



Bexleyheath Tennis Club

After over 20 weekly sessions stretching back to November 2020, practicing their tennis skills on Zoom, Bexley Mencap's Learning Disability group finally got the chance to play outdoors as a group at the Bexleyheath Tennis club on Monday 17 May. Dave Williams, club chairman, was on hand to welcome the group and the club also kindly provided extra racquets and a generous supply of tennis balls.

The group have kept together throughout lockdown supporting each other and playing online with tennis equipment provided courtesy of an Open Court grant from the LTA. Some had never played on an outdoor court before and not ever met as a single group before. 'But all their hard work showed right from the start', said Nick Marsden of Bexley Mencap, who helped lead the session, together with Activity Co-ordinator, Kayleigh Gibson. 'The balancing drills and tennis shots we practiced each week on Zoom, really came to the fore and the members showed great hand/eye co-ordination as well as loads of determination and enthusiasm.'

'It's great to be able to play outside and see all of my friends again – after so long,' said group member, Chris, who is now learning how to slice the ball. And it was great to see forehands, backhands, volleys and more than the odd smash as 10 members of the group, watched by parents and carers, enjoyed themselves having so much fun out on the court.

It was the first of a programme of ten, two-hour tennis sessions and Bexley Mencap staff will support the group to develop their skills each week. The weekly sessions will also help with social skills as well as physical fitness and all-round health and wellbeing. At the end of the programme, it is planned to put on extra sessions with Bexleyheath's Tennis Club's qualified LTA coach. After just 2 weeks, 13 different members have now had the chance to play tennis at the club.

In fact, Bexley Mencap's link with Bexleyheath Tennis club goes back to the summer of 2019 when four members attended a one-off training session with David McGonigle, club coach, as part of a Mencap Beacon programme with a Duke of Edinburgh style award for learning disabilities

<https://www.bexleymencap.org.uk/>