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Young People's VOICES

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LONDON MARATHON
CHARITABLE TRUST

BACKGROUND

In 2019 StreetGames was awarded a three-year funding award from the London Marathon Charitable Trust.

The funding was used to provide a range of doorstep sport activities for young people living in low-income communities across Liverpool, Merthyr Tydfil and Newcastle upon Tyne. The activities were provided by 15 locally trusted organisations (LTOs) within the StreetGames network¹ and were designed to provide more opportunities for young people to take part in sport/physical activity, increase their activity levels and grow 'activity know-how'.

LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE

A key element of the project involved listening to the young people involved to capture their views and track their experiences over time. To do this, we worked with [Platypus](#); a specialist children, youth and family research agency.

Platypus designed and led digital discussions via an online forum with a sample of young people from across the three areas at four different points during the project (March 2020, December 2020, December 2021 and May 2022) together with on-site visits to sessions to observe activities and capture feedback from the participants, volunteers and project leaders involved.

The on-line discussions enabled young people to share their views using their mobile phones or computers in 'real time' through short videos, voice notes and typed responses, which provided rich insight about their lives, experiences, motivations, attitudes and engagement with sport and physical activity.

In addition, further learning and monitoring data was also captured by StreetGames throughout the project via: surveys with young people and community of learning sessions with LTOs.

This document **shares insight from feedback provided by young people** over the three-year period, together with learning about **how this feedback can be used to help shape sport and physical activity offers**.

¹For more information about this intervention see summary report [here](#)



YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

The online forum research captured feedback from 34 young people aged 14-21 years from across the three geographic areas. Those involved all attended local doorstep sport sessions, either as a participant and/or volunteer and included young people with varied activity levels, interest and confidence in sport.

“

I play table tennis at my local youth club once a week... as well as playing, it also helps my feelings because it takes other things off my mind. [Caitlin]

”

“

I play football 4 days a week....I like it because it keeps me fit and helps keep a good mental state. It also helps me to socialize with people with similar interests. I'd like to do more. [Majid]

”

“

I like to walk to places instead of taking transport, I love to be outdoors as much as possible. [Amir]

”

“

I dance everyday as I find it helps me express how I'm feeling & workout nearly every day because I like the feeling after. I also work which is very active & I quite enjoy the people I work with. [Lucy]

”

“

I cycle to college daily during weekdays and sometimes cycle to work on weekends. I've been doing this for 4 months now. I do this because I admired how my brother cycled to work...so, I decided to try it out and I've been cycling since. [Yentel]

”



PRIORITIES

Over the three-year period, young people were asked to share feedback, about the things they prioritise most in their lives. What the research showed, was how young people consistently centred their priorities around relationships, personal wellbeing and development, with priorities focusing on:



Friends & Family – Young People shared how they are especially grateful for the time they get to spend with them – especially following the Covid-19 Pandemic;



Opportunity – Making the most of hobbies and educational opportunities available, and developing themselves personally and academically;



Community Involvement – Involvement in their community and having a positive impact on their peers through volunteering and school council roles etc; and



Personal Well-being – Within the research, there were many mentions of both mental and physical wellbeing throughout, but gradually more focus on mental wellbeing especially post Pandemic and exam periods etc.

“

In my free time I usually spend time with family and friends, play sports whenever I have the time and watch tv. My family are definitely the most important to me. I am proud of myself, family and my friends. [Megan]

”

“

I like being active and getting into a routine with exercise, it makes me feel good about myself so I'd be happy to be more active I just don't have the time. [Shaina]

”

“

Getting young people's voices heard and expressing our opinions and problems as it's not just adults living in this world. [Molly]

”

INSPIRATION

Young people shared feedback about those that inspire them. Their feedback highlighted that young people typically drew inspiration from family, friends and those from within their communities. Often citing people who have worked hard (sometimes against the odds) to achieve their dreams – with dedication frequently mentioned together with resilience and ambition.

“

My Grandad inspires me as he has been through so much in his life (growing up in the post war era and having my Nan pass away) and still has a smile on his face through it all. [Katie]

”

“

My mum inspires me; she has brought me up on her own whilst working hours that fitted in with me... Supported me in all my decisions and encouraged me to do the things I do. [Harry]

”

“

My youth workers from 'Play In Newcastle' because they push me to do my best and allow me to be the real me. [Maddison]

”



COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Due to the time period the project spanned both pre, during and post the Covid-19 Pandemic - understandably, this had a major impact on how young people were feeling and what they could do. Feedback gathered during 2020-21 showed that the national and local Lockdowns impacted young people in terms of them:



Feeling isolated



Missing friends and family



Missing having a regular routine (school, college or work)



Feeling lonely and scared.

Young people also shared how the Lockdowns had impacted their satisfaction with life and decreased their motivation, reducing their freedom and hindering them from progressing with the things that made them happy and they deemed to be worthwhile.

“

I got a job as soon as the pandemic began, so I was working everyday all through lockdown...this was scary and very overwhelming, people were much different. I missed my friends and family so I started to feel very down. I wasn't able to do my GCSE's so I felt like I didn't deserve my results. [Lucy]

”

“

I am missing being out with my friends, being at Uni full time with no online lessons, I hate being at home most of the time it affects my mental health. [Lewis]

”

Once restrictions were lifted young people shared how they wanted to make the most of their freedom and seize the opportunities they missed during lockdown.

Young people also shared how the Pandemic had impacted on their ability to take part in sport and exercise. At the height of the Pandemic all in-person sessions had to cease and whilst LTOs provided a variety of on-line activities and support which was appreciated, young people shared that undertaking virtual exercise tended not to give them the same experience as 'in person' activities. This was not only because certain sports and activities couldn't be made available on-line, but also because the young people often lacked the space or equipment at home to take part and because the on-line activities simply didn't provide the same contact and opportunity to socialise that their local sessions did.

“

I attended a netball session on a Tuesday night. There have been no virtual sessions, as it is quite difficult, as not many people have the facilities/equipment needed to take part. I miss that social interaction you get when meeting others with the same hobbies as you. [Katie]

”

Some of the young people also shared that they had experienced low mental health during the lockdowns which had affected their confidence and desire to return to groups and socialize. However, once sessions resumed, they were happy to return to a sense of 'normality' and were relieved to have an outlet to release stress and socialize.

“

I've missed being here in person. The coaches were really good in lockdown but it's nice to be back with everyone having fun. [Lewis]

”

SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Throughout the research, young people shared how crucial sport and physical activity was in their lives.

Many of the young people we heard from, shared that they would like to be MORE active than they currently are due to a genuine enjoyment and understanding of the benefits it has.

The key factors which young people shared as barriers to being more active spanned a combination of both personal circumstances and opportunity, including a lack of:



Time – often due to other commitments and pressures such as work or study;



Access – due to there being limited opportunities locally, cost or because the activities available lacked appeal;



Motivation – such as being 'stuck in a rut', having low energy or struggling to settle into a routine; and



Confidence – both in terms of a lack of confidence in their own abilities/skills or a lack of confidence to try new activities.

“

I believe the more active I am, the more things I will achieve. I would love that by the time I am thirty I will look back on what I did and say wow, that's a lot. [El-Dana]

”

“

I'm currently very busy preparing for my mocks, however I would love to be more dominant on my lifting... I didn't have much time or confidence and I believe confidence is a big thing. [Elisha]

”

“

I'd been wanting to get out and do stuff but there's not a lot going on around here so then I started coming here [Hattrick] after school and everyone's really nice and supportive. [Megan]

”

“

"I have lost my previous motivation to exercise/play a sport. [Yentel]

”



SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The young people involved in the research attended activities provided by LTOs across the three areas, which included: regular doorstep sport and Us Girls sessions, holiday activities and neighbourhood festivals – together with opportunities to volunteer and access training/ qualifications.

The feedback shared by the young people highlights how **highly they value** these sessions – with the information below summarising the **key aspects that they deemed important** and that had helped them to **overcome key barriers** to participation.

Removal of Barriers: *Right Time, Place & Price*

Young people shared how they value the ease of access of doorstep sport activities – through activities being: low/no cost, situated within the heart of communities, safe, inclusive and include the provision of equipment and support.

“

Other clubs like football are 30 minutes' drive away, it's good that the youth club is so close otherwise I'd have nowhere to do sport. [Ella]

”

Informal & Relaxed: *Right Style*

Young people also shared how they often feel pressure to achieve and can be **put off by a sense of 'demand' and commitment** that can come with being part of a sports team or feel anxious about trying new sports/activities so they really appreciated having a **space to unwind** and have **fun in a 'no pressure' environment**.

“

Everyone just has fun. There's no pressure to be really good at something, everyone comes to have a good time away from school. [Lewis]

”

“

It's a nice break away from daily stresses. It's a chance to forget about everything and enjoy yourself while being active and healthy too. [Shaina]

”

“

I like coming because there's different things you can do and you don't have to take it seriously. All you do is show up and there's no commitment. [Millie]

”



Varied Offers & Opportunities: *An Attractive Offer*

Young people shared how they **valued opportunities to try new sports and activities** that they might not otherwise consider or be aware of, with no pressure or commitment. Variety within sessions helped to keep enjoyment and interest levels high this, sometimes included provision of non-sporting additions such as food, music, neighbourhood festivals and trips.

“

I would never have thought about playing table tennis, but then when I went to the youth club I decided to try and now I always play when I go! [Millie]

”

“

I started off just playing table tennis but then I started playing volleyball and basketball sometimes. [Aasir]

”

Opportunities to develop skills: *Personal Development*

Some of the young people also shared how they used the sessions as an **opportunity to develop their own leadership skills** and encourage others through volunteering (e.g. helping to lead sessions, set up equipment and promote activities etc). Whilst others shared that participating in the sessions had helped them in **other areas of their life** – such as being more confident or having a more positive and motivated mindset through exposure to new opportunities and people who inspire them.

“

I'd definitely be confident to do sport in the future now like going to community centres. Coming here has made me get used to different surroundings and different people, and really helped boost my confidence. [Megan]

”

“

Coming to the sessions has encouraged me to do sport outside of them. I'm quite good at badminton now and the coaches told me that there are matches against other schools and colleges so I'm going to take part in those in a few weeks. [Tarek]

”

“

It's made me feel less self-conscious about my body appearance as I feel comfortable around the group. [Chloe]

”



Coaches & Leaders: *Right People*

Feedback from young people, highlighted the crucial role that the coaches and leaders play. The relationship with coaches was vital to help young people to initially join in and then to go on to maintain attendance. In particular, we heard how young people valued, that the coaches had set the 'tone and style' by:

- Providing opportunities for young people to take part in sport in safe, relaxed, inclusive spaces which enabled them to explore their interests and identity
- Reframing sport as being fun and relevant by listening to what young people want and need, and encouraged being active in a fun, unpressured way
- Recognising the needs of different young people who had very different levels of fitness and motivation and developing sessions accordingly. Similarly, competitive sport/sessions were also sometimes offered and acted as a big draw for some, especially as confidence increased.

“

My youth workers from 'Play In Newcastle' because they push me to do my best and allow me to be the real me. [Maddison]

”

“

The coaches are just so friendly and supportive and they're a lot of fun. [Shaina]

”



Girls Participation: *Right Young People*

The project included a specific aim to engage and support teenage girls to be more active. To achieve this, LTOs provided a variety of activities, which included both girls only sessions and mixed gender sessions – based on young people's demand and feedback – with positive results.

The coaches and leaders on this project did this through a variety of ways including:

- Providing a space for girls and boys to do sport separately if they felt more comfortable doing so.
- Providing exposure for boys and girls to play sport with each other (as most don't get the opportunity in PE) which can alleviate negative perceptions in the future
- Reframing negative perceptions of sport that some girls said they had from other experiences, by making it fun and relevant to them e.g. playing music during sessions
- Offering support and encouragement for girls and others who felt 'lost' initially
- Tackling the negative beliefs that some girls had about not being good enough compared to boys.

“

I go the girls group because it is a safe place to talk to my friends and have fun. The sessions involve a lot of things - Learning how to cope with things, cooking, art, first-aid training and plenty more. [Maddison]

”

“

It's funny because when I first started playing [football], the boys didn't think I'd be as good as them but now I can beat them! It made me realise I can do it. [Chloe]

”

“

I like playing against the boys. We all get really competitive so it's a lot of fun. [Millie]

”



BENEFITS OF TAKING PART

Feedback from young people highlighted, how they valued the activities for more than just the health benefits – sharing how much they enjoyed the opportunities the sessions provided to socialise, make new friends, have fun, unwind, learn new skills and feel part of the ‘community’.

“

I like that it's about talking to people, meeting new people, and doing the things you enjoy. [Marc]

”

“

It's a nice break away from daily stresses. It's a chance to forget about everything and enjoy yourself while being active and healthy too. [Shaina]

”

“

I've got some friends now who I never knew before, some of them are my best mates now. [?]

”



KEY LEARNING & MESSAGES

The feedback provided by the young people involved in this project, provides really useful insight that can help inform the shaping of activities and sessions. We've set out below 10 key learnings, together with additional sign-posting to further reading, resources and training.

1 Listen to young people's voices

When developing activities, it is really important to give young people the opportunity to share their views and shape sessions – as what's 'right' for one group may not be 'right' for another.

2 Minimising Barriers

The young people we heard from highlighted a number of barriers to participation. Those most commonly mentioned included a lack of: time, access, motivation and confidence, which LTOs were able to overcome through: tailored offers that were local, low cost, informal, fun and friendly. However, what's most important, is to listen to young people rather than make assumptions about what the barriers to participation may be, because whilst there are often commonalities, some of the barriers faced will be very individual.

3 On-line Activities

Feedback from young people we heard from, revealed that whilst on-line activities can be good for supporting general fitness, for many young people they don't provide the same benefits they are looking for, that in-person sessions do, in terms of: providing an opportunity for social interaction, a 'community feel' as well as practicalities like enough physical space and equipment.

4 Promotion & Connections

Most of the young people we heard from found out about sessions via word of mouth, from: friends, parents or trusted adults such as school/college teachers and from people they already knew on social media rather than via more traditional promotion channels. It's therefore vitally important to build connections within local communities with existing organisations and trusted sources to raise awareness and maximise reach.

5 Shaping sessions using priorities

Feedback from the young people we heard from identified that their priorities were consistently centred around relationships, personal wellbeing and development. Well planned sport and physical activity offers can facilitate many of these priorities through sessions that support socialising, bonding and building friendships, enhanced wellbeing and opportunities to develop skills both through participation and through volunteering and community involvement.

6 Variety of offer

Even prior to the Pandemic and Lockdowns, young people shared with us how much they value sessions which provide them with new experiences. What we heard loud and clear from young people in this research, was a desire to make the most of their freedom and seize the opportunities they missed during lockdown; with many young people looking for new experiences and opportunities to develop. Therefore, it's important to consider ways that sessions can facilitate this through opportunities to try different activities, go to different places and meet new people through sport.

7 Tailored Sessions

Many young people are happy to take part in open access, community sports sessions, but there will also be others who may feel more comfortable taking part within specific 'groups'. For example, in a girls only session or for those that may be returning to sport after a break – again this requires listening and responding to need.

8 Coaches & leaders

Play a vital role in supporting young people to be active. Those most effective, typically adopt a young person-centred approach, one which prioritises and responds to the needs of the group. Some of the key skills and attributes, that young people shared with us that they most value in a coach/leader include:

- Having empathy, rapport and understanding and being able to connect with those attending and the local area;
- Making young people feel comfortable and welcome, in a non-pressured and non-hierarchical environment - showing that sport can be fun;
- Providing support and encouragement to help young people build confidence – especially amongst those who are new to sport/ activity; and
- Providing encouragement amongst young people to be active in the future and imparting knowledge, skills, confidence so that they can continue to be active when they choose to move on/away from the local sessions.



9 Supporting Young People's Well-being

For some young people, their mental health and well-being has been negatively impacted by the Pandemic and Lockdowns. It's therefore important to support and up-skill coaches and leaders working in community sessions with the knowledge and skills so that they can support young people with low mental well-being and where necessary, signpost onto further support and services.

10 Positive Role Models & Coaches

Role models play a crucial role in young people's lives - Coaches and leaders as well as other young people who take on leadership and volunteer roles often act as positive role models within community sessions. By modelling pro-social behaviours and providing new experiences and the development of skills beyond sport, such as: communication, leadership, teamwork, and language skills, coaches and volunteers can inspire young people in their wider lives.

THANK YOU

- To the many young people who took part in the research and shared their views and ideas over the three-year period;
- To the 15 LTOs across Newcastle, Liverpool & Merthyr, for providing all the local doorstep sport opportunities for young people;
- To Platypus Research for leading the on-line research that provided a wealth of insight to aid future doorstep sport initiatives; and
- LMCT for the investment and support to make delivery of these activity sessions possible.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about youth insight, doorstep sport and this LMCT funded project see the links below to relevant training & insight documents

Insight

There are a wide range of insight documents and resources on the [Knowledge & Insight](#) section of our website. Of particular relevance are further documents which share [youth voice](#) insight and information about [doorstep sport](#).

Training

There are a wide range of training workshops available which have been designed to support community coaches and volunteers working in low-income communities – see here: [StreetGames Training Academy | StreetGames](#) for an overview. In particular, the following workshops may be of interest:

- [Understanding Young People from Low Socio-Economic Groups | StreetGames](#)
- [Doorstep Sport Induction | StreetGames](#)
- [Youth Mental Health First Aid Overview | StreetGames](#)





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