



PEOPLE'S HEALTH TRUST - ACTIVE COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY



# Centre Spot - Friar Park Sporting Champions

## Introduction

This case study explores how Centre Spot developed, its approach, what it delivered and what was achieved, and forms part of the evaluation of the Active Communities Programme managed by People's Health Trust. The report draws on interviews with the project team and participants and the monitoring information submitted as part of the programme's six monthly review cycle.

## About the project

Centre Spot is based in the Friar Park Estate in West Bromwich, an area experiencing high levels of crime, unemployment and poor educational attainment. Beneficiaries have taken part in training and employability

programmes for the local community since 2008 and have used the sports facilities and mentoring support available.

The centre aims to help young people develop positive and healthy behaviours, by engaging them in sport as a distraction from crime, providing volunteering opportunities and work experience, developing key employability skills and working with young people to develop their confidence and self-esteem. Having developed strong links with the local housing association, youth service and fitness centre, Centre Spot also has access to a team of qualified sports coaches and instructors, locally based staff and volunteers.

The project received £44,620 in funding over two years, reaching the end of its funding period in February

2016. It aimed to use the funding to expand social links and ties in the local area by extending its existing activities. This was done by improving the venues it uses for weekly football and dance sessions, recruiting additional coaches and instructors, paying for qualifications for the participants and making logistical arrangements associated with the award ceremonies.

## Main findings

- ➔ The project exceeded the number of beneficiaries it had planned to engage, working with 72 compared to a planned figure of 50, and achieved a retention rate of 100%.
- ➔ The project has facilitated collective control primarily through the formation of a steering group. This steering group was open to all members and its meetings were attended by project staff, coaches and instructors. Young people attending the meetings were able to formally provide feedback, ask questions or make

suggestions for future activities (such as changing the qualification that participants complete to advance from Play Maker to Sports Leader). As well as this formal structure, participants were able to exercise control on a more focused basis. This has been done by giving them ownership of the activities. The dance participants, for example, were able to collectively decide on which routines to follow and the football participants helped to shape the football league through the same process.

- Project staff, volunteers and beneficiaries felt that the project had helped to boost the local area through giving its beneficiaries improved self confidence, creating better social links and ties and improving the community atmosphere on the Friar Park Estate.

## Who is involved?

The project is managed by Centre Spot's own directors with a project worker based at the Centre Spot offices leading the day-to-day management of the project, including overseeing the staff and volunteers. It has a steering group, formed of local young people and project staff, which meets monthly to plan events and activities, monitor progress and provide feedback to staff and directors. This steering group is overseen by a project worker, who is responsible for ensuring the practical delivery of events and activities. According to project staff, all participants are invited to attend the steering group, which has eight regular attendees and an average attendance of approximately 10 participants per meeting.

The project also involves a sports coach, an assistant coach, a dance instructor and an assistant instructor, all working two hours a week, as well as two paid mentors working once a fortnight. At each weekly session, four local volunteers assist paid staff with the delivery of the activities.



## What opportunities does the project offer?

Young people living on the Friar Park Estate attended weekly football and dance sessions led by qualified coaches and instructors who also live on the estate and were assisted by mentors, including peer mentors who have previously participated in Centre Spot activities.

Over the course of the two year funding period, beneficiaries took part in approximately:

- 100 dance sessions
- 100 football sessions, including 40 league sessions
- 12 steering group meetings
- 10 community performances
- 2 annual celebration and award events

Young people completed the 'Play Maker' (in the first year) and 'Sports Leader' (in the second year) awards. These are day long courses designed to help young people develop leadership and organisational skills,

focusing on communication, team work, confidence and self-esteem.

The project lead also stressed the importance of local input and of the local community exercising collective control to direct the project's activities. This has occurred in three main ways:

Firstly, prior to the start of the project, project staff did research with local community groups such as the housing association, youth service and a local fitness centre. Furthermore, Centre Spot has extensive prior experience of delivering activities for young people, holding both formal and informal discussions with them in the process. These avenues identified a clear interest in local opportunities to get involved in sport. The community therefore shaped the project at its inception through this structured and focused process, providing it with a direction and purpose that was based on its own needs.

Secondly, processes were put in place for the community to be empowered throughout the duration of the project, mainly through the steering group, which was made up of the project's participants. The steering group made important decisions, including those related to the organisation of community events, performances and leagues, highlighting the process of structured and focused collective control that the project has followed. These meetings were attended by coaches, mentors and volunteers and provided the participants with an opportunity to feedback and discuss the activities, as well as to make changes if necessary. Project staff commented that, for example, the change in qualification from 'Play Maker' to 'Sports Leader' after the first year of funding, was made as a

result of feedback from the steering group who felt it was more appropriate.

Beneficiaries were also given the opportunity to have collective control by shaping the activities themselves. Young people attending the dance sessions, for example, worked together to create routines which were then performed locally at small-scale events. Furthermore, young people attending the football sessions worked together to arrange a fortnightly football league, with participants forming teams from around the local area, bringing the community together. Both groups also worked together to arrange an annual awards event. These examples highlight how the project has enabled participants to exercise control by focusing on an end goal and collectively making decisions to achieve it.

Thirdly, the project has involved local people as peer mentors, coaches and instructors. This has been a particularly important aspect of the project. The project lead commented that having members of the local community directly involved and engaged in the project at all levels has encouraged beneficiaries to 'open up' and 'be more engaged':

*"If there's an issue with someone, we know from experience that they will take more on board from their peer group than anyone else."* (Project staff)

Therefore the local community has been at the heart of the project at every level, exercising collective control structurally (through the steering group), informally (by speaking to their peer mentors) and in a focused way (through directing and making decisions on the project's activities).

As well as providing opportunities for collective control, the project offered different ways for young people to meet each other and make new friends, thus improving their social links and ties. As mentioned in the project application form, the project design was intended to encourage a core group of young people, who would not otherwise be involved in community activities, to meet regularly and develop a stronger sense of community on the estate. It was said that this would be felt most greatly by the project's steering group, as well as other community organisations and the wider group of residents, when organising events.

This group element was seen as particularly important by beneficiaries, who commented that nobody gets left out:

*"We all talk to each other. Everything is our decision, not one person's decision. It is teamwork. If someone is timid we all work together and get that person to say what they want."* (Beneficiary)

## What has the project achieved?

In total, 72 young people have taken part in the project's activities. This includes 23 young people taking part in dance activities and 49 taking part in football. The project's 18 month monitoring form reported a 100% retention rate and also noted that 20 young people had achieved the Play Maker award with a further 20 achieving the Sports Leader award the following year. Project staff and beneficiaries felt that this award had given some of the young people a fresh perspective on suitable careers with others gaining a sense of achievement.



Project staff and beneficiaries also commented that participants in the dance sessions had, in particular, taken ownership of the activity, representing another success for the project in achieving collective control in a focused, as well as informal way. They did this by regularly providing feedback and views on the routines and direction of the performances which has created a rich learning environment during the sessions, with younger participants supported by the older ones.

The football league has four regular teams and two participants have had trials at local professional football clubs. Furthermore, the participants organised their own tournament, with the support of coaches. This involved entering their own teams into the event and bringing along friends from outside the area. The tournament was attended by 64 young people, all of whom were invited by project participants. Feedback from the day showed that this was a particularly enjoyable event for the participants.

The project attracted beneficiaries mainly through social media, with the project lead emphasising the importance of Twitter and Facebook in spreading the word. Although some fliers were also handed out, the most common other means of attracting participants was 'word of mouth', with beneficiaries bringing their friends to sessions. Although the project exceeded its target number of engaged young people,

there was a view among beneficiaries that not enough had been done to promote the project locally and that the dance sessions in particular, could have attracted more people.

Nevertheless, staff, volunteers and beneficiaries spoke passionately about the positive impact the project has had on people as well as the local area. Indeed, it was commented by project staff that they were able to meet all of their performance targets.

For beneficiaries, the positives stemmed from two main areas.

Beneficiaries felt that the project had improved their confidence and self esteem. It was commented that they were better able to express themselves, were less shy around strangers and, as a result, felt more empowered to have their say. This resulted in what project staff described as 'raised aspirations':

*"We've shown them that they can take ownership of what they want to do. People have more belief in themselves. What is out there doesn't matter."* (Project staff)

By having this ownership and belief, beneficiaries were able to better control the direction of the project, either by attending the steering group meetings or through informally having conversations with others.

*"When I started, I didn't have confidence around people I don't know. But now I'm used to it. I've danced in front of everyone so it's fine!"* (Beneficiary)

Project staff and beneficiaries spoke of the improved social links and ties that the project has brought. This has manifested itself in the form of friendships. The project lead

commented that, previously, people who lived on the same street would not have known each other. Two years later, the project has built links between families and neighbours which otherwise would not have existed. The prevailing view was that the project had helped to break down barriers, particularly for the younger generation living on the Friar Park Estate.



*"It has created a more community feeling."* (Project staff)

As a result of this confidence and improved social links and ties, project staff and beneficiaries felt the general atmosphere in the area had improved with more friendships, fewer barriers, better self-esteem and more aspiration.

### What has worked well?

➔ **Maintaining engagement:** The project maintained a retention rate of 100% (based on young people attending at least 75% of activities following their first session). This was described by project staff as a particular success:

*"They've enjoyed the atmosphere. They feel like they get on well with everyone. It's become part of their life."* (Project staff)

➔ **Providing volunteering and learning opportunities:** Volunteering has also been a success for the project. Following a call for volunteers in the first year, five young people

immediately put themselves forward (and have continued to volunteer) with another five joining throughout the project lifetime. Fifteen per cent of beneficiaries are therefore also volunteers. A key motivating factor, according to a volunteer involved in football coaching, has been the development of a possible career path. With football a particular passion, the volunteer felt the experience of being involved with football coaching will put him in an advantageous position should he wish to pursue this career in the future. Project staff agreed with this view:

*"We have shown them that volunteering is a way into a career and future progression in sport. You can be good at football and make a career out of it without being a footballer."* (Project staff)

### What are the challenges and how have these been overcome?

➔ **Meeting targets within fundable neighbourhoods:** The biggest challenge for the project, according to project staff, has been the target of having 90% of its participants from within the postcode area of the Friar Park Estate. Although this target was met, it was a particular difficulty as young people wanted to bring their friends from outside the area:





*"With football it was easier to deal with as their friends could come to the league but not to the training sessions. It was harder for dancing but*

*we signposted people to other activities the community centre runs."*  
(Project staff)

### The future

Project staff commented that, as the funding has now come to an end, the challenge in the future will be to maintain some form of activity that will continue to engage young people in the community. Although Centre Spot will, most probably,

have to stop the football training sessions due to a lack of suitable funding opportunities, it will look to apply for new funding to enable the community to continue to take part in dance sessions and the football league.

