



Brighton TTC prison scheme hailed a success

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Table tennis sessions led by Brighton TTC are being credited with better behaviour and reduced violence among inmates at HM Prison High Down.

The club has been providing regular sessions in the prison in Banstead for the past 18 months, and also offers UKCC Level 1 coaching courses to prisoners and staff. Earlier this month, 11 of the prisoners completed their assessments with a 100% pass rate.

It is not the only impressive statistic to come out of the project, with figures released by the prison this week showing:

- An 83 per cent reduction in incidents of violence among High Down inmates who have taken part in the table tennis sessions.
- A 14 per cent increase in the number of inmates employed in prison jobs since the table tennis project started.

A prison spokesman said: "Table tennis participants have been involved in significantly fewer incidents relating to drugs and violence since starting the programme." They added that table tennis acts as an incentive for good behaviour, with prisoners "holding it down", knowing that they will not be allowed to take part if they behave badly.

One prisoner said: "It has made me want to keep my enhanced status and stopped me from getting any red or negative entries as I would not be able to attend the sessions if I did. Thank you to the Brighton Table Tennis Club and High Down PE team. 10 out of 10."

This is important progress in a prison which was found to be "in a volatile state" earlier this year by an Independent Monitoring Board, with endemic drug use among inmates and violence on an almost daily basis.



UKCC Level 1 coaching courses have also been on the programme, with 11 inmates passing (picture by Alexis Maryon)

Professor Rosie Meek praised Brighton Table Tennis Club in her recent report on sport in prisons for the Ministry of Justice, which concluded that sport can play a huge and positive role in prisons: “As well as being a way to bring together disparate groups, develop communication skills and learn life lessons, it also has the advantage of being something many people are passionate about.

“It can be a relatively straightforward way to encourage otherwise reluctant individuals to engage in a whole raft of associated activities, while also serving to improve mental and physical health, reduce violence, and tackle re-offending.”

Tim Holtam, director of Brighton Table Tennis Club, added: “We are developing a table tennis model that we hope can be rolled out in other prisons. It is certainly producing results in High Down and Downview women’s prison, where we also work.

“At both prisons we have extremely good relations with both staff and prisoners. Prisons Minister Rory Stewart has announced an extra £10 million to improve conditions in 10 prisons facing acute problems with drugs and violence. I urge him to consider support for table tennis and other sports in his plans.”

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