

Member briefing: Sport and youth justice

January 2016

1. Introduction

The challenge of how to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour has always been one that has fixated Governments, the police, youth organisations and charities. But what role could sport and recreation play in helping steer young people away from a crime? This briefing contains a number of case studies of successful programmes that help youngsters in disadvantaged areas, as well as setting out the policy and political background of sport and recreation and youth justice.

2. Policy context

The Sport and Recreation Alliance published a report in 2012 called *Game of Life*¹ which contained a section on diverting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. The Alliance found that there are four main theories for how sport and recreation can reduce crime and anti-social behaviour:

1. It acts as a diversion from taking part in criminal behaviour - seven in ten teenagers believe anti-social behaviour occurs because young people are bored
2. Sport and recreation activities, particularly when backed by well-known professional clubs, act as a 'hook' for other interventions, such as life-skills workshops, where other risk factors can be addressed
3. Skills and abilities developed whilst playing sport, such as self-regulating or problem-solving skills, can modify behaviour that previously caused anti-social behaviour, or provide a positive avenue for expressing a desire to take risks
4. Sport and recreation can break down barriers between groups of people in a local area who might not otherwise engage, as sport and recreational activities are often inclusive. Mentors who lead the sporting/recreational activity can also provide positive role models for at risk young people.

The Alliance also notes that, when delivering physical activity programmes for at risk young people, it is important that the activity:

- Appeals to the participant

- Is developed by relevant experts to be targeted at the people involved and their specific situations
- Is led by well-trained coaches/mentors

The exact relationship between physical activity and crime reduction is not clear, as little longitudinal evidence (a research study that involves repeated observations of the same variables over long periods of time) for such programmes exists, although there is plenty of anecdotal evidence and smaller studies that prove the short-term value of sporting projects in deprived areas available. There is a strong case for undertaking further longitudinal research on this subject, given the way in which “anti-social behaviour influences a young person’s life chances”.

Furthermore, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), in its report *More than a Game* (2011)², found it difficult to identify how to replicate best practice of sport-related projects in disadvantaged communities to deliver better social outcomes for young people. It recommends conducting more research into which interventions are appropriate in which contexts, and the outcomes we can expect from them. This would give policy makers, funders and practitioners a greater understanding of, and what to expect from, investment in sport’s contribution to social policy.

The CSJ also identify two barriers to proving the effectiveness of sports programmes. These are:

- Political problems:
 - Project managers over-emphasising the potential benefits of their programmes and thus creating unrealistic expectations
 - Vaguely defined objectives
 - Pressure from funders for quantifiable results encourages project managers to measure what is easily measurable rather than what is important (e.g. measuring outputs rather than outcomes of the people taking part in programmes)
- Technical problems:
 - Difficulty of predicting when the benefits of a project should become apparent
 - There is not always funding for evaluation which means it is sometimes seen as a burden

Based on these barriers, the CSJ emphasises the importance of sports programmes clearly defining the problem they are tackling and how they aim to use sport to solve it, as well as ensuring that those programmes were appealing and relevant to the vulnerable young people the programed were targeting.

The CSJ also recommends that training given to sports coaches when they are earning their qualifications should include a specific section on how to work effectively work with disadvantaged and vulnerable young people.

In 2015, the CSJ published a follow-up report, *Sport for Social Good*³, in which they called for:

- A new national strategy setting out a detailed plan to encourage the use of sport for social good, including a viable approach to evaluating the impact of physical activity in order to evidence how disadvantaged people's lives are being positively changed
- Better access to facilities in disadvantaged communities
- Sport England pilot a Community Coaching Scheme for coaches looking to teach multiple skills and give them the skills to engage with disadvantaged young people

The Government's recently published sports strategy⁴ does attempt to overcome these barriers identified by the CSJ in both *More than a Game* and *Sport for Social Good*. Such as making social community and development one of the five key outcomes that will in future be used to measure the success of sport and making it easier for people in disadvantaged communities to access sporting facilities. This commitment will need to be matched with quality implementation and an understanding of the technical details and how to measure progress.

The Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (2012)⁵ argues that sport is ideally placed to engage young people at risk of committing crime and acts of anti-social behaviour as it is easy to set up informal, short-term activities that create a natural environment for interaction between different generations and between those in authority and young people. It also states that there is evidence from the Institute of Community Cohesion that physical activity can contribute towards cohesive communities by transcending divides and challenging fears.

3. Political context

Neither of the main political parties proposed using sport as a primary mechanism for tackling youth crime and anti-social behaviour in their 2015 general election manifestos, although Labour did want local authorities, the police and probation services to work together to identify 18-20 year olds who were "at risk of drifting into criminal activity and, where possible, divert them into a more constructive way of life".

However, former Culture, Media and Sport Secretary Sajid Javid⁶ made a speech in March 2015, in which he declared that he wanted sport to be used "as a force for social good and to make this an explicit objective for sports funding in our country" and that "by targeting investment in sport, we can take steps towards tackling anti-social behaviour".

Successful organisations who deal with troubled young people, Javid said, "recognise that sport is a key vehicle to deliver their message" by providing emotional support and positive

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http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/CSJJ3207_Sports_Paper_03.15_WEB.pdf

⁴
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

⁵
http://www.cloa.org.uk/images/stories/The_role_of_Culture_and_Sport_in_reducing_crime_and_anti_social_behaviour.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/secretary-of-state-sports-speech>

role models to vulnerable youngsters and giving them structure and discipline to their lives that “allows them to deliver other aims, such as employment”.

Javid name checked organisations who are doing this sort of work: Greenhouse, the Change Foundation, Street League and Sport 4 Life, as well as the Premier League’s Kickz programme and the Rugby Football Union’s (RFU) Try for Change Foundation.

In the recent Government Sports Strategy, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport acknowledged the role sport can play in helping the long-term unemployed and “dramatically transform” deprived areas. The Government announced that two of the five outcomes that will be used to judge the success of sport in the UK is social and community development and individual development.⁷

Indeed, Sports Minister Tracey Crouch MP, in a recent speech highlighted the positive impact sport can have in addressing anti-social behaviour⁸. She cited the work StreetGames play in making sport more widely available to disadvantaged young people.

The Government is also starting to fund more of these projects including a scheme that uses the skills of rugby coaches at 14 professional rugby union clubs to install character in disaffected and disadvantaged children, with the aim of reaching more than 17,000 pupils, as well as providing an intensive 33-week training course for almost 500 young people not in education, training or employment⁹.

4. Case studies of the social value of sport

4.1 Boys dancing: Engaging offenders in learning new skills in Shropshire

A four-day dancing project run by Shropshire Council Community Arts & Festivals Team and Stoke Prison which develops and celebrates dance for boys and young men who had never participated in dance before, providing them with the challenge, exhilaration, discipline and the fun of making and sharing dance.

The project has had a positive effect on participants, with collective evaluation revealing that:

- 90% of learners felt that they had learnt new skills
- 50% of learners strongly agreed that their confidence was boosted as a result of the project
- 75% of learners felt they had discovered something they liked doing
- 50% of learners felt their physical fitness had improved during the project

4.2 Street Sports: Diverting young people away from crime

The Street Sports programme, originally in Crewe and Nantwich and now extended across the whole of East Cheshire, has been running since 2007 and provides positive sporting activities for young people to do in their leisure time in crime hotspots to help reduce levels of anti-social behaviour.

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/sports-minister-tracey-crouch-speech-at-beyond-sport-summit>

⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11642858/Nicky-Morgan-top-rugby-coaches-to-teach-pupils-grit-and-respect.html>

The programme also tries to encourage the young people who attend these sessions to become involved in sport as volunteers to expand their opportunities and ensure there are always volunteers available to run these sessions long term.

Evaluation of the project found that during the period Street Sports was running anti-social behaviour fell; in one area incidents fell from 24 in a month down to 3. It also found that the programme had a positive effect on the participants levels of offending, with one particular individual who had offended 3 times in the previous 5 months having no further involvement in crime.

3.3 Hitz Premiership Rugby Social Inclusion programme

Described as the “UK’s largest rugby union social inclusion programme”, Hitz works with 12 Premiership Rugby Clubs across England to provide twice weekly doorstep rugby training sessions to 11-19 year old young people who are at risk of offending, and who are usually referred from youth offending teams, probation, social and youth services.

The programme aims to use rugby and its values to help reduce anti-social behaviour, break down barriers and improve relationships with the police and to encourage a more positive attitude towards education and employment.

Alongside the rugby training, Hitz runs integrated discussions tackling issues of drugs, sexual health, financial literacy and anger management and communication. Young people who are classed as not in education, employment or training are also encouraged to enter a personalised study programme to help develop their numeracy, literacy, ICT and employability skills. Once they had passed their study programme, the young people are then supported in either re-entering education, undertaking an apprenticeship or entering paid employment.

So far, over 9000 children and young people have accessed the scheme, with 1440 NEETs receiving employability support. 90% of those completed the study programme with improved numeracy, literacy and IT skills, with at least 75% of those achieving a positive outcome from using Hitz such as further education or employment. 70% also showed an improvement in resilience, confidence and communication.

3.4 Meriden Park Sports Legacy Zone

Meriden Park in Watford serves a number of high-rise buildings but had few facilities and had a track record of anti-social behaviour in the area. To solve this, Watford Borough Council and Watford Community Housing Trust, working in partnership with a playground equipment company called Proludic, created a sporting legacy project for all ages to mark 2012 being an Olympic year. They created a sports legacy zone that contained different types of sporting equipment, such as fitness, ball games and dynamic equipment, across 6 different zones.

3.5 Street Games

Street Games uses sport for young people to develop stronger and safer communities and was developed in response to research conducted by the Home Office on stopping youth offending. It believes that delivered sport has a wider social impact on the lives of disadvantaged young people and improves the communities they live in.

Street Games schemes are run across the country and have been successful in reducing the number of recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour in those areas. For example, a Street Games project in Wigan resulted in a fall in anti-social behaviour incidents recorded by the police from 23,083 in 2009/10 to 13,598 in 2012/13.

One of its main schemes is Doorstep Sport, which is sport delivered “at the right time, right place, right price and in the right style” to effectively engage disadvantaged young people. Some of the doorstep sport initiatives include:

- Street Games Stoke-on-Trent’s doorstep sports programme forms a key part of the City’s RESPECT initiative aimed at reducing incidents of anti-social behaviour by providing young people with positive sporting activities. This, combined with community tidy-ups, home fire safety checks & the provision of specialist equipment for vulnerable equipment initiatives, has contributed to a 35% reduction in reported anti-social behaviour incidences from 17,000 in 2010 to 11,000 at the end of 2012
- Sporting Futures in Derbyshire provide a diverse range of doorstep sports programmes in disadvantaged communities across Derbyshire, with an average of 40-50 sessions held each week, attracting over 2000 people every year. Police data in the areas these initiatives have run in indicate that anti-social behaviour has fallen, in one case, by over 50%
- Merseyside Fire Support Network provided a doorstep sport cage football project in a number of areas with high deprivation in central Liverpool, which were aimed at improving social cohesion and diverting young people from involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. Over 1,500 young people attended the cage football sessions between 2007 and 2011 and data showed a 29% reduction in recorded deliberate fires and a 27% reduction in police recorded ASB incidents

3.6 Sport 4 Life UK

Sport 4 Life uses sport as a tool to engage disadvantaged teenagers and young people in Birmingham who have a history of offending onto their educational programmes. They establish and develop a relationship with the young people using sport then move them onto education, where young people explore urban issues such as gangs and crime and have the chance to earn a Sports Leader Level 1 qualification.

They also get the chance to go on employability programmes, which engages young people that are furthest away from the job market by providing them with support to help them improve their employability skills and opportunities to gain work experience.

The scheme has engaged with 777 young people, including 23 young ex-offenders, of which 87% have gone on to not commit any further offences. Furthermore, 71% of NEET young people who took part in the scheme moved onto further training, education or employment.

3.7 Kickz

Kickz is a national programme which uses football and the appeal of leading professional football clubs to engage 12-18 year olds in deprived areas which suffer from a high rate of crime and anti-social behaviour. The objectives of Kickz include to:

- Engage young people in a range of constructive activities which link to the Government’s Every Child Matters framework
- Increase the playing, coaching and officiating opportunities for participants.
- Break down barriers between the police and young people
- Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the targeted neighbourhoods
- Encourage volunteering within projects and throughout the target neighbourhoods
- Create routes into education, training and employment
- Increase young people’s interest in and connections with the professional game

To achieve these objectives, Kickz delivers sport coaching as well as workshops delivered in partnership with other organisations in the community such as the police, local authorities and other youth charities, on topics such as drug awareness and healthy eating. In an area of north London where the programme has been running, youth crime fell from 2,529 incidents to 867 in three years.

5. Conclusion

Based upon both the literature that is available on the role sport can play in youth justice and the case studies we collected, it is clear that sports-related programs can successfully rehabilitate young people who previously were heavily involved in crime, were at risk of becoming criminals themselves or had no direction or meaning to their lives.

If you have a case study or any evidence related to sport and youth justice please send to Robert Gill, Policy Support Officer – rgill@sportandrecreation.org.uk