



BEHIND BARS
CALISTHENICS ACADEMY CIC

SUSTAINABILITY & IMPACT REPORT

Developing confidence, strength, resilience and positive opportunities for young people.

Impact since 2020 · Cavendish Community Hub, Birkenhead



OVERVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Behind Bars Calisthenics Academy is a Community Interest Company based at the Cavendish Community Hub in Birkenhead. Its mission is to empower people of all backgrounds through fitness, building physical health, confidence and resilience alongside strong community connections. This report covers its impact since it opened in 2020.

17,600+

exercise experiences delivered to children and young adults since 2020

120+

children and young adults attend 3 or more sessions each month



FAMILIES

Parents and carers take part, give feedback and help shape sessions.

MENTORING

Trusted adults and positive role models work alongside young people.

PARTNERSHIPS

Schools, local authorities and funders help keep provision open and accessible.

WHY WE STARTED

WHERE THE IDEA CAME FROM

Behind Bars opened in 2020 to enhance the physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of children in a safe, supportive environment. Our coaches know first-hand the challenges of growing up in a disadvantaged area, which is why children connect with them and look up to them.

BIRKENHEAD: DEPRIVATION AND CHILD HEALTH

23%

of Wirral areas in England's most deprived 10%

#1 & #2

England's two most deprived neighbourhoods for health and disability are in Birkenhead

29%

of 10-11s in the poorest areas live with obesity

Birkenhead has some of England's most deprived neighbourhoods. Child obesity is more than twice as common in the poorest areas as in the wealthiest (14%), and Wirral's own evidence shows the same pattern locally. ([Indices of Deprivation 2025, Wirral Council](#)), ([NHS England, National Child Measurement Programme](#)), ([Wirral Council, public health evidence](#)).

THE UNMET NEED

Child obesity is rising, and it is highest where families have the fewest affordable ways to stay active. Children need an hour of activity a day ([NHS physical activity guidelines](#)). We give Birkenhead children somewhere fun, affordable and local to get it, every week.



“Enhancing the physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of children.”

Our mission, since 2020

LITTLE NINJAS SURVEY

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Little Ninjas parent and carer survey. All figures are from 42 respondents.

100%

reported a good or big improvement
in confidence and self-esteem

42 of 42

98%

reported a good or big improvement
in fitness and physical confidence

41 of 42

95%

reported a good or big improvement
in social skills

40 of 42

88%

reported a good or big improvement
in behaviour and focus

**37 of 42. All 42 reported at least
some positive change.**

93%

rated their child's overall experience
"Excellent"

39 of 42

95%

said their child "loves" attending
**40 of 42. The other 2 said they
"really enjoy" it.**

98%

would recommend Little Ninjas to
another parent

41 of 42

38%

said their child has additional needs
or support requirements

16 of 42

WHAT WE RUN

OUR PROGRAMMES



LITTLE NINJAS

Ninja Warrior-style bodyweight training for ages 5-12, £5 a session. Builds strength, agility, confidence and social skills.

Survey: 42 responses



YOUTH PROJECT

Ages 12-17, including at-risk youth. Free weekly sessions and 1-to-1 mentoring with the Youth Empowerment Scheme and CBE Services.



MOVE TOGETHER (SEND)

Family sessions in a calm, flexible space. Children take part at their own pace.



MENTORING AND YOUTH INTERVENTION

Work alongside Youth Justice, local authorities and referral partners.



SCHOOLS AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Physical activity and goal setting outside traditional school settings.



COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL PROJECTS

Affordable, free and subsidised places for underprivileged children, at-risk youth and families.

LITTLE NINJAS IMPACT

The core survey findings for the Academy's youngest members, in their parents' own words.



100%

CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

reported a good or big improvement (42 of 42).

“it has really helped build her confidence”

Nicola

Why it matters

The Mental Health Foundation notes that physical activity helps manage stress, improve mood and increase self-esteem, with habits built in childhood carrying benefits into adulthood. [UCL, on Mental Health Foundation research](#)

“The activities are fun, engaging, and well structured, helping the children build their fitness while also developing social skills and confidence.”

Brogan

98%

PHYSICAL CONFIDENCE AND FITNESS

reported a good or big improvement (41 of 42).

Why it matters

Children and young people aged 5–18 are recommended to average 60 minutes of activity a day, for strength, movement skills and long-term health. [NHS physical activity guidelines](#)

“As an anxious child who did not have much strength he was supported through endless challenges. He is now part of a football team, something he may never have had the courage or strength to do without Little Ninjas.”

Parent

LITTLE NINJAS IMPACT

95%

SOCIAL SKILLS

reported a good or big improvement (40 of 42).

Why it matters

The UK Chief Medical Officers' guidelines list confidence and social skills among the core benefits of being active for children and young people. [UK Chief Medical Officers, physical activity guidelines](#)

88%

BEHAVIOUR AND FOCUS

reported a good or big improvement (37 of 42). All 42 reported at least some positive change.

Why it matters

The Education Endowment Foundation finds persistence and attention are linked to physical development, with knock-on benefits for concentration and executive function. [Education Endowment Foundation, physical development](#)

95%

ENJOYMENT

said their child loves attending (40 of 42). 93% rated the overall experience "Excellent".

Why it matters

Sport England's own research finds children who are more active are happier and more resilient, and that positive early experiences of sport are what keep them coming back. [Sport England, positive experiences](#)

WHAT PARENTS WROTE ABOUT

Confidence, perseverance, willingness to try new things, mood, personal bests, social confidence and feeling supported by the coaches.

CONFIDENCE

WHY CONFIDENCE MATTERS



WHAT FAMILIES TOLD US

All 42 survey respondents reported a good or big improvement in confidence and self-esteem.

“At such an impressionable age of 15 this gym has brought about and instilled confidence in my son”

Clare

WHAT WIDER EVIDENCE TELLS US

The Mental Health Foundation says physical activity helps manage stress, improve mood and increase self-esteem, and that habits built in childhood carry mental health benefits into adulthood. ([UCL, on Mental Health Foundation research](#)) Sport England reports that children who are more active are happier, more resilient and more trusting of others, and that positive early experiences of sport build a foundation for lifelong activity and mental health. ([Sport England, positive experiences](#))

HOW WE MEASURE IT

While parents are often the first to notice changes in their children’s confidence, it also shows in class: a child speaking up, joining in with the group and being willing to try something new. Coaches observe every regular attendee against these signs and score their progress over time.

DEVELOPMENT

PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Strength, confidence and coordination.

"to help improve her strength alongside her gymnastic and trampoline clubs"

Michelle



BELONGING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Friendships, communication and role models.

"He is so much more confident than he was and has made new friends."

David



FOCUS AND RESILIENCE

Persistence, goal setting and seeing personal progress.

"His focus has improved so much... this gives him the motivation to improve."

Nikki

Why it matters

Sport England's Active Lives survey finds active children are more resilient: 49% strongly agree "if I find something difficult, I keep trying", against 29% of less active children. [Sport England, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey](#)

COACHES' VIEW

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Coaches see each child week in, week out. Their view of how children grow socially and emotionally sits alongside what families tell us.

"One of our primary goals at the Academy when it comes to active participation is to work with young people to identify and celebrate their strengths quickly. While some children are more nimble, and might excel on monkey bars, for example, others might be relatively stronger and better positioned to push heavy sleds or pick up sandbags. Showcasing these attributes early on is key to developing the self esteem to try other things"

Liam, Outreach Manager

WHAT COACHES LOOK FOR

Speaking up, joining in, trying new things, handling frustration and helping others.

A BROADER VIEW

By building positive relationships with parents, our coaches take a broader view of each child's psychosocial development, inside and outside the Academy.



"One of the most rewarding things I get from service delivery at the Academy is routinely witnessing children and young people develop their physical and emotional health. Its important they understand that exercise can be fun and is so important for everyone; I really believe it's vital to instill constructive habits and positive perceptions like that from an early age."

Kate, Fitness Instructor and Personal Trainer

YOUTH PROJECT

YOUTH PROJECT: AGES 12-17

Our partnership with the Youth Empowerment Scheme and CBE Services Ltd enables free weekly exercise sessions and one-to-one mentoring for 12-17-year-olds, building social skills, strength and teamwork.

Free

for young people aged 12-17

Weekly

exercise sessions

1-to-1

mentoring sessions

Encouraging constructive activities, improving community connections and tackling anti-social behaviour in our area.

What the Youth Project sets out to do

"My son looks forward to the teens session all week. The kids are given lots of encouragement to develop their individual abilities."

Parent

"It boosted my mental health and self-image more than words can describe."

Attendee

SUPPORTED BY



MENTORING AND SCHOOLS

MENTORING, SCHOOLS AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Trusted adults, positive routines and a safe place to be active. Partners include Youth Justice, local authorities, schools and community organisations.

WHAT THE NATIONAL EVIDENCE SAYS ABOUT MENTORING

21%

less violence

14%

less offending

19%

less reoffending

The Youth Endowment Fund's review of the evidence finds one-to-one mentoring by trained adults reduces violence by 21%, offending by 14% and reoffending by 19%. ([Youth Endowment Fund, mentoring toolkit](#)) Locally, the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership's preventative work, which supports community programmes like ours, has helped prevent an estimated 3,220 hospital admissions for violent injury since 2019. ([Merseyside VRP](#))

WHAT WE OFFER

Role models, discipline, engagement, healthier routines and positive use of time.



"These sessions are invaluable to help develop our young people, both in terms of fitness and self-esteem."

Parent



MENTORING AND SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Schools and alternative-provision settings bring students to the Academy for sessions built around strengths, goals and a safe, structured space to be active. This is what they told us.

"This space was safe, leaders are people our youngsters looked up to, and they led by example."

Alternative provision

IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS

"The staff make a concerted effort to identify the strengths of each student, which is often a key factor for young people starting their fitness journeys."

Additional-needs school

ENGAGEMENT AND FOCUS

"It was amazing to see how staff engaged with the students to build confidence and ability. The students were fully engaged for the full session."

School



"Attitudes changed. Behaviour in school has gone a lot better. Confidence from the students has perked up."

School

"The boys really enjoyed it and they had the opportunity to participate in a variety of challenges."

School rugby team

MOVE TOGETHER · 1 OF 2

MOVE TOGETHER: SEND FAMILY SESSIONS

Small-group sessions for children aged 5–12 with higher support needs, with parents and carers alongside, in a calm, supportive space.

5–12

years old, with higher support needs

Small

groups, with each child at their own pace

Family

sessions, with parents and carers taking part

“It doesn’t feel like therapy or intervention — it feels like a space where he can just be himself.”

Katy

“Charlie is severely autistic and requires a lot of sensory input. Charlie climbs around the house regularly and Behind Bars gave him a safe space to do that.”

Jennifer



The poster features a cartoon ninja character in a black suit with a blue belt, jumping over a black box labeled 'MIRAFIT 20kg'. The background shows a gym setting with blue equipment. On the right side, there is a white circular graphic with a blue border. Inside the circle, at the top, is a blue button with a white icon of two people and the text 'JOIN US'. Below this, the text 'Move Together' is written in large, bold, blue letters. Underneath that, 'SEND Family Sessions' is written in smaller, bold, blue letters. At the bottom of the circle, there is a paragraph of text: 'Small-group physical activity sessions for children aged 5–12 with higher support needs, alongside parents and carers, in a calm, supportive environment.' At the bottom of the poster, there are five logos: 'SPORT ENGLAND', 'COPELAND GROUP SERVICES', 'INSPECTANK', 'b' (with a registered trademark symbol), and 'CBE Services'.

JOIN US

Move Together

SEND Family Sessions

Small-group physical activity sessions for children aged 5–12 with higher support needs, alongside parents and carers, in a calm, supportive environment.

SPORT ENGLAND **COPELAND GROUP SERVICES** **INSPECTANK** **b** **CBE SERVICES**

MOVE TOGETHER · 2 OF 2

MOVE TOGETHER: SEND FAMILY SESSIONS



CALM AND FLEXIBLE

Children take part at their own pace, with parents and carers alongside.

INCLUSIVE

Supports regulation, sensory needs and confidence.

“patient, kind, and genuinely inclusive... a safe, non-judgmental space where children with SEND can feel comfortable, regulate, and grow in confidence”

Jenny

Why it matters

The National Autistic Society says sport can increase self-esteem, help develop social skills and improve mental health and wellbeing for autistic people. [National Autistic Society, sports guidance](#)

SPOTLIGHT: THE NEXT GENERATION OF COACHES · 1 OF 2

FROM PARTICIPANT TO ROLE MODEL



George joined Behind Bars in late 2021, nervous and unsure of himself. Today, at 16, he helps coach the younger children, and he volunteered at the Academy for his Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

WHERE IT STARTED

"The first time I went I was extremely nervous. The coaches told me I didn't have to do anything I didn't want to, even if everyone else was. That gave me the confidence to flip a tyre, and they showed me how to do it safely. I couldn't wait to come back, and over the next few sessions my strength and confidence grew."

GROWING THROUGH THE ACADEMY

"Covid's isolation had left me awkward and antisocial, and I felt self-conscious about my weight. Behind Bars showed me that even if I didn't see myself as fit, I was incredibly strong. I went from flipping a small tyre to deadlifting 110kg at 14, and 140kg this year."

"Behind Bars made me see who I really was before I could see it myself."

George, 16

SPOTLIGHT: THE NEXT GENERATION OF COACHES · 2 OF 2

FROM PARTICIPANT TO ROLE MODEL



DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD

For his bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award, George volunteered at the Academy, supporting the younger children's classes and tidying up afterwards.

DofE research finds 78% of young people finishing their Award feel they belong in their neighbourhood, against 53% nationally.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND GIVING BACK

"At the charity events I started helping the younger kids, to take some weight off the coaches' busy shoulders. Now I help in classes, holding a band for pull-ups or sitting at the top of the wall giving advice, and I talk to them about problems at school. They've named me 'Old man' because of the age gap, which makes me happy."

PARTICIPANT



SKILLS



CONFIDENCE



RESPONSIBILITY



SUPPORTING OTHERS

George shows what the Academy is built for: a young person moving from receiving support to giving it.

COMMUNITY

GIVING BACK EVERY CHRISTMAS

Every December, members take on a day of group challenges, with men's, women's and Ninjas events completing thousands of reps together. The money supports local groups helping struggling families and homeless people over Christmas. To thank them, the children who take part enjoy a trip to Ninja Warrior UK in Speke, a reminder that giving back to their community matters.

over **£24,000**

raised for the local community since the Academy opened

over **£4,000**

raised at last Christmas's fundraiser

HOT MEALS

Hot meals and warm spaces for homeless people over Christmas.

HAMPERS AND PRESENTS

Food hampers and Christmas presents for struggling families.

FIFTH YEAR

An annual tradition, now in its fifth year.



SATURDAY 13TH DECEMBER
FUNDRAISING EVENTS

MENS EVENT - 7.30AM-11AM	
1000 PULL UPS	2000 30" BOX JUMPS
2000 50KG SHOULDER ROLLS	2000M 50KG SLED PUSH
2000 DIPS	1000 CHIN UPS
2000 PUSH UPS	1000 100KG DEADLIFT

NINJAS EVENT - 11.30AM-12.30PM	
100 TIMES COMPLETE NINJA WARRIOR RIG	250 PUSH UPS
100 TIMES CLIMB	250 BOX JUMPS
WARPED WALL	1000M 10KG SLED PUSH

WOMENS EVENT - 1PM-4PM	
1000 RING ROWS	2000M 30KG SLED
1000 30KG SHOULDER ROLLS	2000 24" BOX JUMPS
1000 60KG DEADLIFT	2000 AIR SQUATS
2000 PUSH UPS	2000 LUNGES

3 SEPARATE EVENTS AT BEHIND BARS CALISTHENICS ACADEMY
REPS TO BE COMPLETED COLLECTIVELY BY EACH GROUP
IF YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED OR CAN HELP WITH FUNDRAISING REACH OUT!



PARTNERS

PARTNERS AND SPONSORS

None of this runs without the organisations that back it.



Sport England



Community Foundation for Merseyside



Copeland Group Services



Inspectank



CBE Services



National Lottery Community Fund



Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership



Merseyside Police Community Cashback Fund



Bluebird Care Wirral



SpringCare



HYPE (Helping Young People Everywhere)



Youth Empowerment Scheme

LISTENING TO FAMILIES

Feedback shows us what is working, what families need and what to run next.

It also shows funders and partners the value of the work.



LOOKING AHEAD

SUSTAINABILITY AND FUTURE IMPACT

In order to further develop provision and enhance community impact, it is vital that the Academy continues building and strengthening ties with local businesses and external partners.

Forging new relationships is a crucial part of our sustainability strategy in the months and years ahead.



KEEP IT ACCESSIBLE

Community provision that local families can afford and reach.



GROW SEND AND MENTORING

More Move Together sessions and stronger referral pathways.



DEVELOP VOLUNTEERS

Help participants move into supportive roles, as George and many others have.



MEASURE WHAT MATTERS

Score confidence, focus and social skills for every regular attendee, and report progress to funders.

REFERENCES

SOURCES

Each external source is linked directly under the finding it supports throughout this report. Full references are listed here.

Organisation	Source
NHS	Physical activity guidelines for children and young people
UCL Evidence-Based Practice Unit, on Mental Health Foundation research	The importance of physical activity for young people's mental health and wellbeing
UK Chief Medical Officers	Physical activity guidelines for children and young people (5-18)
Education Endowment Foundation	Physical development, Early Years Evidence Store
Sport England	Positive experiences for children and young people; Active Lives Children and Young People Survey
National Autistic Society	A guide for sports coaches and clubs
Youth Endowment Fund	Toolkit: Mentoring
NHS England	National Child Measurement Programme
Wirral Council	Evidence in support of policy (childhood obesity); Wirral Indices of Deprivation 2025
Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership	Violence reduction units prevent thousands of violent offences
The Duke of Edinburgh's Award	Impact research: wellbeing, skills, community ties and physical activity

All Behind Bars figures in this report come from the Academy's own Little Ninjas feedback survey, its coaches' records, its public reviews, and behindbarscalisthenicsacademy.co.uk



SUPPORT, PARTNER OR LEARN MORE

Every child who feels capable today may be the role model of tomorrow.

[CONTACT BEHIND BARS](#)

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