



Football Fitness

Employer: AkzoNobel

Area: BHAW

Theme: Physical Activity



Before the onset of COVID 19, the Ashington AkzoNobel team had enjoyed a friendly game of 5-a-side with colleagues from work on a weekly basis. It was difficult for employees to participate due to work schedules and shift patterns and eventually the games became less frequent. As we came through the strict COVID restrictions we had been living with, and things began to return to normality, there was an interest on site again to get together and play football. After the summer we decided to create Football Fitness when two of a graduate team members offered to plan some football sessions. We contacted the local high school who had offered us a reduced rate to use their outdoor football pitches in the past and booked a regular slot on a Wednesday night. There was a real desire this time to do more than just play football, we wanted everyone to be able to participate. We were also keen to stop any niggly injuries to people who maybe hadn't done that much exercise and wanted to get active again. This is where the fitness aspect came into effect. The initial concept was to do a group warm up, and then split into a football session and a boot-camp session, these would run independently then coming together again for a warm down.





"“Football Fitness has been excellent for me; I have really enjoyed it! It’s a great way for us all to get together and do something to improve our fitness and stay healthy. The warmup made sure I didn’t pull any muscles during the session of boot camp which was excellent for strengthening loads of core muscles. The instructions from Alex Wardle were very clear and easy to follow and the football (which was my favourite bit) was a good standard and i was pleased to see how many got involved. The warm down was the perfect way to end the night. Everyone I spoke to really enjoyed it and I hope it continues for a long time!” - Derek Dodds, Process Operator A Shift "

What we finally settled on was that everyone in attendance would participate in the warm up, boot-camp, football, and warm down allowing us to feel the benefit of each activity. Football Fitness is designed to give everyone, no matter their ability, the opportunity to enjoy some exercise and a friendly game of football. Starting with a group of 7 enthusiastic members on 31st August, we now regularly have 20 people in attendance.

We have a consistent routine which is led by a member of the group. The consistency allows those in attendance to be really comfortable with the activities, as well as allowing new members to follow the experienced people when they are unsure. It has also helped members feel comfortable to step forward and lead sessions, bringing people out of their comfort zones. The sessions were designed by a personal trainer who is the son of one of our employees. The activities are designed to be accessible to all, but also allow those more advanced members to push themselves. The warm up is designed to do just that, warm up the muscles to ensure we have no pulls or sprains when we move into the more strenuous bootcamp. Rest and rehydration is scheduled in between activities allowing those in attendance to refuel and also enjoy some conversation. The bootcamp looks to develop everyone’s general fitness, working key muscle groups as well as incorporating cardio exercises. It has been great to see the development of those who have attended every Football Fitness session, and how they have found each week that bit easier as they have improved their fitness week on week. The football has also been a highlight, with male and female employees playing together. Those in attendance have supported one another in their participation. There had been some trepidation from some of our female employees that it would be too rough and tumble, and yet it has been quite the opposite with everyone being really considerate of peoples ability levels. A football skills session has even been given for those more inexperienced who wanted to learn some of the basics in an easier environment. They are then reintroduced to larger game, where they are actively included. Just as the groups general fitness has improved, we are also seeing individuals develop their football skills and really getting involved in the games.





The greatest achievement of Football Fitness may not have even been the physical growth of those in attendance, but the development of a real community. This activity has allowed people from different shifts and roles, who wouldn't usually interact with one another to get to know one another and create friendships. There has been a real buzz around the site with colleagues talking to one another and relationships being developed that wouldn't have flourished had it not been for Football Fitness. Everyone is welcomed to this activity, with employees attending for the first time even though it has been running for 4 months now.

Not only are the employees of AkzoNobel Ashington getting stronger, so are their bonds of friendship and camaraderie which will never fatigue or break.

"It's been great to mix with people from work that you don't see that much. It's a fun way to get out and be active" Karon Hardy, Process Operator D Shift

"It's a good laugh with a supportive atmosphere. It's great that it caters for people of varying levels of fitness levels and football experience and it's brilliant to see some of the people newer to playing football getting better and more confident every week!" James Anderson, Quality Technician

"I look forward to Football Fitness every week, whether it is sunny or raining! The group are really encouraging and have helped my confidence a lot. I now know a lot more people from the other shifts, and those who work in the offices who I don't get to see very often. I am feeling fitter, and I like that I am doing that and having fun at the same time." Lawrance Aram, QC Lab D Shift

"I have only recently gone to Football Fitness; I was worried that I wouldn't be able to do the exercises and I would feel embarrassed. I heard my colleagues talking about it and I had been invited many times, I now wish I'd gone sooner! There was a really welcoming atmosphere, and it was fun doing the activities even if I wasn't very good at them. I had thought the football would be too rough however everyone was very inclusive with the experienced players helping their new team mates. I look forward to attending when I can, and I would recommend the sessions to everyone at work." Shannon Sewell, Maintenance Planner



