

NPQH graduate Jonathon Aldred is Centre Manager at “The Villan Learning Zone”, which is the “Playing for Success” Centre at Aston Villa Football Club. It’s the kind of job that many young teachers must dream about, combining the twin passions of teaching and football.

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### “Playing for Success”

Playing for Success (PFS) is a partnership between DCFS, local authorities and a wide range of sports governing bodies. It’s targeted at children aged 10 to 14 who are deemed to be in danger of underachievement.

The scheme provides 162 study centres in sports venues across the country. All the centres provide children with the opportunity to do stimulating, creative activities aimed at improving key skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Careful impact studies and independent research evaluations by NFER at frequent intervals during the eleven years of the scheme’s existence show it to have a significant effect on motivation and performance.

In any one school year around 300 children, mostly from schools local to Villa Park, will each complete a six week project at the Villan Learning Zone. Projects are all practical. Describing a typical evening, Jonathan says,

“Tonight there’ll be a gym session, an online quiz, arithmetic games on interactive handsets, making an ID card using publishing software, a teamwork session, a choice of making a radio show or a video, or developing a virtual football team.”

The activities involve ICT, literacy and numeracy skills, and the children have access to a radio and a TV studio and a computer suite all with high-end equipment.

*“I found it easy to tailor it to what I needed. It’s given me a lot of confidence, I loved the face-to-face sessions particularly.”*



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### “Villa Vitality”

The PFS programme operates after school. However, since 2005 Jonathon has helped run another, daytime, programme called “Villa Vitality,” part of the national campaign against childhood obesity, it’s run in association with the Premier League and the National Health Service - the three Birmingham Primary Care Trusts.

The programme is targeted on Year Five children and the aim is to have every Y5 child in Birmingham – sixty a day, five days a week -- attend the football club for one day to do a programme of: healthy eating sessions; football training with club coaches; fitness training in the gym with a qualified instructor; cooking sessions in the Community Food Academy; produce their own healthy eating TV show in the studio and work through on-line evaluations.

Jonathon is the chair of the steering group that oversees Villa Vitality, liaising with the Club, PCTs and partners.

*"It's given me a lot of confidence," he says. "I loved the face-to-face sessions particularly."*

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### The professional journey.

Up until 2003, when Jonathon came to Villa Park, he'd had a relatively conventional primary school career, starting in Nottingham in 1993. There, with an inspirational head teacher, he developed a commitment to creative, active, topic-based learning. A period at another Nottingham primary as Senco was followed by an Assistant Headship at Henley in Arden Primary in Warwickshire.

In 2003 he was appointed to his current post. While the football link was clearly attractive to him – he'd played youth football at Blackpool FC – he was drawn also by the prospect of growing the project from scratch.

*"I could develop it from nothing. There was no legacy."*

He liked the educational remit, too.

"The task is to improve literacy, numeracy, ICT skills and self-confidence in Key Stages 2 and 3. How we do it is very much up to us, so we can be very creative as long as we're fulfilling the remit. That really attracted me."

It's very apparent that children very much enjoy being at the Learning Zone. They're enthusiastic and on task with activities that are practical and highly motivating.

As a result there are very few behaviour issues. The continuous reinforcement with points is balanced by sanctions which, appropriately enough, are yellow and red cards. (A red card means you're taken straight home. In seven years only one child has had a red card.)

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### Why NPQH?

"This job is like being a head," says Jonathon. "I have to ensure the delivery of literacy and numeracy – although I can do it as I want. I have to set the values and vision, run a business plan, hire and fire, run CPD for the staff, do site management, resource management, health and safety and child protection."

Aware of his lack of experience in some of these areas, he looked around for what was available.

*"The NPQH covers things I'm doing already. I found it easy to tailor it to what I needed."*

The programme's been a real success for him.

*"It's given me a lot of confidence," he says. "I loved the face-to-face sessions particularly."*

He reels off numerous elements that have been interesting and useful for him – dealing with the media ("Match of the Day" sometimes come into the Centre) finance, dealing with difficult staff, leadership styles, the in-tray exercise, analyzing data. He's clearly an avid professional learner, and NPQH has provided a welcome challenge that he couldn't have found elsewhere.

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### What next?

Jonathon has plans for developing his learning programmes. Currently he's piloting a new course, written by himself and the Centre's chef, called "Cooking for Success".

His next professional step, though, is likely to be into headship, for which he is now qualified.

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### Conclusion.

There's clearly excellent work going on at the Villan Learning Zone, and its counterparts around the country, that may well not be as well known as it deserves to be. Professionals in these centres deserve the highest quality CPD not only for the sake of their own professional progress but because their experience and skills, if carefully recognized and developed, will eventually feed back into schools when they move on. For Jonathon, NPQH was exactly what he needed not only because of the relevance of the course content, but as a holder of the qualification he is affirmed as a member of the school leadership community nationally. That's important to him, and he's been at pains to recommend NPQH to other PFS centre managers.

To learn more about NPQH please contact HTI on 024 7641 0104 or email [npqh@hti.org.uk](mailto:npqh@hti.org.uk)