

WAR AND PEACE

Troops to Teachers meets Football 4 Peace International

Gary Stidder [afPE Member]

INTRODUCTION

Troops to Teachers (T2T) is a UK government - funded initiative through which recently- retired ex-military personnel are retrained for careers in the teaching profession after being demobbed. The University of Brighton has a key role in arranging and facilitating this curriculum and a particular responsibility for the organisation and delivery of the physical education (PE) dimension of the T2T programme. The University of Brighton is also home to the world-renowned Football 4 Peace International (F4P) programme, a multi-dimensional, sport-based, community engagement project that places a particular emphasis on peace-building in divided and otherwise fragmented and fractured societies. A number of former service personnel who enrolled on the PE T2T route have also chosen to engage with F4P, volunteering to be trained in the distinctively pacifist values-based teaching and coaching methodologies associated with the programme before being deployed to take part in peace-building and related development projects in various troubled regions of the world. This short article focuses on the overlap between T2T and F4P, seeking to answer the question: why and how are former military personnel turned into peace-makers?

MIKE WINS GOLD

Now into its third year, the T2T programme has recruited some truly inspirational individuals. Mike Westwelt, seriously injured in the war in Afghanistan, is on the university's T2T PE course and is also a coach for F4P. The 36-year-old former RA F air crew sergeant took gold in the time-trial cycling and silver in the road-race at the Invictus Games. He also took part in rowing and a Jaguar Land Rover driver challenge during this five-day Paralympics-style event for injured, sick or wounded armed forces personnel. Mike, who graduated from the University of Brighton in July 2016, was an RAF weapons systems operator on Nimrod MR2 aircraft; he served in Afghanistan and Iraq four times from 2003-2007 as well as the Lebanon-Israeli conflict in 2006. Mike commented on his transition from being in the military to secondary school teaching:

“As a member of the armed forces you build a vast skill set over a long period of time through exposure to many different situations. These include flexibility, being open to change, reactive, resilient, determined, helpful, a team player, leader, good communicator, problem solver, good at JCT, role model, high values, standards and expectations, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. (In the military our pre-flight planning would look at what needed to be done, how it had been done before, how it needed to be done this time and incorporated lots of information sources intelligence data, weather and flight information)”

Previous experiences, subject knowledge and qualifications within fitness and exercise as well as in certain sports had also prepared Mike for teaching PE in schools, particularly accredited courses such as GCSE Physical Education:

“Whilst in the RAF we were actively encouraged to participate in regular exercise, monitored on an annual basis by a health and fitness test. Within my peers I was responsible for sustaining their development, advising them on health and fitness whilst away on active

duty. Moreover, this was combined with supporting those who were less-able with targeted plans utilising my practical and theoretical knowledge of anatomy and physiology. More recently I enhanced my breadth and depth of knowledge in this area by studying and passing a Level 3 Sports Massage and Rehabilitation qualification. I then advanced to gain a Level 4 Certificate providing additional in-depth information that I can use to engage pupils with differing levels of understanding.”

After winning gold at the Invictus Games he said: "The pinnacle at these games is a gold medal but it's more about using sport as a tool for rehabilitation of both physical and psychological injuries and overcoming the se in the face of adversity." Similarly, the F4P curriculum and methodology have helped Mike to understand how sport and physical activity can be used to educate young people from divided societies about the importance of trust, respect, responsibility, equity and inclusion as well as contributing to their holistic development as responsible citizens within their societies. This values-based approach to teaching PE can then be employed with in the formal PE curriculum in order to develop team-building, problem-solving, joint decision-making, communication, leadership and relationships.

Mike is a very dedicated individual and will be an amazing role model to young people now he has begun his new career as a PE teacher. In addition, his involvement and commitment to the F4P programme has been exceptional. Mike trained to teach PE at Nottingham Academy and started his new career as a PE and mathematics teacher at Garibaldi College in Mansfield in September.

To listen to Mike talking about how cycling has helped with his rehabilitation, watch:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b07bq2vl/Invictus-games-2016-3-day-1>. Watch from 16 mins 30 seconds.

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