



## **NI sporting stars team up to tackle youth mental health with Lidl Northern Ireland's Sport For Good Schools Programme**

*Sporting greats in call out for nominations for secondary schools to win place on Lidl Northern Ireland's coveted mental health athlete mentorship programme*

An innovative educational programme aimed at equipping school students across Northern Ireland with invaluable tools to manage and improve their mental health through sport has been launched, supported by a stellar line up of some of the country's most successful sporting stars.

Following on from Mental Health Awareness Week which ran from 15-21 May, Lidl Northern Ireland's Sport for Good Schools Programme, in partnership with the UK's leading children's charity the Youth Sport Trust, and championed by six-time Paralympic gold medallist swimmer Bethany Firth OBE, European Championship 1500 metre silver medallist Ciara Mageean, and World Champion gymnast Rhys McClenaghan, launched at a special event held at Queen's University Malone Playing Fields in Belfast.

Nominations are now open for the 2023/24 programme which will see 25 secondary schools across the region receive £1,000 in funding for new sports equipment and delivery of a series of mental health workshops, led by the Youth Sport Trust's specially trained athlete mentors.

The esteemed group of athlete mentors help young people to think like an athlete to tackle declining emotional wellbeing and resilience, and attitudes to learning. The team, which includes Paralympics athletics champion Michael McKillop MBE, Olympic hockey hero Shirley McCay MBE, and Olympic steeplechaser Kerry O'Flaherty, joined the programme's ambassadors to launch this year's initiative.

Returning for a third year, Lidl Northern Ireland's Sport for Good Schools Programme educates students on the power of sport for positive mental health, boosting young people's social skills, self-esteem and body confidence, and the positive effect it has on their mental health.

The initiative was developed by the retailer in partnership with Youth Sport Trust after research found that 45% of young people here said their mental health had deteriorated during the pandemic.\*

Feedback survey results from last year's programme revealed that 83% of participants felt that the programme had boosted their overall confidence, 75% reported an improvement in resilience and self-belief and two thirds said it increased their enjoyment of exercise. All teachers participating in the programme confirmed their commitment to making improvements to their school's mental health curriculum as a result of the initiative.



**Speaking at the launch of the 2023/24 programme, Lidl Northern Ireland Sport for Good ambassador, Rhys McClenaghan said;**

*"Empowering our young people to manage their mental health is more important than ever, and I'm honoured to continue being an ambassador for a mental health initiative that delivers such real benefits to local school students as the Lidl Northern Ireland Sport for Good programme.*

*"After winning the pommel horse gold medal at the 2023 European Gymnastics Championships and now training for the 2023 World Championship, I know how important it is to have a healthy mindset as well as a healthy body. Sports participation can be truly life-changing in building confidence, developing resilience and managing mental health challenges and I hope my experience can inspire students right across Northern Ireland to get into sport.*

*"I'm excited to launch this year's programme and to use my platform to reach the next generation with this message, inspiring positive change amongst those who may need it most."*

**Martin Moreland, Principal at Mercy College in Belfast, who participated in the programme last year, commented;**

*"We're very grateful for the Lidl Northern Ireland Sport for Good programme and for the mental health workshops which have provided our students with such fantastic role models in the athlete mentors, and in doing so supporting them with the skills they need to get up, get active, and improve their mental health.*

*"With the recent £14m budget cut to education and the loss of key mental health initiatives, it's impressive to see a local retailer like Lidl Northern Ireland continue to champion their own programmes to help plug gaps in our education sector as part of their wider contribution to the local community.*

*"I encourage every school to nominate themselves for this exceptional programme which has had a truly lasting impact on our students and will set them up with the skills they need to manage mental health challenges well into the future."*

**Louise Gray, Development Manager at Youth Sport Trust said;**

*"We know unhappy, unhealthy children don't learn as effectively, and with only one in ten young people achieving recommended guidelines for 60 minutes a day of physical activity, this initiative is vital to boosting young people's health and wellbeing.*

*"We're proud to be working with Lidl Northern Ireland, athletes and schools to take preventative action and ensure this generation grow up healthy and happy. We must turn the tide on the increasing number of children who are feeling lower levels of happiness, life satisfaction and worthwhileness."*



Since 2019, the Sport for Good programme has supported more than 120 sports clubs and schools across Northern Ireland and provided more than £400,000 in funding and equipment to encourage more children to connect with sport.

**Joe Mooney, Senior Partnerships Manager for Lidl Ireland and Northern Ireland said;**

*"Supporting young people within our communities is something we are passionate about at Lidl Northern Ireland so it gives me great pleasure to launch this year's Sport for Good Schools Programme alongside our ambassadors Ciara, Bethany and Rhys and our fantastic athlete mentors Michael, Shirley and Kerry. They truly represent the best of Northern Irish sport and they have been instrumental in delivering this programme to more than 5,200 pupils to date across the region. The real-world experience they bring makes such a difference to the lives of these young people, by providing practical advice and techniques to improve their mental health, and by motivating them to engage in sport as a meaningful way of improving their overall wellbeing.*

*"We look forward to building on the already strong foundation of the Sport for Good Schools Programme which has benefited so many young people across the region, and to encourage the NI public to nominate their local secondary school to be in with a chance of reaping the rewards of the programme."*

Lidl Northern Ireland shoppers can nominate their local secondary school to win a place on the Sport for Good programme, as well as £1,000 worth of brand-new sports equipment, by visiting their local Lidl store and making a purchase using the Lidl Plus Rewards App to receive a qualifying Lidl receipt containing a 10-digit code. Receipt codes must be submitted online along with the secondary school nomination for a chance to win. Entries can be made via the dedicated Sport for Good online entry form at [lidl-ni.co.uk/lidl-community-works](http://lidl-ni.co.uk/lidl-community-works). The competition is open now until **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2023**.

For more information, please visit [www.lidl-ni.co.uk/lidl-community-works](http://www.lidl-ni.co.uk/lidl-community-works).

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\*Source: 2021 Prince's Trust Youth Index

\*Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2019) Findings from the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey 2019

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#### **Notes to editors**

Sport for Good programme data collated as part of Lidl Community Works: Sport for Good Evaluation Report produced by the Youth Sport Trust Research and Insight Team (August 2022)

#### **About the Youth Sport Trust**



The Youth Sport Trust is the UK's leading charity for improving young people's wellbeing through sport and play. It empowers young people and equips educators to transform lives. Founded in 1995, it works with around 20,000 schools and inspires Changemakers to build a sense of belonging. Its vision is to create a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits of play and sport. Visit the YST website for ideas, tips and information [www.youthsporttrust.org](http://www.youthsporttrust.org)

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