

## How SOFEA is helping young people improve their job prospects through physical activity

SOFEA (the South Oxfordshire Food & Education Alliance) is based in Didcot and works with young people to improve their employability. In January 2018 SOFEA was awarded funding to develop physical activity sessions with the young people they work with.

Through this, it launched two incredibly popular sessions: table tennis and fitness. The initial funding has acted as a catalyst towards building a wider physical activity initiative at SOFEA; something resembling that of an amateur sports club. The first step towards realising this ambition was the entering of a SOFEA team in the Didcot & District Table Tennis league for 2018/19.

The fitness sessions have also grown in popularity and SOFEA are now working in partnership with The Park Club, Milton, who have designated a fitness class per week for young people at SOFEA.

Here, young people talk about how the SOFEA sessions have helped them:

### **Hayden Gilding, 18**

“Taking part in table tennis sessions has made me feel more confident. I used to have a lot of self-confidence issues and now I play in front of people in the league.

“I’m learning lots of new skills from volunteer coaches Bill and Paul. Normally I never used to start a conversation and now I can. My teamworking has improved through playing doubles with different people in the league. It’s also helped my reflexes.”

### **Molly Sears, 18**

“Taking part in SOFEA’s fitness sessions has made me feel good about myself and like I am actually getting somewhere. I am more confident as well. I’ve really enjoyed it because I like feeling these things about myself.

“I feel bonded with the people who I work out with, spending time with new people and making friends with them. These sessions have really helped my social skills.”

### **Charlie Gamage, 21**

“Thanks to SOFEA’s fitness sessions I am losing some weight slowly. It has helped with my back because it is making it stronger. My back is always sore so making my back better will help with all different parts of my life.

“I would never have gone to the gym on my own”.

### **Jamie Williams, 20**

“The fitness sessions help me take my anger out with my adrenaline, so it is helping me with my anger management. It makes me feel good inside about myself because I’m not just sat around doing nothing. It has helped me get back into fitness as I do really love it but I had stopped so this is helping me get back into it.

“I really want it to carry on because I want to get fitter and I really enjoy it. Exercising helps with other parts of my life because it helps a lot with my anger and anger is a big part of my life. I used to go around kicking and punching things but now I do this to a punching bag.”

### **Josh Hunter, 17**

“Taking part in fitness sessions with SOFEA makes me feel good, because I am getting exercise and giving me motivation.

“It has helped with confidence. I have really bad anxiety and it has helped with that – when I first would go to the gym I would be really anxious and think everyone is staring at me but you quickly see no one cares and that has helped with my general anxiety and because I feel good from the confidence this also helps.

“Exercise is really good for me especially because I have really bad sleeping patterns but exercise wears me out so can help me sleep.”