

CAN SPORT ACTION ZONES FACILITATE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF UK GOVERNMENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TARGETS?

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Context

The UK Government has established a vision 'to increase significantly levels of sport and physical activity, particularly among disadvantaged groups.' (DCMS/Strategy Unit Report, 2002, p80). Believing that sport and physical activity have a major role to play in health promotion (Department of Health, 2004), educational attainment, diminished crime and greater social inclusion, the Government have set a target for 70% of the population to be reasonably active by 2020 (DCMS/Strategy Unit Report, 2002). Reasonably active has been classified as 30 minutes of physical activity, at least 5 times a week (DCMS/Strategy Unit Report, 2002). Although increased participation is required across the whole population to address the Government's aim to encourage mass participation in physical activity and sport, interventions have been focused on the most economically disadvantaged groups.

Sport Action Zones (SAZ) are one such intervention. SAZ's were announced in the Sport England Lottery Strategy in 1999 as part of the Government agenda to minimise sport and physical activity inequalities across areas of high social and economic deprivation within the UK (Sport England, 2003). Their intention is to raise aspirations and empower local communities to participate in sport on their terms, thereby adopting a 'bottom-up' approach. Significantly, such an initiative endorses a new way of working with its focus on people rather than facilities (Sport England, 2003).

This presentation reports on the monitoring and evaluation of the Wear Valley SAZ, highlighting both the benefits and problems faced by local people in terms of their participation in physical activity. The discussion that follows demonstrates how the notions of empowerment, sustainability, attitude and education interlink and are fundamental to the success of all Sport Action Zones. Each of these issues requires further deliberation if the zones are going to achieve and exceed the extent of success initially anticipated. However, it can be concluded that, such initiatives, despite their identified problems, contribute greatly to the wider government agenda of reducing the effects of poverty and deprivation (Sport England, 1999). Consequently, the mainstreaming of these projects is essential for the sustainability of current recreational activities and effective use of government spending to enhance physical activity.

Project/Partners

Sport Action Zone Partnership members are as follows: Bishop Auckland College, Wear Valley District Council, University of Durham, Dales Primary Care Trust, Groundwork West Durham, Age Concern, Durham County Council, Durham Sport, Wear Valley and Teesdale Learning Partnership, Federation Disability Sport, Sure Start, 2D (Wear Valley and Teesdale CVS), Community Safety Partnership, Sport England, North East Region. This partnership highlights the diversity of statutory and non-statutory groups working together effectively to facilitate the development of the Wear Valley Sport Action Zone. SAZ projects include Walking the Way to Health, Community Physical Activity Co-ordinators, Positive Futures, and Modern Apprentices.

Results

Walking the Way to Health:

- 212 participants in first 8 months of the project
- Two thirds of participants were female
- 16-24 year olds accounted for the least number of participants
- 76% of Wear Walking for Health walk participants were aged 45+
- 2% of Wear Walking for Health walk participants took part in all 6 walks
- 42% of Wear Walking for Health walk participants took part in just 1 walk
- 26% claimed to be active for minimum of 30 minutes more than 3 times a week
- Almost double the amount of intended volunteers (n=22)

- 49.8% of participants live in an area of deprivation.

Community Physical Activity Co-ordinators:

- 12,597 visits recorded in the first 10 months of the project
- 79% male participants
- 63% reside in an area of deprivation
- Majority of participants aged 12 to 15 years.

Positive Futures:

- 112 participants within the first 5 months of the project
- Reduction in fear of crime
- Reduction in complaints of anti-social behaviour
- Residents believed youth disaffection was consequence of lack of leisure provision
- Young people wished to participate in more physical activities
- Lack of clear exit routes.

Modern Apprentices:

- Qualifications achieved by apprentices including:
 - Level 2 sport and recreation
 - Technical certificate
 - Key skills
 - RLSS pool lifeguard
 - OCR level gym instructor
 - Personal safety
 - Child protection workshop
 - Football level 1
 - Customer Relations level 2
 - First aid
- 5 of the 6 apprentices secured contracts within the leisure industry
- 1 apprentice chose to utilise their business administration skills.

Discussion/Implications

The multifaceted nature of the initiative allows for the evaluation to identify both generic and specific issues pertinent to the various projects which the SAZ houses. However, for the purpose of this presentation the focus shall be on the former set of issues. Initial analysis of the data reveals 4 main categories of generic issue across the Projects. These are: empowerment, sustainability, attitude, and education.

References

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