**Elevate Conference**

**OUR SESSION**

**DATE: 8th May**

**LOCATION: London Excel**

**SEMINAR STREAM: Active Kids**

**TIME: 10.50-11.30 SEMINAR TITLE: Understanding the positive affects of physical activity on mental wellbeing in children**

**Session details:**

*Children’s physical health is equally important as their mental health, and the two are closely linked. A strong evidence base supports the benefits of physical activity for children’s mental health and wellbeing.  Positive mental health helps children enjoy life, builds confidence, resilience and self-esteem, and provides a foundation for a positive mental outlook in later life.​*

*This session will explore successful approaches to building and securing positive mental health and the role of physical activity.*

Good morning everyone. Thank you for joining us this morning for our panel session entitled ‘Understanding the positive effects of physical activity on mental wellbeing in children’. From whatever industry or professional context you are here representing today, we all, no doubt, recognise the growing crisis in our children’s mental health. With 1 in 10 children diagnosed with mental health illness and a further 1 in 4 who have undiagnosed mental health concerns, there is undisputedly a need for us consider both our collective and individual contributions in how we might better support health outcomes for our young people, before they reach adulthood.

The focus for today’s discussion is not going to be merely on our concerns and stats- info that you probably already know. Instead, my panel colleagues and I would like to invite you to discuss with us strategies and policy direction for how we can make a change. I am sure, that regardless of the sector you are connected to, we all have a shared belief that physical activity can have a powerful role to play in supporting children’s health and wellbeing and know that when young people are able to take part in movement experiences that are inclusive, nurturing and age appropriate, the benefits are endless. Movement can be social; it can create friendships, develop leadership, enjoyment and engender trust. When movement is valued for movement sake, it can help develop creativity, exploration, curiosity, excitement. When children learn how to take part in respectful movement, they learn how to listen to their bodies and become more aware of themselves and their surroundings. It can promote care of the self and care of those around us. When competitive experiences are appropriately pitched, in an environment that is encouraging as well as motivating, we see that resilience and optimism can grow. The converse is also true. That’s why I am great believer of a highly qualified and expert workforce that can offer children the best possible opportunities

However, with more children inactive and playing less than ever before, solutions are complex. The UK Government prevention concordat statement for better mental health(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevention-concordat-for-better-mental-health-consensus-statement/prevention-concordat-for-better-mental-health>) recognises the need for a prevention focused model, that can facilitate lasting change for young people from a young age. To address the concerns of young people’s wellbeing and mental health, skills and expertise are required across the sector to ensure that any changes made are effective and sustainable. This includes drawing upon research and academic knowledge, educational leadership, cultural change agents, health and wellbeing experts, movement providers and of course our young people.

My own connections to this topic have been predominantly through education. I was previously a teacher of physical education and now an academic and teacher educator; I have seen how movement can be transformative in a child’s and adult’s life. The body is an amazing vessel where we it can be used to learn in though and about movement.

Over the last year I have started working with a wonderful Charity called Stormbreak as part of their Strategic Executive Group. Founded by Dr Martin Yelling Stormbreak is a culture change programme that uses movement to help develop positive mental health in primary schools. Our trustee Jack Shakespeare from UK Active Kids has said that:

“Physical activity is vital to the development and wellbeing of children and young people. From the very start of life, engaging in physical activity contributes to our physical, social, and emotional development needs. We have a responsibility as a society to ensure that we continually strive to provide the best possible growing conditions for our children to flourish and thrive. Stormbreak aims to create these positive growing conditions through meaningful movement experiences - allowing schools, families and the children themselves to set up and find solace in positive, active environments”.

I couldn’t agree more.

Today I am delighted to welcome on our panel two sector leading experts in the areas of physical activity and child health.

Chris Wright is Head of Well being at the Youth Sport Trust and James Allen, Director of Policy, Governance and External Affairs, Sport and Recreation Alliance. Chris and James will be speaking to us about for around 10 minutes and then would like to open the floor up for questions and discussions.

James, if we could begin with you.