

FOOTBALL IN THE COMMUNITY: A COLLABORATIVE VENTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Football in the community programmes have been identified as organisations that can attend to the development of a range of social issues (Watson, 2000). More recently, The Football Foundation (2006) identified that the relationship between football and its communities had become more obscure and challenging. Specifically, the report identified a need for a more coherent strategic framework to inform English football's approach to community engagement. This paper outlines the development of a formal collaboration between Everton Football in the Community (EitC), Greggs plc and the Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences at Liverpool John Moores University.

METHODS

The data presented in the following paper is part of a wider collaborative canvas that forms part of an action research protocol (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). In this sense, a detailed reconnaissance phase embraced a range of primary and secondary research sources over a protracted period of approximately 2 years including a range of observations, field notes, formal and informal meetings, informal semi-structured interviews and more formalised interview protocols. Material is presented in a way that adequately captures the evolving nature of the collaboration and identifies the emergence of subsequent evaluative strategies.

RESULTS

Everton in the Community is Everton Football Club's community department. EitC has operated as a financially independent, registered charitable company since the 1st of June 2004. In this regard, EitC is an 'outward facing' independent community organisation which has both structural and financial independence from the football club. EitC's predominant community work embraces school based development activities, disability awareness and empowerment, social inclusion activities and women and girls development. It appears that Greggs plc are committed to their social responsibility in giving something back to the community. Specifically, funding by Greggs plc has enabled the formation of a strategic alliance (i.e., Greggs plc., EitC and LJMU Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences) in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the EitC community coaching programme in developing children's level of engagement in, and perception towards, physical activity and associated lifestyle balance. Further to this a range of collaborative initiatives and funding opportunities have subsequently emerged.

DISCUSSION

EitC were the first English Premiership football club to be awarded the prestigious 'Community Mark' national standard from Business in the Community (patron HRH Prince of Wales). There is poor physical health within

the region and little evidence of real behavioural change. Community football projects have been seen as a possible vehicle to encourage changes in physical activity levels and behaviours of the community. The collaborative partnership enables an evaluation of the current aspiration and practice of EitC by exploring the presence of actual lifestyle and/or behavioural change in young children. In this regard, the strategic alliance enables for an evaluation of the effectiveness of football community schemes, a better understanding of ‘on the ground’ community engagement and offers evidence of tangible social responsibility for all partners.

REFERENCES

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