

Street Elite

Annual
Evaluative
Report

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PREFACE

Research that attends to the social identities and cultural practices of young people will often compartmentalise models of culture, identity and social practice in order to explain a more complex reality. Young people can be creative and enterprising, and are increasingly finding themselves operating in changing communities, making it a complex and challenging task to meet their needs in terms of engagement, employment and education.

Furthermore, the current global economic situation has created concern among many of today's young people about their future – particularly their future employment prospects. Employers are concerned about many young people's work readiness, particularly in relation to their personal and social development. This includes skills and qualities such as the ability to manage behaviours, make decisions and build relationships. At the heart of the Government's vision for young people is the crucial importance of the need to raise young people's aspirations, participation and attainment in both education and work.

It has been clearly evident that this particular 'sport for development' programme is driven by passionate and committed individuals who are establishing crucial provisions, in particular areas of London, and providing valuable opportunities to a group of young people who have long been deprived of such support. The authors hope that this report will contribute to the on-going development of the programme.

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INTRODUCTION

The main aim of the *Street Elite* programme is to offer young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) the opportunity to develop new skills and levels of confidence to engage in employment, education or further training. Young people today face a great deal of uncertainty regarding their education and career opportunities. These opportunities for young people in Britain are increasingly rare and as such the choices that are presented are either unappealing or inaccessible. *Street Elite* attempts to provide a dynamic and unique environment for young people to develop in a positive way and this research attempts to illuminate the landscape in which *Street Elite* operates in order to better understand the complexity of young people and the obstacles to their success in employment, education and in their lives.

Youth unemployment has dropped marginally according to official figures published in August 2012. In the 16-24 age group, 1.01 million people were unemployed in the three months to June, down by four thousand from the previous three months. However, a report from the Trade Union Congress this year warned that the employment outlook for the young was the bleakest since 1994. "*Students looking to start their careers or continue in their education next month are facing the toughest climate for nearly twenty years,*" said General Secretary Brendan Barber. "*If this continues we could lose a generation of talented and highly qualified youngsters to blighted careers, debt and underachievement*" (TUC 2012). With high levels of youth unemployment in the last two decades and the spiralling cost of education, it has become increasingly common for young people to disengage from society. Young people considered vulnerable and disaffected are subject to marginalising processes that can be understood as detrimental to them personally as well as to society as a whole.

Game Plan (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2002) was published by the UK Government in 2002 as a way of outlining its intended strategy for delivering its sport and physical activity policy objectives. Within *Game Plan* the Government championed the role that sport could play with regards to the issues across the health, education, economic and local community sectors. It also suggested that sport could make a significant contribution in other areas, such as crime reduction, social inclusion and help with the development of young people in schools.

Moreover, *Game Plan* was based upon the premise that sport has the ability to deliver universal benefits to a community in terms of key indicators of social benefit such as health, crime, decreased unemployment rates and education provision increases. This promotion of sport as a vehicle for change has seen Government agencies, in collaboration with local community partnerships, increase the number of sport for development interventions with the conviction that increased sports participation in deprived areas can lead to improved local outcomes, including 'better health, lower crime, less worklessness, improved environment [and] enhanced skills' (ODPM, 2004: 7). As Crabbe (2000), Gratton and Henry (2001) and Long and Sanderson (2001) suggest, the provision of sports facilities and programmatic sport services can have a dramatically positive impact on a number of social factors. Namely; how people perceive the social make up of their communities as well as improving the general health of communities and also encouraging economic resurgence and sustainability.

Furthermore, sporting activities and events contribute to the development of stronger social

networks and more cohesive communities, strengthening community engagement and capacity building (Scully et al, 1998). Sport can be used as a means of engaging those individuals or groups that are particularly disaffected or marginalised (Crabbe, 2007). It has the potential to do so by offering those alienated from mainstream society alternative avenues through which they can access support, education and advice regarding societal provisions such as health, education and employment programmes. Coalter (2007) refers to these interventions as 'plus-sport' interventions, wherein sport is the context and not the focus, which is clearly the case with *Street Elite*.

In addition to this, appropriately structured physical activity can contribute to a reduction in the likelihood of a young person participating in crime or anti-social behavior (Coalter, 2001; Coalter, Allison and Taylor, 2000) by addressing some of the factors that have been identified as increasing the risk of youth offending (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2005). Sport can offer role models and alternative social groups with different views, attitudes and expectations and provide activity choices that prevent boredom, improve cognitive skills and present physical and mental challenges. The provision of local sports facilities at a neighbourhood level alongside programmes of sports activities, developed in consultation with young people, can provide alternative activities for young people to participate in and places for young people to congregate. It is argued that well designed and high quality sports programmes can make a significant contribution to the physical wellbeing of young people.

This report summarises the findings from the evaluation study carried out on the *Street Elite* programme, an initiative that uses sport as a way of engaging with NEETs to identify and meet their needs, and moreover facilitate the transition from community involvement to employment. The *Street Elite* programme therefore presents a critical opportunity to engage with NEETs through 'plus-sport' interventions (Coalter, 2007). Previous research (Coalter, 2001; Collins, 2003) has identified a need for specialist delivery and carefully planned methods of motivating NEETs to make positive life changes. Moreover it presents a unique opportunity to engage with even the most challenging of young people caught up in a cycle of exclusion and unemployment.

The *Street Elite* programme uses sport and a supportive multi agency environment to engage high-risk young people, to create pathways for personal and social development, and to raise aspirations in those young people. Partnership work is a key aspect of delivery and is essential (Coalter, 2001) in providing high quality, impactful and sustainable initiatives. The *Street Elite* programme offers vocational training and as a consequence realistic routes into mainstream education, training and employment.

The report is made up of four sections. The introduction provides a contextual overview of the role of the programme as a sports development initiative, the evaluation research methodology outlines the background and delivery of the qualitative and quantitative research methods, the discussion section is dedicated to a presentation of the insights and recommendations generated by the research and finally the concluding comments summarise the value and impact of the programme.

THE EVALUATION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodologies that seek to examine complex and multifaceted phenomena such as the *Street Elite* programme, and better understand their impact, according to Greene (2007), should focus on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data in order to attain a more in depth picture of the context, particularly in relation to such issues as social identities and the cultural practices of young people (Greene *et al.*, 2001). Quantitative data is that which consists of closed-ended information that is clearly defined, statistical, objective and measurable. Upon the paradigmatic presumptions of realism and objectivism the collection of quantitative data involves measuring or recording a phenomenon against predefined indicators. Quantitative information can also be found in documents such as progress reports and performance records. Analysing quantitative data involves either mathematical or numerical analytical processes toward answering predetermined research questions or a hypothesis regarding value and impact.

In contrast, qualitative data is data that consists of people's experiences of the social world. Qualitative data often takes the form of interview with participants or observational records of the delivery environment. Qualitative data collection via interviewing methods involves open-ended and fluid questions within a semi-structured interview context, which seeks not to measure responses against predetermined measurement indicators, but rather to garner rich articulations of interviewees' experiences of a phenomena in their own words. It can also involve observing participants at the sites of research, gathering documents from diaries or meetings, and viewing audiovisual materials such as news cuttings, film clips and other cultural artifacts. Analysing qualitative data follows either a deductive path of aggregating participants' words, or the researcher's observations, into categories of information and presenting the diversity of ideas gathered during data collection, or an inductive process of analysing the data using theoretical concepts to unpack the perceptions, feelings and thoughts of the participants.

The intention with this first annual report of the *Street Elite* project was to collect a range of data that would provide a holistic picture of the programme's background, performance, value and impact. Reflecting on value creation and impact requires a series of key questions to be asked of those responsible for the conduct of the input (Funders and Coaches) and of those in receipt of that input in the form of outputs and outcomes (NEETs and communities).

In order to achieve these objectives, the researchers undertook the following tasks:

A review of documents and data - A review of key research, policy, regulatory and operational documents relevant to the study was undertaken.

Stakeholder interviews - Telephone interviews with key stakeholders were conducted.

Case studies – The emergent findings were illustrated through individual stories.

LITERATURE REVIEW: DISCUSSION

The following section presents insights into the programme from the range of research conducted and proposes a number of recommendations to inform a possible action plan.

The Programme's Relational Culture

Street Elite seeks to employ sport and coaching tools to engage, and work with, young people in the most deprived communities of London. British culture is imbued with an enthusiasm for engaging with sport, both participating and viewing, and thus, sport participation is seen as a powerful tool for personal and social development (Crabbe, 2000; Coalter, 2007).

One participant who was interviewed discussed the notion of *Corporate Social Responsibility* as essential to the work of the *Street Elite* programme highlighting that 'It's important as a business to be able to get close enough to the programme so we can influence how it's going to be delivered and where.' The same interviewee noted that as a foundation, the Berkeley Foundation '*builds houses and neighbourhoods*' and it was the strong sense of communities and neighbourhoods, rather than housing that this partnership is engaged in developing. Through the *Street Elite* programme and Berkeley partnership it is clear that a range of stakeholders are given an opportunity to engage 'with' and 'in' a unique moment in their respective communities, whilst learning to volunteer and to accept a sense of responsibility for a civil society.

During the interview process it became clear that despite the apparent power of sport for social good, many organisations are not involved in engaging marginalised populations in the way that *Street Elite* does. One interviewee noted that '*nineteen have completed the course...it's an amazing achievement and one we're really proud of*' which offers up two thoughts. Firstly, it is an incredible statistic to graduate nineteen from twenty four of a first year cohort, but that there are only nineteen young people engaged in such an innovative scheme should be a note of consideration if developing this programme nationally. It is, of course, not *Street Elite's* responsibility directly to address this, however, undoubtedly part of the remit for successful programmes might be to highlight that lack of activity more broadly in the sector.

Participation in *Street Elite*, like sport more generally, provides the space within which young people can engage with one another whilst participating in sporting activities. Whilst sport provides the initial 'hook' (Coakley, 2011; Spaaij, 2009), *Street Elite* uses this space to teach employability and leadership skills toward enhancing young people's quality of life and employability prospects. Within academic literature such programmes are conceptualised as sport for development, or 'plus-sport', programmes (Coalter, 2007; 2010; Crabbe, 2013; Kelly, 2011, Nichols *et al.*, 2011). Such programmes are built upon the understanding that participation in sport can provide a myriad of individualised and societal benefits ranging from social mobility (Jarvie & Maguire, 2013; Spaaij, 2011), crime reduction (Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Nichols, 2007), the development of the self (Green, 2008; Kay, 2009) and the development of social trust and reciprocity (Spaaij, 2009). So much so that sport has been described as "the training ground for life" by Danish (2002: 50).

Moreover, and most importantly within the context of the report is the perceived power of

sport as a mechanism for social inclusion (Kelly, 2011; Sandford *et al.*, 2006). Sport for development programmes are surrounded and supported by a rhetoric that sport possesses the potential to engage particularly marginalised young people (Kelly, 2011; Tacon, 2007) with the aim of working “to improve the social outlook and employability prospects of long-term unemployed and underemployed youth” (Spaaij, 2009: 2). *Street Elite* offers a prime example of a successful and progressive sport for development model, and as such it is the conviction of the authors that there exists many persuasive elements of the programme that can be shared with other similar establishments across the country.

It is clear that in the first year of the *Street Elite* programme some considerable achievements have been made. One of the young people interviewed, having graduated the course gave testimony to the fact that sport (*Street Elite* in particular) had saved his life. He commented that ‘*It’s like I have another family you know with Si and them...if it wasn’t for that I’d probably be on the streets with my mates messing around*’. Interestingly, the young man in question had actually suggested that ‘messing around’ involved strong criminal action at some points in his life and that the relationships and family he had developed through *Street Elite* was integral in his development as a mentor and now coach on the programme. The research clearly illuminates the positive impact resulting from participation in the programme, in regards to behaviour within the coach/NEET relationships, training and employment opportunities for NEETs and the ability of NEETs to manage their transition into the world of work. The conclusion can be drawn from the research conducted that the programme provides a unique opportunity for delivery staff to reach out to and engage with particularly marginalised NEETs. *Street Elite* has established an infrastructure of support and mentoring relationships for NEETs as they generate positive aspirations for the future.

In recognition of that the assertion can be made that the success of the programme is heavily dependent on the relationships formed between those facilitating the programme and the participating NEETs. Thus, the quality, in regards to the ability of the practitioner delivering the programme to engage with, build relationships, mentor, be empathetic and supportive and respond to the needs of the participants, is key. The energy and attention to personal detail is astounding with narratives relating to calling some of the NEETs any time of day and night to check their progress or ensuring they attended training, college or work. This *parenting* or *social work* is beyond the demand of the job but essential to the vocation and the programme success. The importance that the latter group possesses the ability to work effectively with young people from some of the most challenging backgrounds cannot be underestimated. A number of the partners believe that the social development aspects of *Street Elite* will develop even further in the following year. Based on the author’s experience with the London *Street Elite* programme most of the stories were successful because of the amount of time young people spent in this environment and the relationships that were formed.

Recommendation: *Maintain and continue an effective strategy towards the engagement of NEETs. All participants should be welcomed into a group that offers trusted, working relationships and interesting, engaging learning and training episodes. Positive teaching approaches coupled with supportive and informal learning environments exist at present. Supportive and rewarding relationships with the coaches are an outstanding feature of the Street Elite programme. It can be underestimated how much the programme relies on the quality of its people and there needs to be further investment and support if this is to be (a)*

ongoing, and, (b) grown. There is a need for enhanced high quality advice and guidance with regards to the transition into work and the increased availability of high quality courses that give NEETs opportunities to progress to their choice of further learning or employment.

Data and Accountability Gaps

All of the various transformative potential sport possesses can only be mobilised via systematic, long-term and sustainable initiatives (Coalter, 2007). Therefore, the support staff responsible for budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and consultation that surround a project such as *Street Elite* are just as important to delivering a successful programme as those delivering the programme in direct engagement with the participants.

According to Coalter (2007) there is a temptation to use the words “evaluation” and “impact” loosely, stretching these terms to include any type of report on the use of funds or the results they achieve. For Coalter (2007), for impact and evaluation to be developed there needs to be a distinction made between *measuring performance* (monitoring inputs, activities, and outputs), *measuring outcomes* (near-term results) and *evaluating impact* (long-term changes that are attributable to the programme’s activities).

The performance measurement systems apparent in this study, can and do provide valuable data that enable funders, coaches and participants to reflect upon and improve the quality of the programme, however they lack the necessary attributes to achieve an evaluative provision that attends to the more complex notions of evaluation and success espoused by Coalter (2007) above. This first year report is intended to invoke some discussion, thought and to put in place effective measurement tools for the future years (long term tracking of NEETs for example).

The fundamental components of an effective system include the following:

- An organising framework based on predetermined and agreed set of overarching goals and impact measures that *Street Elite* tracks and reports against formatively every three months and summatively to the community annually.
- A structured, but flexible, empirically led process that is implemented with the aim of improving the education of the participants and the alignment of the programme possibly across a number of geographical locations. Each participant progresses at his or her own pace and the available data should record and report their unique development. While the programme at different locations will also develop at different rates the systems should reveal any issues or incidents of good practice that can be dealt with and extrapolated across the locations.
- Highly engaged professional support requires guidance to design action plans and use data effectively. *Street Elite* therefore, should provide well trained facilitators, data/analytics support, technology support, strong communications systems and committed leadership. In addition to the facilitators, each network works with highly trained coaches who help participants define the problem, develop action plans and shared indicators, measure and analyse progress and improve their action plans on an ongoing basis.

At present there is a lack of consistent evidence based in the design of the progress reports and a lack of well-designed protocols for the delivery of any such evidence. We encourage *Street Elite* to measure progress formatively and summatively against vocational outcomes and not just programme-specific indicators such as self-esteem (although this type of

evidence can provide useful insight if done longitudinally and in conjunction with other evidence). The authors suggest that the highly beneficial work of *Street Elite* would be better served by incorporating a range of evaluation approaches to include more timely, pragmatic and progressive techniques. Such techniques will aid the strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of the programme in relation to the preset outcome goals.

Recommendation: *Install mechanisms for improving monitoring and accountability. At the very least a comprehensive, web-based data management system that includes a standardised set of defined indicators, a robust reporting function and web-based data storage should be implemented as soon as possible. The benefits of such will include significant financial savings, whilst improving the quality and credibility of data and reducing the need for grantee evaluation expertise.*

Financial situation

Having this project independently evaluated fully validates the overall value and impact of the programme and the potential for future contributions from *Street Elite* to aid progress and the funding partners. It is necessary, therefore to attempt a cost benefit analysis in order to identify the financial impact and the social return on the investment to the programme. The results provide further evidence for the partners considering how and whether they should invest in the programme to tackle the issues in future years and elsewhere nationally. This is directly linked to notions of measuring the impact and performance and outcomes of the programme.

It is difficult to gauge the costs of a programme with multiple partners, where staffing and programme costs are separate due to the diverse roles that staff fulfill across programmes and partnerships. In looking to the future and the roll out of further programmes it will become essential to gauge such costs and as a consequence the sustainability of funding the programme. During this year, the problem of additional funding has been circumnavigated by one of the funding bodies putting in more money to deliver the scheme. Thus it becomes very difficult to calculate the exact cost per NEET of the programme. Information presented to the authors suggests the average cost per NEET will be between £4K and £6K. This estimate would represent value for money (certainly to society given issues of employment, education and criminal activity), but this needs to be accurately calculated in order to develop funding bids.

Recommendation: *Leverage current funding streams and align new ones. The search for alternative funding streams and the uncertainties that this commitment engenders can impact community engagement levels. Robust evidence is required in order to build the case for additional partners and sustained funding for the programme in order to ensure the mistakes of other similar interventions scheme are not made again. These mistakes revolve around a lack of comprehensive evaluation due to a lack of funding.*

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this report the authors draw together a body of evidence which demonstrates that *Street Elite* offers an effective and powerful mechanism through which to engage NEETs in educational and employability opportunities.

The authors reveal the strong motivations for NEETs who experience especially disrupted and negative educational experiences to engage in sports coaching. The research has also excavated a common enthusiasm for employment in the sports and leisure industry by NEETs with a history of unemployment and lack of career aspirations. Such motivation requires support and guidance in order to be nurtured into life-transforming opportunities and the authors argue that the funding bodies, *Street Elite* and their coaches hold a responsibility, which is met with vigour, for making such aspirations possible.

The report outlines the need for development relating to monitoring and evaluation in the long term, as well as demonstrating the cost-benefit of the programme for alternative funding partners that will allow the enhancement of an already successful programme. There is a clear rationale for the continuation of this programme, although it is worth noting that an over reliance on a handful of motivated, inspiring and industrious individuals may present problems in regards to sustainability as *Street Elite* grows and moves forward. The authors note in particular that the partnership work is a beacon of best practice that should be continually developed as the programme is enhanced in year two.

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