Students rise to the challenge to boost mental health

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University of Nottingham table tennis players are proving that no challenge is insurmountable if you work as a team – and it's all in the name of encouraging people to talk about mental health.

The table tennis club, whose members include Commonwealth Games medallists Tin-Tin Ho and Denise Payet, are smashing a series of challenges this week, all of which stem from a mental health statistic.

They started on Monday with 5,691 sit-ups between them – reflecting the 5,691 suicides in England and Wales alone in 2019.

Tuesday's challenge was to run 82,000m because the Higher Education Statistics Agency found in 2018/19 that 82,000 students said they suffered from a mental health condition – a figure two-and-a-half times higher than in 2014/15.

On Wednesday, they spent a combined 1,330 minutes talking in small groups, that figure being chosen because 1,330 students have committed suicide in the last 10 years.

They are back to a physical challenge today, Thursday, as they complete 20,000 squats in honour of the 20,000 volunteers who are part of the Samaritans charity.

And they will end tomorrow with a social media push to reach 800,000 people to reflect World Health Organisation estimates that 800,000 people die by suicide every year – one person every 40 seconds.

UoN TTC Vice-President and senior England international Lois Peake said: "This year particularly, we've noticed as a club that students in general have been struggling a bit more than usual and facing new challenges.

"So, the idea came from just wanting to raise awareness about mental health because we've seen from our own students how people are struggling, and to encourage people to support one another and talk about it."

Originally, the plan was to get together to complete the challenges, but lockdown 2.0 meant they had to accomplish them within the covid restrictions.

The players have been combining their individual efforts – and managed to smash Tuesday's 82km running target, clocking up a staggering 122km, as shown in this video:

"People have been running by themselves or in pairs, within the rules," said Lois. "Everyone has been sharing videos on social media and we've had a very positive response from the university.

"It's been such a team effort and that just highlights how important this is and how the students feel about it.

"The challenges seem impossible but if you share it as a team, then together it's not impossible, and we've smashed our first two challenges.

"We've had more than 30 players involved and everybody's been amazing and have gone a lot further than they needed to."

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