

BUILDING COMMUNITY SPORT PARTNERSHIPS: USING SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A PARTNERSHIP TOOL

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Context

Current evidence shows that sport and physical activity (PA) can act as a catalyst in developing sustainable communities, but also shows the numbers of people accessing sport and PA from areas of social disadvantage is falling (SE, 2005). The government's research into sports participation in *Game Plan* (DCMS, 2002) resulted in the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit publishing *Teaming Up* and *Street Games* (NRU, 2004a,b), offering a framework for a new approach: "There is growing evidence that sport can help to deliver neighbourhood renewal outcomes, from improved health and education to reduced crime and anti-social behaviour. These benefits can arise either through physical activity itself, or by using sport as a means of getting people involved in new activities" (NRU, 2004a:4).

Projects and partners

Newcastle City Council developed an initiative called SHARP to change how sport and PA is delivered in its communities, the relationship needed between sports development and other key delivery agencies, and to evaluate the issues arising for a future delivery strategy. Building on a previous successful nationally recognised leisure training scheme funded by £50,000 from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the Head of Community Sport at WestGate Centre for Sport approached the Fund to support a cross-cutting programme to impact on several key targets in the Newcastle Plan. The NRF identified key criteria as:

- A pilot scheme to increase extra-curricular sport & PA in schools in key NRF areas (*target 2 extra hours a week*)
- Raising participation of the whole population by 1% a year (*target 70% moderately active by 2020*)
- Increasing access by local people to local leisure centres in key NRF areas
- Developing training and education opportunities through sport
- Creating a partnership approach to sports and physical activity delivery.

To avoid creating separate 'silo' projects and duplication of resources, a new SHARP Partnership (Sport, Health, Activity, regeneration, Partnership) was formed, and a practical pilot programme specifically targeting young people (8-18 years) in order to secure the £0.5m funding.

Results

SHARP is now comprises 3 citywide sub-partnerships, bringing together people who may not have used sport in the past such as the police, Street wardens, community development and drug/alcohol abuse prevention workers with those in Sport & PA, creating a shared responsibility to *Get people Active*. It was important to use an independent facilitator, Sunderland University. Its practical elements are:

- 1) Sports-specific, using basketball and football
- 2) Training through work-based programmes for schools leavers unlikely to gain employment easily
- 3) StreetGames using multi-sport centres and developing local activities like spokes of a wheel.

Discussion and Implications

The Project is currently still developing, so finite outcomes are not yet measurable but the key desires and principles of the Partnerships are

- the need for sustainability
- shared ownership and shared resources

- moving away from non-traditional and 'private' ethos of centre management
- bringing sport back to the community: "Community sport delivery is more complex and diverse: a range of public, private and voluntary sector providers operate within locally determined structures. The lack of a 'joined up' approach to community delivery risks not achieving the key policy objective of increasing and widening the base of participation" (Carter, 2005:6).

For these new and other similar 'alternative' approaches to delivering sport and PA to succeed, there needs to be a foundation of involvement and ownership by local communities. The initial creation of local commitment is more important than the resourcing of existing activities. This community cohesion provides a successful forum for generating broader ways of generating funds (from policy mainstreaming, grant aid or subsidies), to underpin existing and exciting community-identified initiatives. Partnership development far outweighs any outcomes of the individual practical programmes, and meets the broader overall aims of the renewal agenda, not just those relating to sport and health. Fundamentally, it allows creative opportunities for increased participation and greater use of facilities by those who are less likely to access them. "'Local' sports provision is a major factor in encouraging certain social groups, including the long-term unemployed and other excluded groups, to participate"(Carter, 2005:7).

This piece of work not only looks to reduce the barriers, real or perceived, concerned with access to facilities and sports based programmes but looks to create a much greater interaction between agencies who have stronger and wider experience in working with hard-to-reach communities and build on their experience to bring sport to the heart of the renewal agenda.

References

- Dept of Media, Culture & Sport (2002) *Game Plan* London: DCMS
 Lord Patrick Carter (2005) *Review of national sport effort and resources* London: Dept of Media Culture & Sport
 Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004a) *Teaming up* London: Home Office
 Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004b) *Street Games* London: Home Office

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