

When Danielle Pointon was a football-mad teenager she had no idea that legions of Roman soldiers had once camped on the very spot where she was now playing for her school team.

Even if she had known, she probably wouldn't have cared, she says.

"I didn't like history at school, and I was too busy running round with my gang the rest of the time."

Danielle was a talented footballer with a promising amateur career, but she was also a teenage tearaway who had started getting into trouble with the police in her hometown of Chesterton in North Staffordshire.

Now 20 and working as a sports coach for local primary schools, she can see how her tough circumstances nearly derailed her. A recurrent knee injury had started to affect her football, and she felt frustrated and angry.

> "I was like a bottle of pop getting constantly shaken up, and every now again the top would come off."
>
> - Danielle

"I was like a bottle of pop getting constantly shaken up, and every now again the top would come off," she says. "Eventually I tried to make contact with my dad, who I hadn't seen since I was two, only to find out that he had recently died."

To cap it all, she also discovered that a congenital heart condition had become serious and she had to stop playing sports on medical advice. “Instead of running seven or eight miles a day, I had to start limiting it to half a mile.” She was devastated.

In the footsteps of the Romans

But then Danielle was introduced to Ben Rigby and Ross Podyma of Sporting Communities, who were setting up an HLF-supported project to explore Chesterton’s Roman past, with the aim of reconnecting local residents with their Roman heritage.

Danielle was immediately hooked. She got involved in the consultation and application to HLF for the project and helped out with eight pop-up fun days put on for local children and families.

Thanks to the support from National Lottery players, the project ran activities including a Roman treasure hunt with swords, helmets and armour as the ‘finds’, and modern variations of games and sports that the Romans would have played, such as hopscotch, archery and tag.

“I never gave it a thought before, but now it’s amazing to me that we were literally playing in the footsteps of Roman soldiers. Not many schoolkids can say that their school was built on a 1st-century fort.”

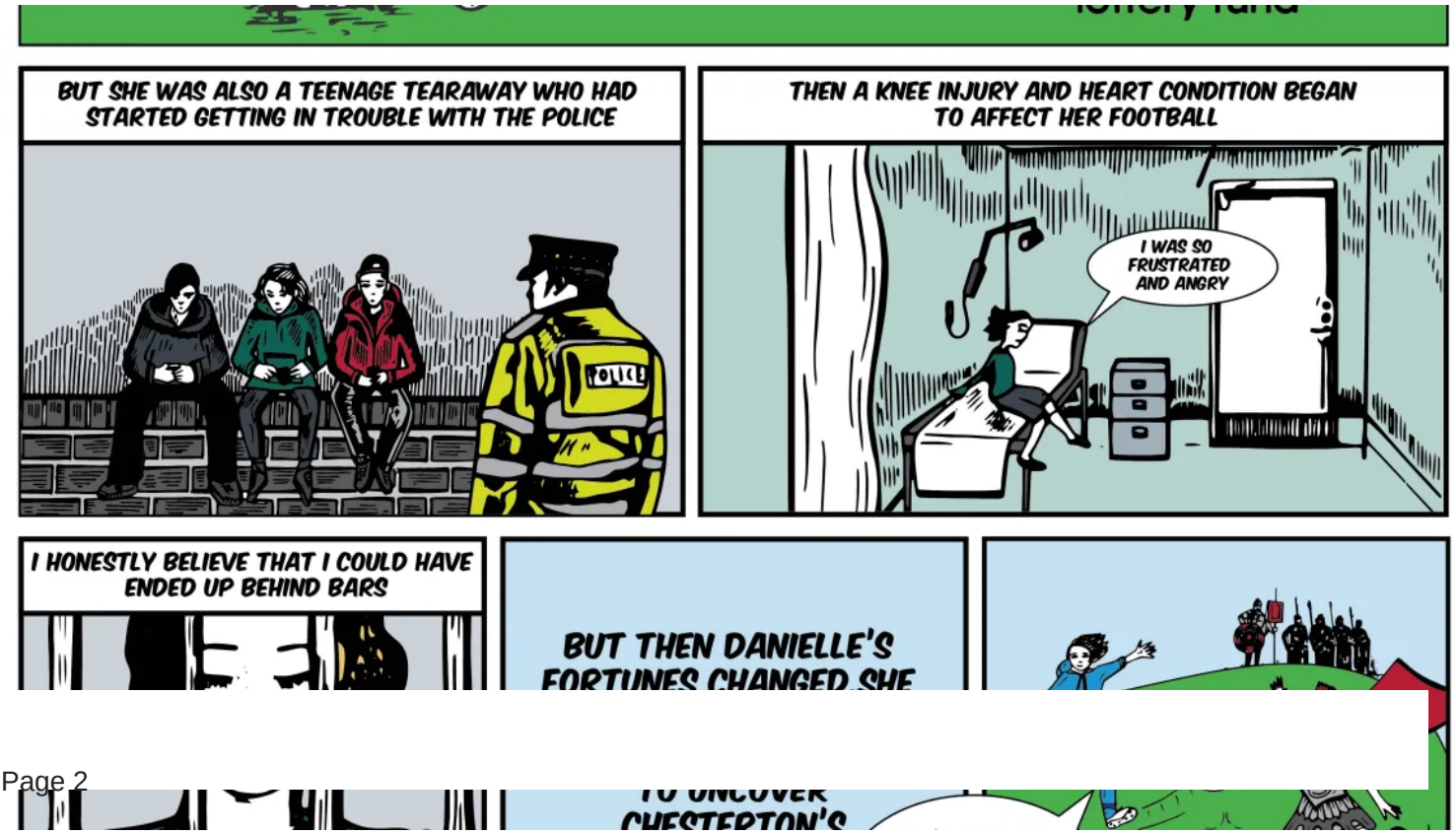
Planning for the future

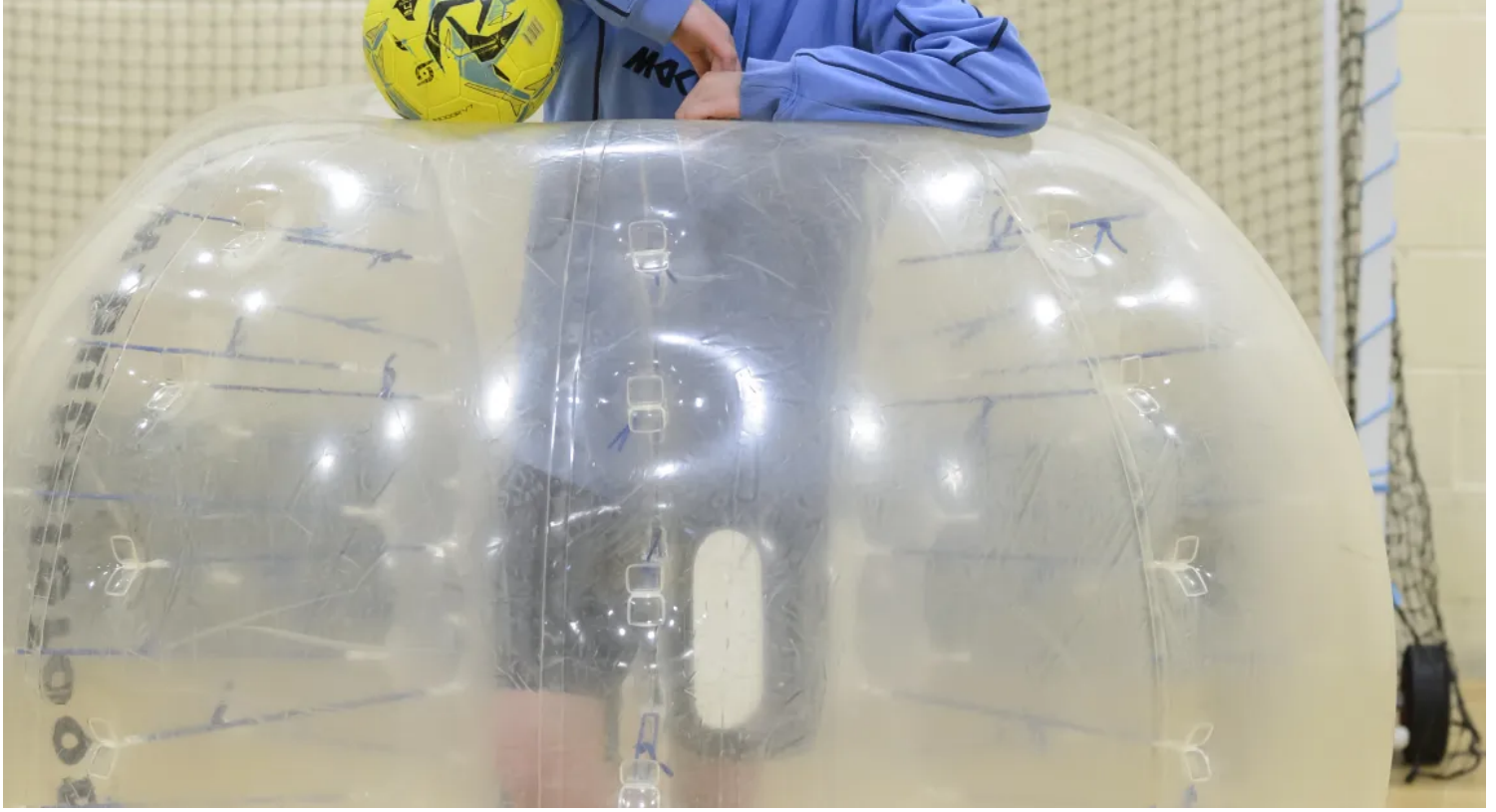
When Danielle had what she calls her "reality check" she realised that she wanted to do something positive not only with her own life but also for her community.

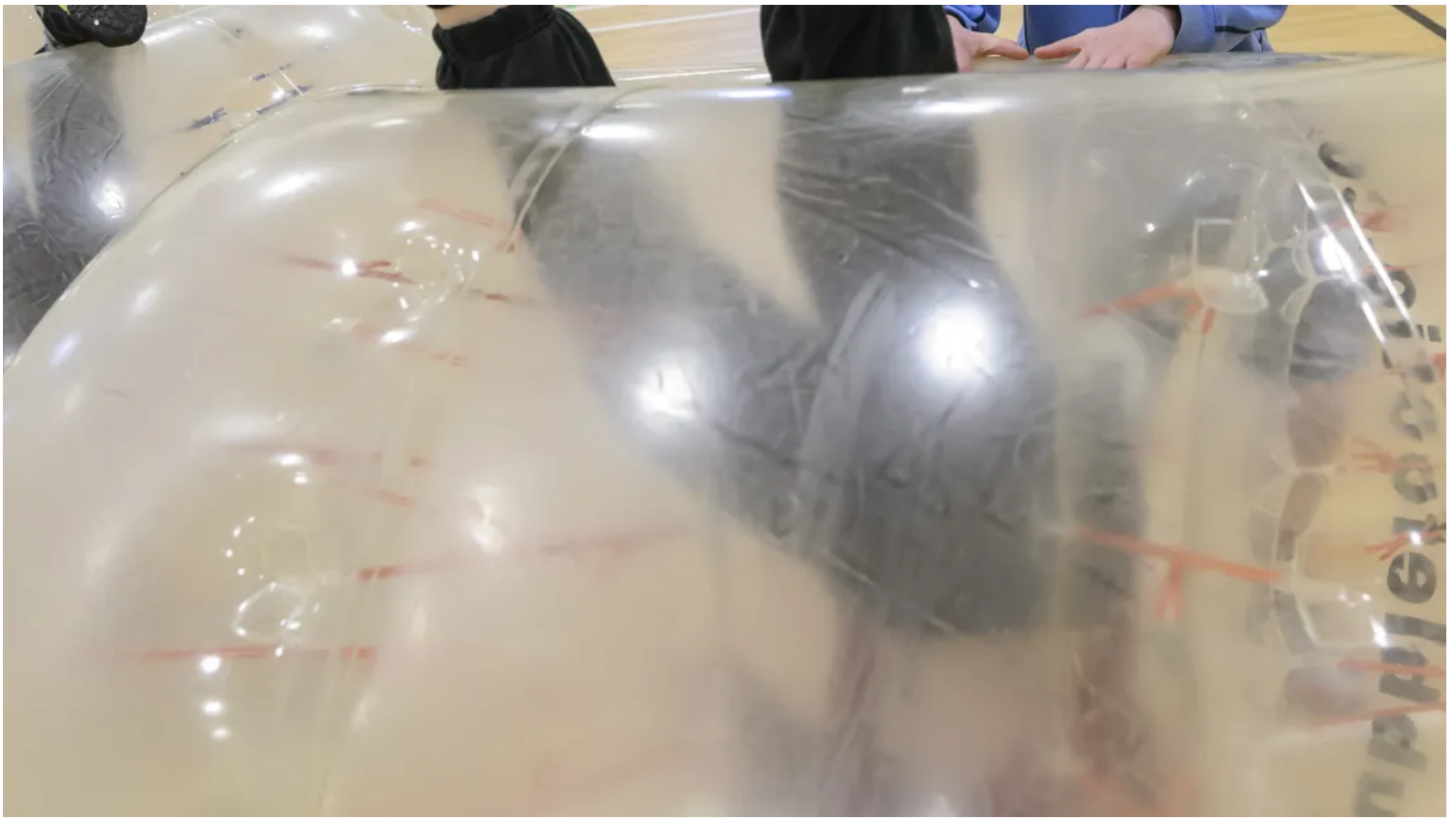
“I know how easy it is for young people to get involved in petty crime,” she says. “But just because you’ve been in a gang doesn’t mean you can’t have a new start and a career.”

Her goal is to be a sports coach for people with disabilities. “I want to show them that they can still participate in sports,” she says. “And my long-term goal is to be a police community support officer.”

Today she is too busy coaching and volunteering to get into trouble, she says.











Volunteers get to grips with Roman costume

Bridge to the Future