly shared with his family. Thanks to this positive experience, Lucas feels confident to start playing football again.



How did the project help with personal development:

School indicates that Lucas has always enjoyed sports, but now he participates in them much more frequently. He tries out new

activities in gym class more quickly and joins in the football games during breaks. He shows tremendous dedication and sportsmanship. It's wonderful to read that both the school and the family are incredibly proud of him. We have also seen him grow within the group. He is a kind and sociable boy who has found his place in the team.

Functioneren in een team



Name: Geert



Age: 36



Gender: Male



Role: Participant



Club: NAC Breda

Brief description of the Case Study:

Geert is a man who lives in supervised housing. Once a month, he spends a weekend at his parents' place, where he usually plays a lot of games. Additionally, Geert is somewhat overweight, so it's good that he had the courage to join us for football.



How did the project help with personal development:

During one of the matches, Geert was spending the weekend at his parents' place. His caregiver was present at the match, but

Geert was late. I asked him, "Do you think Geert will still come?" to which he replied, "He probably stayed up late playing games,

so I don't expect him." He hadn't finished speaking when we saw Geert arriving at the sports complex! We told him that we thought he wouldn't come anymore, to which he replied, "But I promised, didn't I? You need me!". We were able to instill in him the sense of being part of a team and the responsibility that comes with it. That's incredibly valuable for a young man like he made a commitment to join a football club.



Name: Soraya



Age: 13



Gender: Female



Role: Participant



Club: NAC Breda

Brief description of the Case Study:

Soraya lives in a parent-child residence of a care institution. Her parents do not own a car or have the means to transport their child to a sports lesson. We have arranged for her to be picked up for every training session and match so that she can also participate. She attends special education and already plays in the Community Champions League there. When she mentioned that she was going to play football for NAC, her classmates actually told her that she couldn't play football at all, but she's proving them wrong.

Best take away from the SCL project

Please include at least 4 sentences:

See above and below.

How did the project help with personal development:

Every time Soraya gets to train or play a match, she feels nervous. She's a super sweet girl who always has plenty of stories but needs a few minutes to warm up. She enthusiastically

participates in the exercises. Although she has no football experience, she practices at home with her brothers. While her fitness level may sometimes leave something to be desired, she has many successful moments. Her teammates also pass to her, and the coaches provide positive encouragement. She even manages to score occasionally, making the success experience complete! It's great to see her active and involved.



Making Friends!



Name: Fay



Age: 18



Gender: Female



Role: Participant



Club: NAC Breda

Fay is a girl who played in a regular football team. However, it didn't go well for her because she experienced too many stimuli. She then joined a disability football team, and that's going much better. Sometimes, there is still some insecurity noticeable in Fay, which is why she was asked if she would like to play football at NAC. She agreed. We were able to instil in him the sense of being part of a team and the responsibility that comes with it. She has enjoyed the project and making friends has been a big part of this project for her.



	Name:	Jason Schönen	Brief description of the Case Study: Jason is a pupil with a cognitive impairment and socio-emotional disorder. He has severe behavioural problems. Despite individual support, he has made little progress at school and has always attracted attention due to his negative behaviour.
	Age:	17	
	Gender:	Male	
	Role:	Player	
	Club:	KAS Eupen	

Best take away from the SCL project

Since the football module was introduced at school, Jason's behaviour has improved a lot. He feels more comfortable at school and has a better image of the school.

How did the project help with personal development:

The tournaments have given him a lot more self-confidence and he believes in himself and the school more. He is also very proud to play for the KAS Eupen team. This is also reflected in his participation in many different sports tournaments.



	Name:	Jamie Dumont	Brief description of the Case Study: Jamie is a pupil with learning difficulties and socio-emotional disabilities. He has received psychiatric treatment several times and has already been admitted to a psychiatric ward. As a result, he now only attends our school part-time for three days.
	Age:	16	
	Gender:	Male	
	Role:	Patiricipant	
	Club:	KAS Eupen	

Best take away from the SCL project

Jamie did not regularly take part in the football module. I then spoke to the school psychologist and suggested that he could take part in the SCL in Breda. She thought it would be a good idea to observe how he behaves in a new environment. Jamie was delighted with the invitation and has been taking part in the football module every week since then. The other teachers also report that he has improved his work behaviour since

then.

How did the project help with personal development:

Due to his improved behaviour and increased self-esteem, his school every half day again. At the end of the school year, we will evaluate whether he should come to school full-time again next school year. We have the SCL to thank for this, which has had a big impact on his self-confidence



Name: Álvaro Alcácer



Age: 26



Gender: Male



Role: Participant



Club: Fundación Levante UD



Brief description of the Case Study:

Álvaro is a guy with Down's Syndrome, even though his difficulties, he is very good at talking and studying. When he arrived he was afraid of socialising and didn't talk with others that weren't his friends. Álvaro has been practising football in the Foundation for 9 years. Year by year, he is more and more involved in the project and being one of the most distinguished players in Fundación Levante.

Best take away from the SCL project

Álvaro did really enjoy the experience in SCL, he remembers it with great affection. The best for him was to share time with other players, from other countries, through the activities that were organised. He also highlighted the hotel and the visit to the stadium with the participants and the local club. And the last of all, he really loved the opportunity to exchange shirts with other players, from other clubs, and keep them with affection.

How did the project help with personal development:

Through his 9 years in the project, Álvaro has developed a feeling of belonging that make the Foundation really proud. For him it was difficult to establish relationships with others. Since the moment he arrived to Levante's Foundation he has learned to bound with others, change his teammates without problems and participating in projects like SCL that helped to make new friends. He has also improved his level by training with other persons and being part of a different championship.



Name: Alba Blasco



Age: 25



Gender: Female



Role: Participant



Club: Fundación Levante UD



Brief description of the Case Study:

This girl has been a real example of overcoming. This girl, with 25 years, has spent 8 years in the Foundation, enjoying so much football. She is one of our athletes who spends more time driving than training, just to enjoy her sport and being with her teammates. Alba not only has intellectual disability; she also has been dealing with mental issues until the doctors found out the best medicine for her. She has one of the warmest hearts in the Foundation.

Best take away from the SCL project

Her best experience in each tournament is to get to know other of the participants in Fundación Levante. She also loves and enjoys meeting other football players, like her, from other countries. She hasn't travelled yet to other country with the Foundation and she is wishing to do it.

How did the project help with personal development:

This experience helps her with her eager to learn new things. communicate with the dutchman players. From the moment she arrived, with all her problems, she has been dedicated to our activity, sharing their values and demonstrated to our activ



Name: Blanca Fuertes



Age: 22



Gender: Female



Role: Participant



Club: Fundacion Levante UD

Brief description of the Case Study:

Blanca is one of our youngest female players. She also has Down's Syndrome. She started playing in the youngest section 'Iniciación'. She also was one of the first woman that compose our female team. For the last 8 years, she has been practising football in the Foundation, and her improvement is very notable.

Best take away from the SCL project

She hasn't live the experience of the championship itself yet, but she is enjoying the experience already. The experience has motivated Blanca to train harder, has more desire to train and she is more committed. Blanca likes training with other players from the Foundation and get to know them better. She is also nervous because is the first time she is flying, but she can't wait to live it.

How did the project help with personal development:

As we have already said, she is a player who has been in the Foundation for many years. During these years we have noticed a lot the physical and football evolution that she has had. Although now receiving more personalized attention, she is growing even more. It also helps you be more committed and motivated. And it also improves her social skills and personal relationships with the rest of the team. Eupen team. This is also reflected in his participation in many different sports tournaments.



Name: César Gomariz



Age: 17



Gender: Male



Role:



Club: Fundacion Levante UD

Brief description of the Case Study:

César is one of the youngest players who has participated in the SCL project. He has been part of the "Iniciación" section. He has a long history in the Foundation and has gone from being a small player to a great player. Furthermore, before being part of the Foundation, he was already a member of the Club, so now he feels very excited to represent it.

Best take away from the SCL project

Participating in the SCL tournament has increased his passion for soccer. Although what he liked most was being able to fly to another country, since it was the first time he had done so. He has very good memories of the rest of the

clubs that participated and the opportunity to make new friends. He also enjoyed the activities that were carried out and spending time with his team and getting to know them better. The project has helped César to socialize. He was a very shy child, and finding people like him has helped him grow as a person.



Name: José Moreno



Age: 20



Gender: Male



Role: Player



Club: Fundação Benfica

Brief description of the Case Study:

He is a boy who has been part of the Benfica Foundation's adapted football project since he was very young and suffers from a disease that leads to an infection of the lymphatic system. He has been participating in the project for 10 years, and at the moment he lives independently in a house with support from the Portuguese state, which has allowed him to gain skills related to his personal life.

Best take away from the SCL project

Through the foundation and this project, José had the opportunity to travel to different countries in Europe and get to know other cultures. However, due to his demonstration of being a responsible boy with the ability to work, José got a job at the adidas store at Estádio da Luz, where he has worked for 3 years, and they have already offered him a permanent contract.

How did the project help with personal development:

Participating in this project allowed him to gain social skills, confidence, responsibility and work ability, which allowed him to find a stable job and be independent.



Vrienden maken



Name: Hugo Silva



Age: 34



Gender: Male



Role: Player

Club: Fundação Benfica

Brief description of the Case Study:

Hugo is a boy with Down Syndrome, who has a lot of sporting experience, having already practiced different sports. Hugo lives with his parents and helps them with some tasks at the local store they own. Hugo's participation in our project is prolonged, as he plays as a goalkeeper. Outside of sport, Hugo studied gardening and hospitality and worked in a coffee shop close to where he lives.

Best take away from the SCL project

Due to the participation in the project, Hugo was able to participate in the Special Olympics competition with the Portuguese team in Dubai and regularly goes to the national down syndrome team, having

participated in the world championship in Peru, where he reached 2nd place in the tournament. This project allowed Hugo to gain social skills, as well as improve his physical and mental condition, delaying the effects associated with his condition.



Personal relationships through SCL



Name: Anonymous



Age: 23



Gender: Male



Role: Player



Club: SD Huesca

Brief description of the Case Study:

This player was a shy person who had not travelled outside Spain, he did not have very good communication skills with his team mates and coaches, which made it difficult for him to play football in a good way. Through this project we have worked on personal relationships and the ability to relate to other people from other cultures.

Best take away from the SCL project

The best thing about the project for him has been to be able to go to other countries through football, because he has been able to understand that football goes beyond that and that we can all be included in this sport, no matter how many difficulties there are.

How did the project help with personal development:

He has been able to develop as a person in terms of personal relationships not only with his teammates but also with his work colleagues, family and others. In addition, in football he has been able to develop new skills and abilities, as well as techniques to improve in matches.



Name: Anonymous



Age: 20



Gender: Female



Role: Player



Club: SD Huesca

Brief description of the Case Study:

She was a girl who liked football but was afraid to play because she did not feel able to play football with boys, she was aware of her disability and was afraid and ashamed to play because she could have difficulties. We invited her to participate with us and she liked the atmosphere and she was able to participate in the project and get to know other countries.

Best take away from the SCL project

She has been able to experience through the project how football is lived in other countries and where other girls, thanks to the project, have also been able to enjoy football and the values and companionship that they bring with them. In addition, the techniques applied in the training sessions and other workshops

have helped her to feel more comfortable with the group. The project has really helped improve her social skills as she found herself surrounded by people she did not know and therefore she knew she had to improve her social skills and get to know people if she wanted to enjoy participant

Training with more tools



Name: Anonymous



Age: 31



Gender: Male



Role: Staff



Club: SD Huesca

Brief description of the Case Study:

One of our coaches has acquired through sharing with other coaches from European clubs concepts and techniques to train players with intellectual disabilities in a way that is easier for him and for the players. In this way, the coach has transmitted and facilitated better basic concepts of football.

Best take away from the SCL project

He has been able to enjoy air travel with the players, travelling around Europe and experiencing more than just football with them: experiences, conviviality, laughter and fun times. He has learned how other European clubs work, improving techniques, as well as teaching concepts to other club friends.

How did the project help with personal development:

Personally, he has been able to grow personally and professionally in aspects that he had not experienced outside of Spain and with the difficulty that this type of person entails. Being able to show what he does in Huesca with his players has been very gratifying for him as it was a sign that he was doing well and to be able to show it away from



Name: Ferdinand



Age: 27



Gender: Male



Role: Player

Club: SV Werder Bremen

Best take away from the SCL project

Ferdinand has become much more independent as a result of the project. Thanks to the weekly training, he has a certain structure to his week, which gives him a sense of security. Before training, he comes to our office and helps to prepare the training materials, thereby taking on responsibility.

How did the project help with personal development:

Ferdinand has been playing football with us for many years. The SCL programme has given him the opportunity to travel which was a new experience.





Name: Jordan



Age: 21



Gender: Male



Role: Player



Club: SV Werder Bremen

Brief description of the Case Study:

Jordan is in a wheelchair and generally has very low self-confidence. His participation in the Werder Bremen football programme has greatly improved this. The Special Champions League has even reinforced this effect.

Best take away from the SCL project

The opportunity to travel with his team to the Special Champions League tournaments has shown Jordan that, despite his disability, much more is possible in his life than he previously thought. For a long time, travelling abroad was just a dream for him, but the Special Champions League has made it a reality.

How did the project help with personal development:

This realisation that he is capable of far more than he thought for a long time has helped Jordan grow personally. It's great to see how much self-confidence he has gained through the programme, which will help him in many situations in his future life.



Name: Caroline



Age: 28



Gender: Female



Role: Player



Club: SV Werder Bremen

Brief description of the Case Study:

Caroline is a young woman with Down's syndrome who has been taking part in Werder Bremen's football programme for two years. However, playing football is not her main interest: She just likes being part of a group.

Best take away from the SCL project






The football group gives her a fixed date in her weekly calendar that she can use as a guide. Sometimes she doesn't even come to play, but just to meet her friends on the football pitch. The new

friends are very good for her. She has even found a boyfriend in the football group, with whom she now has a relationship



Training with more tools



	Name:	Nike
	Age:	17
	Gender:	Female
	Role:	Player
	Club:	SV Werder Bremen

Brief description of the Case Study:

Nike is a young woman with Down’s syndrome who has been playing football at Werder for a long time. However, her interest in the club now goes beyond just playing football. Now that she has finished school, she is wondering what she would like to do professionally. Her dream employer is Werder Bremen.

Best take away from the SCL project

Through the Special Champion’s League, Nike has gained further self-confidence, which should help her in her later professional life. Together with Werder Bremen’s HR department and Nike’s mum, we have developed a concept for how she might be able to work at Werder in a permanent position later on. She is particularly interested in the hospitality and kitchen area. It would be a great story if Nike were to develop over time from a player to a Werder employee.

How did the project help with personal development:

Thanks to her increased self-confidence, Nike now knows much better what she wants in her life and stands up for her interests and opinions. The football group has taught her many social skills that she previously lacked.



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