

Knowing the score

Positive Futures Case Study Research: Final Report

For the Home Office - November 2006

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everybody who has contributed to this research project. It would not have been possible without their time, support, thoughts, energy and suggestions.

In particular we would like to thank the Crime and Drug Strategy Directorate at the Home Office for funding the research, and its staff (past and present) for providing invaluable support. Special mention must be made of Jenny Lyon, Alan Jones, Marcello Ramella and Steve Tippell. However, the biggest thanks are reserved for Neil Watson who in his time as National Director of the programme (and subsequently) has shown unequivocal enthusiasm for the project and unstinting engagement with the research team.

In the final year of the research, we have worked closely with the Positive Futures management team at Crime Concern. In particular we would like to thank Gary Stannett, Bronwen Bew, Jane Edmonds, Richard Leahy, Suzy Mason and Ian Yates for their interest and support, and for their constant willingness to discuss the research in the context of future policy and practice.

Over the course of the research period, a number of other researchers also contributed to various aspects of the work and so thanks go to Davies Banda, Bob Muir, Alex Robertson, Chris Stone and Jane Took.

Final and special mention must be made of the Positive Futures projects which supported the research as case studies. These were North Liverpool and Sefton (in the North West), Keighley, Calderdale and, for a limited period, Leeds (in Yorkshire) and Wandsworth and Southwark (in London). The projects' staff, volunteers and participants all provided excellent access and support and in many cases inspired our vision of how sport-based community development projects should be organised and delivered.

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Findings and Recommendations

This section contains a summary of the overall findings and key recommendations from the case study research. Detailed information on the set up, achievements and developments of Positive Futures are contained in our Interim Reports¹, as well as other programme documents.

• Strategy

The most successful sport-related programmes and projects are those which understand what is possible and clearly articulate and implement what they are trying to achieve. Resources should not be allocated to projects which make unqualified claims relating to their capacity to impact upon specific social outcomes.

At a project level, it is vital that project managers maintain the integrity of the Positive Futures ethos and approach, even where they are involved in other types of work.

• Sport and other activities

We have found that whilst sport does have social value this can only be fully realised within a social and personal developmental approach. This finding needs to be acknowledged nationally and locally by partners, funders, government and Positive Futures.

Since the value of any activity lies primarily in its ability to engage, those projects which have embraced a range of sporting and non-sporting activities in their work have had more success than those relying on sport alone.

• Delivery agencies

Organisations identified in this report as most suited to leading this type of work may not be best equipped to respond to open application processes. Positive Futures and related programmes should therefore be proactive in identifying agencies, supporting them in the funding process and allocating resources.

The allocation of resources should enable and 'set free' more radical, 'risk' taking and innovative organisations to deliver work with marginalised young people. Where statutory organisations are involved they are most likely to be effective where they create structures which allow these elements of work to 'step outside' and move beyond their normal institutional frameworks.

• Staff and delivery

The most effective Positive Futures projects employ management teams with appropriate frontline experience of grassroots youth work which can enable the development of project based progression among participants, staff and delivery partners. Management teams with this experience tend to have a clearer understanding of the contrasting nature of diversionary and developmental work and how these different approaches can both compete with and complement one another.

Successful projects have emphasised the need for delivery staff to prioritise outreach, rather than formal referral-based engagement approaches. This should be encouraged to better enable developmental work based on mutual respect and trust to emerge, rather than authoritarian diversionary styles of delivery.

• Monitoring and Evaluation

Our research highlights the limitations of fixed, inflexible and exclusively quantitative assessments of project and programme performance.

For it to be effective, monitoring, evaluation and research needs to be integral to project work and developmental in practice, embracing qualitative and quantitative methods which give a more complete picture of the ways in which *projects* influence participants' engagement and development.

- **Developing and broadening the reach of the Positive Futures approach**

We recognise the significant achievements of Positive Futures to date, and acknowledge the recent changes in national management of the programme. Notwithstanding these successes, in order to develop and broaden the application of the Positive Futures approach further, we recommend the identification of an intermediate agency or network which can be located ‘between’ the national programme and delivery agencies at the regional level. This network should work closely with both Positive Futures projects, as well as supporting other projects and programmes that seek similar outcomes. Staffed by experienced managers it should be able to:

- identify appropriate lead organisations and individuals that will embrace the Positive Futures ethos
- build up and identify local networks of support and resources
- identify and disseminate good practice from Positive Futures and elsewhere
- communicate and help develop a ‘Positive Futures’ approach among projects.

Ideally such an agency would consist of a co-ordinated national network of leading ‘model’ practitioners who have come to embody the ‘Positive Futures approach’. We should emphasise that such a network would need to grow in a progressive developmental way so that local models of working can be supported rather than innovation being undermined by the imposition of uniform approaches from on high. Whilst working with national agencies to ensure a fit with the latest national policy developments and standards, the network would engage with local projects to capture and develop the more creative work emerging at that level through demonstration, exchange and project mentoring.

We are convinced such a network would make a powerful contribution to the capacity to deliver the kinds of positive progression we describe in this report.



Part One: Marking out the pitch

1.1 Introduction

Launched in 2000, Positive Futures is a national sports and activity based social inclusion programme, funded by the Home Office Crime and Drug Strategy Directorate and now managed on its behalf by Crime Concern. Currently operating through over 100 local projects across England and Wales, it aims to support young people living in some of the most socially and economically deprived communities in the country by helping them to find routes back into education, volunteering and employment.

In contrast to many other sports-based social policy initiatives Positive Futures is clear in its assertion that it is not a 'diversionary' or even a sports development programme as traditionally understood and practiced. Rather, it describes itself as a 'relationship strategy' which seeks to engage with young people through an ability to teach or help them learn something they think is worthwhile. Working in neighbourhoods identified as amongst the 20% most deprived in the country², it seeks to use sport and other activities as a basis for establishing relationships with young people who have otherwise become alienated and distanced from mainstream social policy agencies and 'authority' figures. Central to this approach is a commitment to a flexible, organic local development strategy and the role of community workers in establishing a platform of trust. Working from this position the intention is that young people will talk to responsible adults about issues affecting their lives. Through these means, it is hoped that Positive Futures will:

'have a positive influence on participants' drug use, physical activity and offending behaviour by widening horizons and access to lifestyle, educational and employment opportunities within a supportive and culturally familiar environment'.³

These aims were articulated in the strategy document *Cul-de-sacs and gateways* which was published after the roll out of the first two waves of Positive Futures projects in June 2003. This document sought to generate a clearer understanding of 'the Positive Futures approach' by outlining the programme's guiding principles and objectives for the three year period to March 2006. As such, this document provides a benchmark against which to assess the achievements of the programme given that the plans for the case study research were developed at a similar time and with this purpose in mind.

From April 2004, following a Home Office tendering exercise, a research team led by staff from the Sports Industries Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University, in partnership with the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture at Manchester Metropolitan University and the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths College, was invited to conduct a two year programme of detailed qualitative research. The research itself focused on six⁴ case study projects located in Yorkshire, Merseyside and London which reflected the diversity of organisational and delivery cultures within the wider Positive Futures programme. This report outlines the key findings from that research and principal recommendations.

² As defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

³ Home Office (2003) *Cul-de-sacs and gateways: Understanding the Positive Futures Approach*, London: Home Office.

⁴ A seventh case study was added later but was not followed for the full duration of the research period due to funding and staff changes.



1.2 Research methodology

The decision to commission the study represented an important landmark, both for the sport based social policy sector and for the future of social policy research more generally. One of the things that has marked Positive Futures out from other sport based social inclusion initiatives is its commitment to the development of a comprehensive programme of research, monitoring and evaluation that combines both quantitative and qualitative assessments. This was borne of an early recognition of the failure of a succession of similar programmes to demonstrate their achievements or provide definitive evidence of a direct causal relationship between involvement in sports and specific social outcomes⁵.

Part of the reason for this failure is precisely because other initiatives have too often focused on trying to establish a direct causal relationship between involvement in sport and the social policy concerns of the day. Attempts at proving such direct 'outputs' are inevitably problematic and the shortcomings of this approach are being recognised increasingly across academic, practitioner and policy-making circles. At best, this method can produce a numeric record of, for

example, how many participants have not been arrested over a given period of time. However, the incomplete nature of this 'data' renders its usefulness limited. Such statistics are notoriously unreliable as, in the case of arrest figures, they ignore unreported crimes whilst the 'fact' that somebody has not been *arrested* gives no indication as to whether they have actually been involved in crime or not. Furthermore, any evidence of non involvement in crime could never be directly attributed to the impact of a specific programme such as Positive Futures.

In this sense, successive attempts to establish a relationship between sport and singular 'outcomes' can be seen as a rather crass effort to bang square pegs into round holes. Whilst politically expedient, this approach ultimately represents a staged attempt to validate the benefits of sporting programmes rather than providing a more robust and complete account of what is actually involved in the process. As such, instead of focusing on sport itself, or any particular key outcomes indicator, the Positive Futures case study research has been concerned to gain a more complete picture of the ways in which *projects* (rather than sports or other activities) influence participants' attitudes, engagement, interests, education, employment, peer groups and relationships. Furthermore, the programme's commitment to this research process is informed

⁵ See Long, J. & Sanderson, I. (2001) The social benefits of sport: where's the proof?, in C. Gratton & I. Henry (eds) *Sport in the City: the role of sport in economic and social regeneration*, London: Routledge and Collins, M. (2002) *Sport and Social Exclusion*, London: Routledge.

not only by a determination to generate evidence of projects' achievements but also by its desire to identify ways of learning from the diverse range of agencies, staff and contexts in which the work is delivered.

This represents an important step-change. It breaks with the more common reliance upon the simple reporting of monitoring statistics, but also goes beyond the more sophisticated attempts to quantify social interactions associated with social capital perspectives⁶. What these quantitative approaches represent is a search for a certainty and finality which is absent from the lives of the young people associated with Positive Futures. **Whilst most policy makers, politicians and media agencies may feel they benefit from clear, uncomplicated and quantifiable assessments of programme achievements, such approaches do not provide a full picture.**

If Positive Futures is a 'relationship' strategy, then the success of the relationships it creates, just like our own private personal relations, cannot be 'measured' in a finite, quantifiable sense. Situations change rapidly due to myriad factors which extend beyond any pre-determined lists of 'variables'. In this context, the Home Office and Positive Futures were prepared to recognise the wastefulness of applying resources to measuring the point-in-time correspondence between programme activities and fixed 'outcomes'. Instead the programme chose to adopt a longitudinal approach which would seek to capture a sense of participant and project 'development' over time.

In pursuing this objective the research team adopted a longterm, Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. This approach seeks to engage those at the heart of any research process in the design, analysis and use of findings and leads to the development of flexible, locally-appropriate methods of enquiry rather than externally defined, fixed methods of assessment. The fundamental principle which guided our research was to ensure that the voices of the young participants, local residents and involved professionals were central to the study.

Within this broad framework, and in keeping with recent research into the social impact of the arts⁷, we were willing to adapt the methods we used and to draw upon a range of techniques depending on the groups with whom we were working, once we had 'a feel' for what might be most appropriate. Our participation ranged from the full and active (e.g. playing as part of a team in a series of football matches), through the provision of assistance (helping to carry kit and setting up equipment), to non-participant observation. It also involved the use of research techniques which directly involved participants in the generation of research 'findings' through the use of cameras, videos and a range of mapping tools. In this context, whilst the researchers' roles were sometimes misunderstood by staff and young people, through their sustained attendance and organisation of activities, they achieved their goal and became a trusted 'part of the set up', with dividing lines between members of 'staff' and 'researchers' eventually blurring⁸.

Furthermore, rather than presenting a final and complete set of 'findings' at the end of the research period, the research team, national management and indeed some of the projects, have been keen to use learning from the study to inform practice and future direction. In addition to the day-to-day contact between researchers and project staff, local reporting procedures were established and a series of interim national, regional and project reports produced as part of a reciprocal process of feedback. The three detailed interim national reports each picked up a key theme rather than focusing on the more conventional periodic reporting of progress.

6 See Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, New York: Simon & Schuster and Blackshaw, T. & Long, J. (2005) What's the Big Idea? A critical exploration of the concept of social capital and its incorporation into leisure policy discourse, *Leisure Studies*, 24 (3) 239-258.

7 See Coalter, F. (2001) *Realising the potential of cultural services: the case for the arts*, London: Local Government Association.

8 A full discussion of the research approach and specific methods of enquiry employed can be found in the three interim case study research reports, which preceded this final report, available at www.substance.coop whilst an audit of research activity is presented in Appendix 1.

'Getting to know you': Engagement and relationship building. This first interim report introduced the case study projects and set out a sense of the current picture against which any progress might be assessed. The report also considered the relationship between project activities and 'the Positive Futures approach'. In particular a focus was placed upon investigating:

- how participants are targeted
- how local geographical, demographic and cultural contours are navigated
- the style and delivery of project activities
- projects' appeal to particular target groups
- the characteristics and approach of project staff.

'In the boot room': Organisational contexts and partnerships. This second interim report was concerned with the supply lines, channels of communication, management structures, partnerships and cultures of operation which both enable and inhibit the achievement of Positive Futures' programme objectives. In particular a focus was placed upon:

- the characteristics of appropriate lead agencies
- the nature of strong effective local partnerships
- the skills and training needs of the Positive Futures workforce
- the need for a central monitoring and evaluation framework.

'Going the distance': Impact, journeys and distance travelled. This third interim report was more explicitly concerned with the impact of Positive Futures through the duration of the study. This report presents an alternative framework for the assessment of programme impacts involving:

- a critical review of existing evaluative frameworks in this sector
- a sense of 'best practice' and the story of what it is to be involved with Positive Futures and the challenges the work presents
- a fresh consideration of progression and programme achievement
- an attempt to draw out what is distinct about the Positive Futures programme.

In contrast to these interim reports, this final report is not designed to provide detailed research data on the case study projects. Rather, it will draw out the key themes which have informed the research team's conclusions about both the contribution of Positive Futures and the lessons which will help to establish a new benchmark for sport and activity based social inclusion programmes.



Part Two: Visions of Positive Futures

Since Positive Futures has grown through various phases of development, with contrasting priorities and management styles, this has undoubtedly influenced how the programme has been shaped at individual projects. Launched in 2000 as a largely experimental programme, it was only with the roll out of a third wave of projects, tied to a coherent strategic framework, that a clearly discernable Positive Futures vision began to emerge.

This vision, articulated within the strategy document *Cul-de-sacs and gateways*, was in some ways built up around the distinction between a 'diversionary' approach and a 'developmental' Positive Futures approach which might be characterised in the following terms.

Diversionsary approach	Developmental approach
Providing alternative 'beneficial' activity to anti-social behaviour, substance misuse etc.	Using activity as a gateway to ongoing personal development
Fixed outcomes as targets (e.g. reduction in crime figures)	Open ended outcomes (e.g. the 'distance travelled' of participants)
Mass participation as an indicator of success	Quality of engagement as an indicator of success
Belief in the intrinsic value of the activity itself (e.g. sport, physical activity)	Focus on the value of wider personal development which might be facilitated by the use of activity rather than a belief in the activity's intrinsic value
Short or fixed term delivery	Ongoing, open ended delivery
Structured schemes of work or programs of coaching	Flexible, organic, local development and readily adaptable activities
Authoritarian, based on discipline	Mutual respect, based on trust
Doing something program leaders think is worthwhile	Doing something the young person thinks is worthwhile

From Diversion to Engagement

During the summer of 2005 two Activity Development Workers at one of the case study projects had six weeks of intensive contact with a core group of young people from the area which sat within a wider period of engagement commencing the previous February. Following the school holidays many of the young people continued to attend open-access or 'sit-off' sessions. One sixteen year old girl, 'Allie', described her engagement with the project and how it had developed out of the intensive summer programme:

"I started (dancing) last year before the summer... We started then going to the gym with Lucy on a Tuesday and then she said she had a summer group on and asked us if we wanted to be involved."

Although Allie would like to have continued the intensive involvement that she enjoyed over the summer, it was this which underpinned her ongoing commitment to the work. Her participation began with the open access dance classes, then gym sessions, then an intensive Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) summer programme and now her participation in the 'girls evenings' is less formal. The girls and young women who have moved down this route do not distinguish between PAYP and Positive Futures and viewed their summer programme as part of the wider 'Spiced-up-Sport' scheme of work.

Within this schematic, the community development principles of Positive Futures are implicitly represented as having more value and 'depth' than the short-term control imperatives of diversionary work. However, such distinctions are themselves inherently problematic since where good youth work is practiced there will usually be elements of *both* diversionary and developmental work. Nearly all engagement work with young people could be regarded in the first instance as diversionary in that during its time of operation it offers an activity that may be a diversion from other forms of behaviour. However, building on this work, it becomes possible to layer a developmental Positive Futures approach over a diversionary approach as illustrated in *From Diversion to Engagement*.

However this distinction between diversionary and developmental work is sometimes merely a reflection of language or rhetoric rather than substance. At one of our case study projects, which was originally selected because of its apparently innovative and participant-focused approach, there was an occasional, but significant, contradiction in terms of the way the lead agency viewed and portrayed their work. Whilst application packs for vacancies at the project described the work as 'diversionary', literature sent to agencies promoting the project more clearly emphasised the Positive Futures ethos. At another project, whilst

one annual report referred to Positive Futures as diversionary, a more recent one portrays it as a social inclusion project. This particular lead agency has however, not so much struggled to come to terms with how Positive Futures might be different from other more diversionary programmes. It has simply never attempted to do so, viewing its Positive Futures work as just another correctional youth justice programme.

At the project level then there remains a lack of consistency, with a variety of interpretations of the work being apparent amongst our case studies. It would appear that the more 'organic', open access and outreach approaches adopted at some of the programme's flagship projects have been harder to replicate in other contexts where staff have been more constrained by the organisational cultures in which they work or where strategic messages have failed to penetrate.

As such, as we suggested in our third interim report, *Going the Distance*, we are drawn to the ways in which Hylton and Totten⁹ have invoked Raymond Williams¹⁰ work in relation to community sports practice. According to Williams, at any given moment within a social formation, there is a 'dominant' culture, an 'emergent' culture, and one that has past, but still leaves its 'residual' marks on the current forms of culture.

9 Hylton, K. & Totten, M. (2001) 'Community Sports Development', in Hylton, K., Bramham, P., Jackson, D. & Nesti, M. (Eds.) *Sports Development: Policy, Process and Practice*, London: Routledge.

10 Williams, R. (1977) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Looking at the field of community sports practice, within this framework it is possible to distinguish between:

- a 'dominant' approach characterised by local authority sports development perspectives
- a 'residual' approach, the legacy of which derives from the Victorian Rational Recreation and Muscular Christianity movements but which is now reflected in diversionary 'social control' perspectives
- an emergent approach associated with the social inclusion and community development perspective previously associated with the 'Action Sport' model and now espoused by Positive Futures.

A new taxonomy of community sport practice

Category	Approach	Characteristics
Dominant	Sports development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief in sport for sports sake Activity driven Focus on development of mass participation Highly structured/standardised 'Expert' driven Fixed-term national/regional programmes Institutional
Residual	Social control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief in ability of sport to deliver social outcomes Highly targeted Criminal justice agency led Focused on the control and management of disruptive behaviour Disciplinarian approaches and values
Emergent	Social inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief in addressing social disadvantage Personal and social development approach Flexible, outreach approaches Broader, non-sports, base of activities Long-term participant focused work Community based and led

Of course the whole point of Williams' work is that these cultural influences are not distinct and separate. Instead, the dominant, residual and emergent forces overlap; none having a final authority. In this sense, the categories cannot be applied to specific programmes or periods in the way that Hylton and Totten have suggested. Therefore, although we are inclined towards representing the social inclusion perspective of Positive Futures as an emergent influence which is increasingly likely to assume a dominant position within the field of community sport practice, this cannot be claimed in any complete and uniform sense. Rather, it is possible within the Positive Futures programme itself to identify a similar range of broad influences which may help to determine its future direction and, in turn, community sports practice more generally.

Within Positive Futures, based upon the original designation of the programme rather than the models of practice that have developed from it, it is the 'crime reduction' approach which might initially have been regarded as the 'dominant' category. However, as the programme has developed it has become clear that it is not possible to make direct connections between

the impact of sport-based social interventions such as Positive Futures and reductions in crime or substance misuse. As such, we welcome the finding that from our observations it is clear that, within Positive Futures at least, the social inclusion or community development approach is the emergent and increasingly dominant influence.

It is those projects operating from this perspective that have most clearly and un-self-consciously demonstrated their success in retaining young people's engagement, thereby contributing to their personal development and impacting upon their wider patterns of behaviour. They are able to do so through their acceptance that the journeys young people make will typically be not only complex but rhizomatic¹¹, or meandering and non-linear, rather than being rooted in the orderly social conditions more conventionally associated with the category 'youth'.



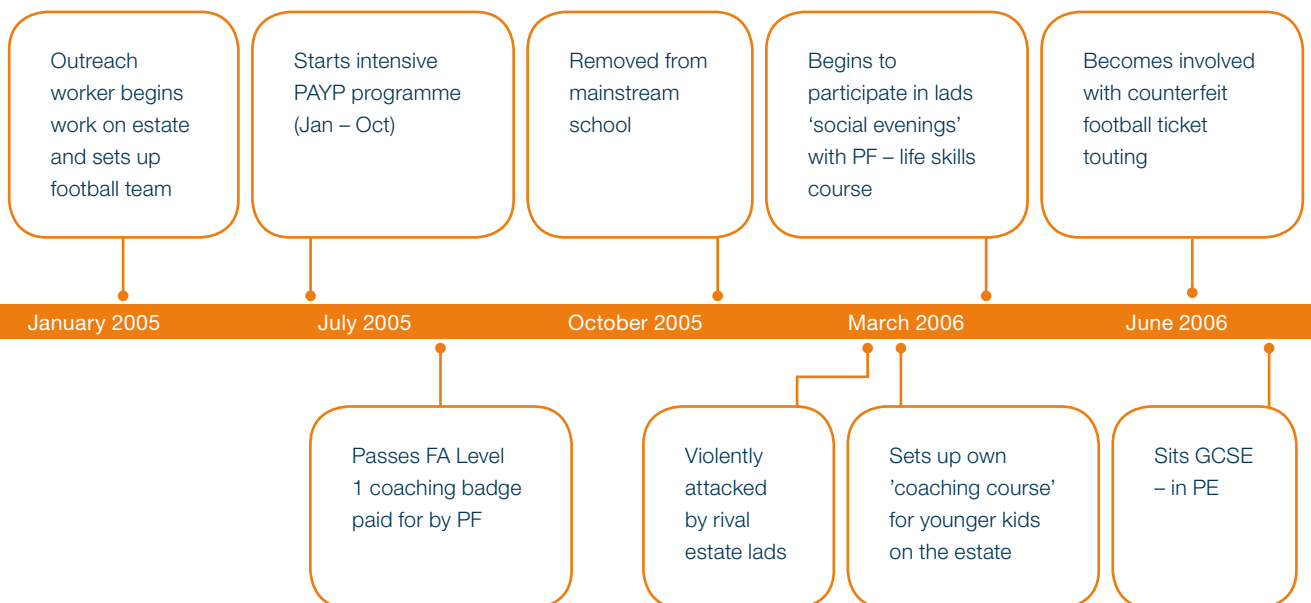
¹¹ The metaphor of the rhizome, which is a term taken from botany to describe meandering under ground growth of roots, is ideal for describing and understanding young lives.

Participants are likely then to engage, drift off and then perhaps re-engage. They do not necessarily follow prescribed routes, and, therefore, adaptability in working with them and longevity in trying to analyse or chart any progress is vital. It is often only with hindsight that real impacts are revealed, and the multifarious routes become apparent, complete with dead ends, bridges, blind alleys, and sudden gateways. As Chris' story illustrates in *The Apprentice*¹², 'progress' is often complex and apparently contradictory. Since his involvement in the project he has engaged well, earned

new qualifications and taken on community leadership roles. Alongside this 'progress', he has been excluded from school and become involved in violent inter-estate conflict and the counterfeit ticket trade. As such, he can be viewed through many different lenses which might offer up rather different conclusions as to the kind of young man he is and his potential. Nevertheless, within this range of perspectives it is clear that Positive Futures has provided a stabilising and purposeful influence.

The Apprentice

Chris has been with Positive Futures for two years now. Initially engaged on his estate by an outreach worker, he is a well mannered and friendly young man who has an excellent relationship with the project team. It is not unusual to see him just 'hanging-out' in the office. Through his involvement with the project his confidence has grown and his entrepreneurialism flourished. On the down side, this has led to his involvement in selling counterfeit football match tickets but at the same time, following the award of coaching qualifications, he has now established his own 'mini Positive Futures' programme of work with young 'lads' on his estate and seems determined to carve out a continuing role with the project.





In this sense, it could be argued that Positive Futures projects can engage young people in high quality relationship building work and record developmental progressions whilst flashpoint incidents out of the realm of projects' influence continue to occur. This type of fractured and inconsistent progression 'story' should not be seen as a 'failure' but rather as the inevitable context in which work with participants occurs. In such circumstances the continued involvement of participants throughout periods of disruption represents a success in and of itself.

Previous studies and commentaries within the field have struggled with this complexity, and developed either an ideologically informed critique of sports based initiatives as capitalist social control mechanisms¹³ or a more simplistic celebration of sport's assumed social worth¹⁴. From our observations it is clear that both the direction in which Positive Futures projects are moving, and the impacts they are having, cannot be evaluated in such straightforward ways. When considered in terms of its role as a personal and social development programme, there are no fixed outcomes to be pursued. Rather, the focus on widening the horizons and aspirations of young people - and the associated evaluatory tools introduced to assess programme achievements - relates to a desire

to help participants achieve a sense of personal autonomy. This sense of autonomy must be regarded as the antithesis of social control, but does not lend itself to a simple celebration of sport's social worth.

Indeed, it is perhaps one of Positive Futures' greatest strengths that it does not make grand claims about its capacity to transform the social and economic conditions which contribute to the social problems of the areas in which projects operate. Rather, **where projects are at their most effective, they take on the role of the 'cultural intermediary'**¹⁵, opening access to social worlds and opportunities which are not currently accessible to the young people with whom they work, in order that those young people are in a stronger position to make positive life choices from a wider range of options. As young people become empowered through such processes we have found evidence of how this can contribute to a growing influence over wider structural factors. Indeed, during the lifetime of our research one of the case study projects was transformed from being a simple provider of sport-based social inclusion schemes into a conduit for funding streams into the area for a variety of other social regenerative purposes.

¹³ See Hargreaves, J. (1986) *Sport, Power and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Clarke, J. & Critcher C. (1985), *The Devil Makes Work: Leisure in Capitalist Britain*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press; and Rigauer, B. (1969) *Sport und Arbeit. Soziologische Zusammenhänge und ideologische Implikationen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp (*Sport and Work*, trans. by A. Guttmann, New York, 1981, Columbia University Press).

¹⁴ See, for example, Labour Party (1997) *Labour's Sporting Nation*, London: The Labour Party.

¹⁵ See our first interim report 'Getting to know you': *Engagement and relationship building*, www.substance.coop

Part Three: The role of sport

- In search of the sacred cow

Within a range of populist and political discourses, 'sports' are regarded as wholesome pursuits for young people to be involved in, activities which are conferred with a whole series of positive attributes with the power to 'cure' the social ills facing society. Indeed, such perspectives follow in the footsteps of Victorian attempts to influence attitudes within Britain's public schools and to service the needs of the 'Empire' through the concept of 'Muscular Christianity'. A perspective which advocated the moral value of sports and games and set the tone for the missionary zeal with which 'modern' sports were developed over the course of the following century¹⁶. More pertinently, during this period, sports were argued to have played 'a major part... in the creation of a healthy, moral and orderly workforce' and in shaping the values and behaviour of working class youth¹⁷.

It is this model which has since been revisited with the emergence of 'third way' politics and concerns about the erosion of social and civic engagement¹⁸. Nostalgic evocations of sport have emerged in the context of the 'respectable fears'¹⁹ which associate a perceived moral decline with a loss of discipline and direction amongst contemporary youth. In this context, sport has been held up as the embodiment of a social tradition which values discipline and personal responsibility. Equally it has been seen as a symbol of the identifications and processes of connection and belonging associated with 'community', itself the focus of renewed interest amongst academics, politicians and policy makers. 'Community', and by extension the notion of 'community sport', has then increasingly been wheeled out as both a lament to a more certain past and as an appeal and means to the achievement of a 'better' future²⁰.

Such perspectives have typically been tied into a model of sport which sees it as capable of 'building character'. Indeed research related to this model has focused on a whole range of issues associated with the relationship between sports participation and character, morality, delinquency, academic performance, status, political attitudes and social mobility. Yet, for a variety of reasons, very little evidence has been produced to show sports participation does in fact make a consistent contribution in terms of 'character building', however narrowly defined²¹. It is clear that when people live significant periods of their lives in and around sports, much like any other cultural environment, their characters and behaviours are to some extent influenced by that activity. However, it is not possible to make generalisations about specific patterns of character development or behaviour as a consequence of particular patterns of sports participation. More contemporary research, then, has tended to emphasise 'sports as sites for socialisation experiences, not causes of socialisation outcomes'²².

In this context the assertion within the *Cul-de-sacs and gateways* strategy document that Positive Futures is 'not concerned with the celebration, development or promotion of sport as an end in itself'²³ is highly significant. This position is based upon recognition that **the principal attraction of sport for the programme is its capacity to engage young people, rather than some intrinsic developmental quality in sport itself.** For as was revealed in previous parts of this report, the aims of Positive Futures relate to its capacity to build relationships and contribute to personal and social development. As such, our research confirms the limitations of attempts to utilise particular activities in the pursuit of specific objectives. Rather, it provides evidence of sport's capacity to 'engage' young people as well as the importance of acknowledging the different qualities of the diverse range of activities mobilised by individual projects.

¹⁶ Money, T. (1997) *Manly and Muscular Diversions: Public Schools and the Nineteenth Century Sporting Revival*, London: Duckworth.

¹⁷ Holt, R. (1989) *Sport and the British*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.136.

¹⁸ Putnam, R. (2000) *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Pearson, G. (1983) *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰ This trend is not unprecedented and was a feature of the thinking of the Wolfenden Committee on Sport (1960) *Sport and Community*, London: Central Council on Physical Education and the Action Sport programme of the 1970s and 1980s.

²¹ See Coakley, J. (2003) *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*, Eighth Edition, Boston: McGraw Hill.
²² *Ibid.* p.102.

²³ Home Office (2003) *op. cit.* p.8.

In some ways sports provide what Victor Turner has referred to as a 'liminal' space, which provides the individual with a 'spatial separation from the familiar and habitual'²⁴. Sport can be experienced as a site of legitimised conflict, where 'normal' social rules are broken and subverted and participants undertake socially acceptable forms of 'risk taking'. Ironically though, it is this perspective which underpins the appeal of using sports as a 'diversionary' tool since it provides an alternative and less disruptive basis for young people to transgress convention than those associated with 'anti-social' behaviours such as 'joy riding' and street harassment. Equally though, at the more 'extreme' end of sporting experience, such as white water rafting and rock climbing, researchers have identified that an emphasis is placed on a similarly exclusionary orientation which maintains that the skills involved are possessed by a select few who identify with one another on the basis of their perceived status²⁵. The attractions are rooted in a similar desire to engage with risk and the public display of risky behaviour in the context of the secure, monotonous, repetition that more often characterises our contemporary social condition.

Whilst our research would appear to confirm the appeal that can go with the excitement of doing something 'different'²⁶ and the sanctioned opportunities for

physical encounters that sport can provide, we have also established that sport and related activities do offer something more. What is significant here is not the sport as such, but the context in which it occurs. As well as providing a space in which people can escape their wider troubles through an intense, un-self-conscious involvement with a physically rewarding activity, more generally, sport can provide spaces in which participants may:

- enter unfamiliar locations and meet new people
- talk and reflect upon relationships and performances
- be encouraged by coaches and peers to take personal and mutual responsibility, thus refining their sense of both individual potentials and mutual dependencies
- experience strong and open inter-generational contact, thus fostering more respectful forms of interaction
- be encouraged to recognise the importance of partnership, consensus and reliance on others through their own experience
- feel able to freely submit to the 'rules of the game' and the time-limited disciplinary regimes of particular sports.



24 Turner, V. (1973) 'The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal', *History of Religions*, 12, 3: p.213.

25 Lyng, S. (1990) 'Edgework: A Social Psychological Analysis of Voluntary Risk Taking', *American Journal of Sociology*, 95, 4: 851-86.

26 See our first interim report 'Getting to know you': *Engagement and relationship building*, www.substance.coop

Breaking out of the box

Frankie hadn't particularly wanted to take up boxing and Dave didn't really want girls in the gym but somehow, through the work of the local Positive Futures project, they came together.

At first, Frankie found it hard, declaring that

"I hated sports, hated PE, hated exercises. But once I came up here I just got into everything. Just liked it."

Watching newcomers train in this environment, they seem to absorb the unspoken codes of behaviour that pervade it, along with the smells of sweat and leather, and sounds of skipping feet and ropes. These codes may be imparted by the example of older experienced boxers, with their intense motivation, enviable fitness and co-ordination, courteous behaviour, and their place in an unquestionable hierarchy of ability, age, and experience. While this may appear to put beginners at the 'bottom of the pile', it also extends to them the care and attention which is the responsibility of the more experienced.

The gym itself - with its history captured in the cuttings taped to the walls; its codes of conduct; its special equipment; and its regular users and characters - confers upon those who enter, the possibility of belonging in a familial sense. Indeed, Frankie and her friends admit that it is sometimes hard to make themselves leave even though they usually attend two or three times a week:

"I'd say the people is the best thing about it. The support we get from them. It ain't just about us being up here. It's about our lives and exams, what we're gonna do and personal things. We can talk to all of them about it. That's what I got really, like friends from it all."

This sense of family appears to denote the importance and closeness of the relationships formed, and how these relationships extend well beyond the focus on the activity in question. Vitality, for his own part, Dave sees his role as something more than that of a boxing coach. While boxing is his personal passion, when he talks about the young people he works with, he is clear that the sport is a tool of engagement, and it is through the activity and the arena in which it occurs, that he is able to provide support and guidance.

The gym is presented as a microcosmic world, with its own rules, which those who enter are compelled to take on. It provides a sense of stability and certainty through its promotion of self-discipline and mutual respect which sits in blissful contrast with the confusion and chaos outside, even in terms of changes in the physical environment. Dave doesn't really want 'improvements' made to the gym as he is happy with how it is. For him, 'modernisation' will only mean that he will no longer be able to keep an eye on things. This 'keeping an eye' is something Dave does continually and subtly. For whilst the impression is that the gym almost runs itself, in reality this is due to Dave's longstanding presence. He continually 'clocks' things and quickly pulls young people into line if their behaviour slips. Even this role has been mastered and is performed in a quiet, discreet and unspectacular way. In this sense, young people attend, and are offered training and support in exchange for their commitment to the club and its ethics.

What our research suggests then, is that sport and related activities have value beyond their intrinsic appeal to young people. As the example of Dave's gym captured in *Breaking out of the box* shows though, it is not the sport itself that matters most. The value can only be realised when sport is undertaken within a 'developmental approach'. In this sense it is **the adoption of a personal and social development model which is 'sacred' to sport-based social inclusion programmes rather than 'sport'**.

Indeed it is clear from our study that not everyone targeted by the Positive Futures programme likes or is even interested in sport. Indeed for some of the young people we have observed, sport can be an additional alienating experience. This has been recognised by some of the case study projects and the national Positive Futures management team, and has contributed to the provision of a broader profile of activities²⁷. It is clear that these non-sporting, activities (including arts and music) can also generate the 'added value' referred to above and, as such, it is not sport *per se* that is the key to project success, but the ability to find activities that attract and engage young people.

As such, we would conclude that whilst the provision of sporting opportunities does not itself generate sufficient confidence to provide ongoing support for sport-based social inclusion programmes, when tied to an appropriate personal and social development strategy, such programmes can have significant impacts. Furthermore, in an increasingly individualistic and consumer-oriented world, it is particularly appropriate to adopt 'models' of delivery which are flexible enough to cope with a diverse range of interests and personalities rather than to rely upon more formulaic sports development approaches.



²⁷ See Crime Concern (2006) *Be part of something*, London: Crime Concern.

Part Four: Rules of the game

In our first interim report, *Getting to know you*²⁸ we focused on the ways in which projects sought to engage and build relationships with young people. At the time, it was clear that the Positive Futures programme embraces a variety of delivery styles which reflect different projects' organisational contexts, personnel and interpretation of the work.

With the strategic development of the programme, which has embraced the production of strategy documents, workforce training and accredited qualifications for young people, it has become increasingly clear that it is concerned to offer more than 'things to do' or to pursue particular specified objectives. Rather, the purpose of using the relationships established with young people to aid their personal and social development has become a cornerstone of the programme's vision. Nevertheless, our work has revealed great variation in the extent to which projects have consistently achieved this objective. As such, rather than draw out these differences, we are concerned here to identify and distil the key elements we have found to be central to this process in terms of:

- project staff
- styles of delivery
- space and place
- progression and pathways
- ethos and organisational culture.



4.1 Staff

In '*Getting to know you*' we established that there is no such thing as an archetypal 'community sports practitioner' and that projects typically employ a disparate array of staff with distinct skills and backgrounds. Within this range we identified a loose typology around characterisations of 'the boss', 'the buddy', 'the teacher', 'the joker', 'mr cool', 'the geezer' and 'the expert', whilst recognising that staff may play to or utilise different aspects of these characters depending on the group with whom they are working. Nevertheless, we have been persuaded, with significant exceptions, that there is a stronger identification amongst participants with members of staff who are 'local' rather than with those who are not.

In this respect, and in tune with our understandings of the role of sport discussed in the previous section, it is clear to us that **whilst successful relationship building may be assisted by sports competency, it is primarily driven by participants' identifications with the socio-cultural background and approach of staff.** As such, it seems important that staff display certain characteristics which are present in most relationships between friends or 'buddies' including:

- interest in participants' wellbeing
- familiarity with and knowledge of personality traits
- concern over their future plans
- co-receptive trust and respect
- warmth, joviality and humour.

At the same time, more formal characteristics are required which 'relocate' their relationships with participants from that of a 'buddy' to one of a 'mentor' or 'role model'. These characteristics include:

- consistency and reliability
- setting of appropriate boundaries relating to language and behaviour
- written or unwritten codes of conduct
- purposeful and developmental aims to the relationship.

As such it is clear that a range of skills are required for the delivery of an effective project. In terms of the development of these skills all staff have benefited or will have the opportunity to benefit from the programme's Workforce Quality Initiative which is designed to ensure that individuals working on projects have the knowledge, skills and personal qualities across 16 core competencies to perform their roles effectively. This is a vital development which helps Positive Futures projects to stand apart from other sport-based social policy initiatives. Ultimately though, projects need to strike a balance which involves the employment of *youth work* styles characterised by the construction of both 'buddy' and 'bounded' personalities which it seems young people are frequently able to respond to, precisely because of the mix of the two. The creation of a respectful relationship which acknowledges both similarity and difference enables mutual exchange whilst also allowing staff to challenge behaviour and, if necessary, enforce rules.

4.2 Styles of delivery

Most projects attract participants through a variety of routes, including both formal and informal referrals, but, if an objective of Positive Futures is to engage young people who have become marginalised from other mainstream service providers, then alternative means of engagement must be identified. Where participants are compelled to attend as part of a programme of 'rehabilitation' or as an identified group of 'offenders' it can be hard to move beyond the power imbalance that such arrangements necessarily imply and sustain. **Those projects which have successfully retained the involvement of disadvantaged young people have more often found that open access provision, outreach approaches and loose informal referrals are the most effective means of achieving and sustaining participant engagement.** At times, such an approach may appear to lack direction or structure but ultimately it is more likely to lead to a positive engagement with projects.

In keeping with such approaches, through our observations we have identified how the engagement process can develop from initial contacts of the type revealed in *Penny for the guy* (see over), on the basis of a three-step model:

Step 1:

Initial engagement and relationship building phase

- use of sport or another activity as a 'hook'
- use of initial relationship building tools including humour and conviviality
- allowing 'risky' language/behaviour to go mainly unchallenged to avoid the creation of 'distance' from participants.

Penny for the guy

Kate seemed disappointed with the attendance. She was worried that the football club coaches were coming the next day and that there would only be a few kids for them to work with. Rather than sit around and worry about it, she decided to get out and see if there were any kids hanging around the streets who she could get to come along. Driving around the area it was not the day to be rustling up support for a 'sports day'. The pouring rain had put paid to street corner society as those left to face the elements made for what shelter they could find. A couple of hardy souls crunched up under the hoarding of a newsagent were similarly struggling for punters willing to offer reward for their improvised effigy of Guy Fawkes. Spotting the opportunity we stopped and walked over.

Rather than a coin Kate handed them a flyer and asked if they wanted to come down. 'Its better than sitting out here in the rain'.

Spotting that one of the kids was carrying a crutch, the offer was re-inforced.

"Its ok if you're injured cos there are x-boxes and other indoor activities that you can get involved with".

'I'm not injured; it's for whacking people with',

he smirked as he smashed the stick against the metal shutter boarding up the shop next door for effect.

Kate, utilising her local knowledge, ignored the bravado and turned to his mate, "I know you" she said, asking how his mum was. He was soon on board and ran off home to get his mum to sign the form.

Looking to make his excuses, the kid with the stick asked "Is it where the Pitz is? That's miles away. I'm not goin' there. I'd have to get a bus."

When his mate returned Kate took the form off him and told the boys that it was on all week so they should just come along. As we got back into the car to rustle up some more would-be participants Kate waved at the lad's mum who was walking down the street.

There were several more at the session the next day.

Step 2:

Maintaining engagement / Developmental phase

- development of a mutual bond with each young person
- distinguishing young people's needs and interests both within and beyond sport
- exploring possible pathways or progression routes for young people.

Step 3:

Purposeful and tailored engagement

- maintenance of a consistent level of engagement and familiarity
- challenging inappropriate behaviour with use of sanctions
- accreditation of both sporting and non-sporting activities
- person specific advice and guidance to specialist agencies.

While the three stages of engagement presented here are not applicable in all cases, the sequence is desirable and provides a progressional basis for building meaningful relationships.

4.3 Place and space

The Positive Futures programme has a commitment to both 'widening horizons' whilst also providing opportunities within a 'supportive and culturally familiar environment'²⁹. In this sense, projects have to counter their desire to provide young people with access to provision and venues which might normally be out of their reach, whilst also respecting their fears and desire for safety and familiarity. In the main this suggests a preference for the use of local facilities and a direction of resources into the immediate neighbourhood of projects in order to facilitate the transformation of 'places with nothing to do' into 'spaces with something to do'.

However, whilst the 'project base' and the activities projects deliver may be considered to be safe spaces, what is more important is the relationship the young people have with staff. It is this which will determine the extent to which projects create spaces which are not only 'physically safe' but also 'emotionally safe'. **Where staff build a good level of trust and respect with their core groups, this can create an environment in which young people are able to discuss 'risky' subjects** relating to drinking, sexual activity, crime, violence and substance misuse. In turn, this provides the ideal platform for these issues to be addressed through education and more informal personal guidance in the face of 'real' incidents rather than punitive measures, thus maintaining participant interest and participation.

4.4 Progression and pathways

Ultimately, we are largely convinced that the best approach towards retaining both staff and participants and achieving positive outcomes is provided by a project-based progression model involving a movement through participant, volunteer and staff roles. In our preferred model³⁰ and in keeping with the staged engagement model outlined previously, when a young person first attends a project, their areas of interest will be identified.

Once they are engaged in an activity, they will be given small responsibilities, usually at the sessions they are attending as participants. Often this means helping the staff on an ad hoc basis, building confidence before making the volunteering a more formal responsibility. The ideal is to then provide progressive forms of credit for this basic volunteering. As soon as they are registered, volunteers are encouraged to develop a personal action plan, with clear goals both within and beyond the volunteering period.

In our research we have found that the step from ad hoc volunteering to a regular commitment can be a huge one for young people and the step to paid work can be even more daunting. However, these are developments which can transform the self-image of who young people are and what they are capable of achieving and the subsequent step to paid work can for some be a moment of great pride and a fulfilment of hopes. Proper preparation and volunteering experience can ease these steps by ensuring that young people are entering new roles that they have been well prepared for.

Either way, this process of young people moving through and progressing to become part and full-time employees of the project, thus delivering in the ways in which they have been delivered to, is eminently sustainable and self-renewing. It ensures that real learning is passed on, and utilises the enthusiasm and example of the 'converted'. The staff themselves can, therefore, become aspirational role models for the next generation. New 'workers' will also be aware, not only of those just in front of them on the pathway, but also of those just behind. Provided they have received the appropriate training and have not been rushed in their development this will enable them to spot when a volunteer is getting into any difficulties and to provide the support needed. It also enables them to remain on the 'look-out' for talent, the next generation of young people who could themselves be developed, supported and brought into the team.

²⁹ Home Office (2003) *op.cit.*

³⁰ Considered in more detail in our third interim report 'Going the distance': *Impact, journeys and distance travelled*, www.substance.coop

Part Five: Organisational style and the de-McDonaldization of sport-based social policy

In some respects the organisation of modern sports has been associated with a process of rationalisation and subsequent bureaucratisation. The degree of standardisation which has come with the establishment of national and international rules, development frameworks and globalisation can in many ways be related to the process of ‘McDonaldization’³¹ which has had such a profound effect on contemporary business practice and social structures. This process has been characterised as providing greater:

- efficiency
- calculability
- predictability
- control.

Applied to the sports development industry, *efficiency* can be related to the optimisation of participation rates and the development of skills through the efficient operation of staff trained to follow pre-designed delivery programmes. *Calculability* has come with an emphasis on the quantitative assessment of inputs and outcomes whereby the quantity of participants has at times been seen as a proxy for quality and value for money has been judged in terms of cost per head. *Predictability* relates to the familiarity that people have with a service whereby sports sessions are delivered in a consistent format, for set durations, at fixed times and staff perform standardised inflexible roles. In the context of sport the fourth element, *control*, is associated with limitation of choice and a primary focus on sporting outcomes.

It should be quite clear that whilst this model may have demonstrated its commercial value, it is not easily reconcilable with the focus on Positive Futures’ need for flexible modes of delivery outlined in the previous section and detailed in earlier interim reports. The focus on predictability and control in the McDonald’s approach and other bureaucratic modes of production is essentially about creating a sense of security and safety for both consumers and the bureaucracies themselves. However, the conditions experienced by many of the young people who are the focus of Positive Futures might be seen to reverse this status, since over-rationalised processes in society more generally do not provide them with security but lead to their exclusion from shopping malls, town centres, coaching sessions and institutionalised educational formats. As such, security and safety for them is more likely to require a degree of ‘dreaming’, ‘magic’ or ‘enchantment’ which sits at odds with over-rationalised bureaucratic processes.

It is in this light that Positive Futures has a preference for lead agencies which are ‘independent and innovative’³², capable of ‘enchanted’ young people, getting them to ‘dream’ and, crucially, keeping that dream alive. Furthermore, our research suggests that the statutory sector is more likely to be characterised by a bureaucratic systems approach which limits this capacity. From our observations large institutional and statutory providers have tended not to provide projects with structural independence and can constrain them through their demands for adherence to wider formulaic policies and procedures. Of course, voluntary sector led projects are far from being universally autonomous entities which can be separated out from wider institutional frameworks but our case studies did provide examples of greater structural independence and a far less rigid adherence to standardised policies and procedures. This secondary point is key, in that there is no benefit to be obtained from structural independence if there is no desire on the part of the lead agency to take advantage of the associated freedom to innovate.

Whistle while we work

For the newest of the case study projects, unburdened by the weight of institutional bureaucracy, there is a culture of co-operativeness, flexibility and equity which runs through their approach. All five full-time members of staff are located within the same office which is characterised by an inviting feeling created by the ubiquity of personal affects and the radio playing in the background.

Amidst this 'easiness' sits a hive of last minute bid writing, development work, planning and organising which often runs late into the evening. The flexible working hours are accompanied by the encouragement given to staff to manage their own workload and office time.

This flexible, open and friendly culture is not only inward facing but is also demonstrated outwards to the young people and project partners. Indeed the informal inclusive feel means that the office space is regularly frequented by young people who visit to hang out and chat to the team, have 'take-away' evenings and watch DVDs whilst local community groups access the facility as a free meeting space.

Meanwhile, the project's development officers are left to develop their activities autonomously and spend most of their time out of the office in the areas in which they work. As one of the Area Development Workers explains:

"We manage our projects and are supported by the manager rather than being managed. It helps when you are... around the area and you are known, so it's about getting out there. Numerous kids know me and know the organisation even if we haven't really worked with them."

While there are team meetings when staff relay their plans and current activities, the process of communication and feedback is largely informal and played out through the everyday rhythms of office discussion. This practice-led approach is supported by the more formal monthly steering group meetings which provide an opportunity to feedback to stakeholders, seek support in the form of resources, staff time or advice and request approval for major forthcoming initiatives.

In this sense, the learning from alternative business strategies which sit more easily with this less-rationalised approach may be appropriate for Positive Futures. In some ways, the necessarily 'non mainstream', inspirational work of Positive Futures and related programmes might require projects to operate as non-rationalised *niches* within the wider, and otherwise heavily bureaucratised, domain of sport. Projects need to be set free to operate at the radical edge of this field of work in order that they can attempt to find ways of engaging with and inspiring those young people who have been alienated by more structured, 'mainstream' approaches.

This mode of working, illustrated in *Whistle while we work*, suggests a congruence with the co-operative model espoused by Ricardo Semler³³, which places an emphasis on the empowerment of staff to make their own decisions within a 'flat' operational structure. It also fits with the 'skunk works' approach used by some high-tech organisations to encourage staff to 'think outside the box' whereby people are insulated from routine organisational demands and do their work as they see fit in order to encourage an entrepreneurial or 'visionary' spirit³⁴.

33 Semler, R. (2001) *Maverick: Success Story Behind the World's Most Unusual Work Place*, Random House Business Book.

34 Peters, T. & Waterman, R. (1982) *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, New York: Harper & Row.

It is this kind of approach which might facilitate the creation of environments in which the human ‘narratives’ sense of ‘usefulness’ and ‘craftsmanship’ - crushed by over rationalisation of the workplace³⁵ - can re-emerge to enable work to be fulfilling and inspirational to young people. Of course **this will only be possible where such environments are underpinned by a clear guiding ethos and commitment which permeates the various management, staff, volunteer and participant layers of project activity.** As such, in the search for the most appropriate agencies to deliver effective sport-based social inclusion projects, in our second interim report, *In the bootroom*, we drew out the ‘barriers’ and ‘enablers’ relating to the characteristics previously identified as desirable in the *Cul-de-sacs and gateways* strategy document.

It is our belief that many independent voluntary sector agencies have the contacts and networks in local neighbourhoods which can provide them with a key advantage in becoming the pioneers of new forms of local engagement, regeneration and redevelopment. In line with this perspective, our research findings suggest that community-based voluntary sector groups are more likely to have organisational structures which would accommodate the preferred characteristics identified in the table opposite. Voluntary sector status does not, of itself, provide any guarantee that a project will be successful but, other things being equal, it can provide a structural framework and degree of autonomy which enables projects to generate forms of working which are: small scale; locally based; well resourced and dynamic with their own ethos or ‘attitude’ where no single area of work dominates; thereby allowing design and approach to develop organically.

This is not to say that other types of organisation cannot take on the role of a lead agency and we are aware of a few local authority led projects which have taken on ‘flagship’ status and helped to define Positive Futures within the wider programme. However, in these situations this has often been as a result of the determination of individual personnel to eschew the host agency’s existing procedures and ways of working in order to forge an independent identity for the project and also to influence the approach of the host agency.

As such we would highlight the need for local authority projects and others led by larger more institutional bodies to be conscious of the ways in which **Positive Futures requires an approach which is distinct from more conventional patterns of statutory sector public service delivery.** If such organisations are to continue leading Positive Futures there will be a need for the projects they host to have greater autonomy from formal institutional policies and procedures which can act as a barrier to work with the disadvantaged young people at the heart of the work.



Organisational characteristic barriers and enablers

Characteristic	Purpose	Barrier	Enabler
Independent and innovative	Currency and credibility with participants and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucratic governance, policy and procedure • Fixed 'models' of working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural independence • Flexibility • 'Confidence' and passion for work
Organisationally transparent	To enable monitoring and encourage adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-integrated front line delivery partnerships • Negative perceptions of voluntary sector • Focus on structure over delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflective practice • Non-defensive and open communication
Co-operative and non duplicating	Ensuring extended provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying Positive Futures as sports/diversionary work • 'Turf' wars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local audits/mapping exercises • Desire to enhance provision
Providing value for money	Demonstrating Positive Futures achievements and securing future funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventional VFM models • Inflexible budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established local networks • Intensive, long-term work • New qualitative forms of monitoring which focus on participant journeys
Capable of growth	To develop participant pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed delivery models • Departmental rivalry • Thin spread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Strategic approach • Strong networks • Consistency • Thick spread
Funding from a range of sources	Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed duration provision • Reliant relationship with core sponsor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fit with strategic policy agendas • Autonomy and flexibility

In this sense, and drawing on our learning from other research focused on the delivery of sports based social initiatives³⁶, the kind of independence required can be characterised in the following ways:

1. Greater organisational and financial autonomy from wider institutional structures.
2. Alternative 'branding' to generate a locally acknowledged sense of 'cool' and kudos around projects which avoids the labelling and stigmatisation that can go with 'state' branded services.
3. Locally constituted strategic plans which outline *projects'* priority themes and geographical focus rather than the strategic orientation of parent organisations.
4. Flexible work plans which are adaptable in order to appeal to a wider array of funders.
5. Flexible employment policies enabling the employment of both youth work and sports delivery staff, alongside partnership with other specialist agencies who can deliver on the projects behalf.
6. A bottom up approach to secure meaningful and effective 'community' support which can be tainted by too close a tie with statutory service providers.
7. Trustees and/or steering group members drawn from a wide range of stakeholders.

With such a model, whilst steering groups can be important, they should not be regarded as the organisational heart of a project or necessarily provide confidence in what is happening at the 'frontline'. Rather, if there is confidence in the lead agency to deliver, their primary role should be to support that agency and its staff in their aspirations, with delivery partnerships 'emerging organically on the basis of what engages effectively'. Such delivery partnerships should be open and responsive and seek to accommodate and shape the different values and cultures of participating groups. In the spirit of openness, they should be innovative, flexible and prepared to take risks since this work should, by its very nature, be difficult, challenging and innovative.

Appendix 1

Summary of Research Activity, Positive Futures Case Study Research Project, 2004-2006

Number of days spent with projects	475
Number of activity sessions attended	396
Approximate number of days spent at project offices	282
Number of 'events' attended with project staff	27
Number of social contacts with staff/young people	20 ³⁷
Number of 'residential' attended	7
Number of research exercises - mapping, questionnaires, etc - conducted with young people	33
Number of interviews with staff (NB: Some staff interviewed more than once)	82
Number of interviews with project partners	53
Number of formal interviews with young people	30 ³⁸



³⁷ Not including informal time spent during lunch breaks etc.

³⁸ Due to the problematic nature of formal interviews with young people we preferred to engage in more informal discussions and activity based research exercises to ascertain young people's views. Informal contact and discussion was maintained with young people at all activity sessions as well as in project offices and social locations.

Research team

Gavin Bailey

Gavin contributed to the Positive Futures research while a doctoral student in the Centre for Urban and Community Research. He is continuing his PhD, on extremist politics, at the University of Keele. He has worked as a researcher for the Community Development Foundation, the Future Foundation and Vision 21, most recently completing an evaluation of the Neighbourhood Support Fund.

Tony Blackshaw

Tony has had an academic and practical work career which is rooted in community policy, theory and practice. His first degree was in community studies and after graduating he worked in community regeneration in the field of social housing. This experience was subsequently augmented through his voluntary work at an inner city community centre and his teaching in adult education over a number of years. Tony currently teaches the community dimensions of sport at Sheffield Hallam University and, drawing on the sociology of Zygmunt Bauman, has written widely on the social theorization of sport, leisure and contemporary social formations. As well as contributing to the Positive Futures research, over the last three years he has also been active in other community-based research projects, both in the UK and Malaysia.

Adam Brown

Adam, who led the North West element of the case study research, is a founder member of Substance and was Deputy Director and Senior Research Fellow at the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture, Manchester Metropolitan University from 1996-2006. He has extensive research and policy experience in the areas of sport and popular culture and has led and been involved in a number of major academic research projects; applied research for major sports organisations; and has contributed to sports policy development, for instance as a leading member of the Government Football Task Force. He was co-director of the Football and its Communities research for the Football Foundation and is also an elected member of the Board of Directors of FC United of Manchester and a board member of Cornerhouse Manchester.

Clare Choak

Clare contributed to the Positive Futures research while studying for a PhD in conjunction with Sheffield Hallam University and Positive Futures. Her study has focused on how young women engage with sport interventions, exploring particularly the concepts of cool and respect. She now works at Greenwich University as a Community Sport lecturer whilst continuing her research.

Tim Crabbe

Tim, who led the Positive Futures case study research, is a founder member of Substance and Professor of the Sociology of Sport and Popular Culture at Sheffield Hallam University. He has a specialist interest in the social dimensions of sport, leisure and popular culture and has a long track record of conducting both 'pure' academic and applied research in these fields as well as tailored monitoring and evaluation exercises relating to specific programmes of activity. Through his involvement with the Positive Futures programme and work with the Football Foundation he has emerged as one of the leading authorities in relation to the research, development and analysis of sports based social policy initiatives. Tim also has a long history of research and writing around the issues of crime, 'deviance' and substance misuse, particularly in relation to young people and contemporary cultures of consumption.

Ben Gidley

Ben, who works at the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR) at Goldsmiths College and led the London element of the case study research, is a resident of South London and has a history of research into community involvement in deprived areas. This work led to the publication of *Reflecting Realities: Participants' perspectives on integrated communities and sustainable development* (2000, with Anastacio et al). Ben has also worked on the evaluation of a number of estate-base regeneration programmes and an NRF-funded youth involvement project. He has trained residents and parents as researchers in participatory action projects in Southwark and is now working on developing participatory evaluation tools for media- and arts-based projects.

Gavin Mellor

Gavin is a founder member of Substance, and formerly a Research Fellow at the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture at Manchester Metropolitan University. His principal research interests relate to the fields of sport and community, the social uses of sport, sport and disaster, young people and social exclusion. Gavin was the lead researcher on the Football and its Communities project for the Football Foundation at Manchester Metropolitan University (2002-2006), has conducted research for Barclays Spaces for Sports and now leads the national evaluation of the Kick programme. Gavin has particular experience of using oral history as a research technique.

Kath O'Connor

Kath, who was the principal field researcher for the North West case study research, is a founder member of Substance and formerly a Research Associate at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her main research interests include young people and social exclusion, the crime prevention agenda, multi-agency partnerships and qualitative evaluation methods. Kath also has experience of conducting research within public sector agencies including local authorities and the Police Service. She is the North West Evaluation Network steering group convenor and North West representative on the UK Evaluation Society.

Imogen Slater

Imogen, who was the principle field researcher for the London case studies has lived and worked in South East London for most of her life. She spent much of her career in the youth and community development field, setting up and managing a number of cutting edge projects for young people, designed to increase opportunities and effectively counter barriers to their progress and inclusion. In 1993 she set up a community based social research company. She led an action research project (funded by Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Action Zone), exploring sexual health issues for young people; this involved training a core group of young people to carry out research with their peers. She has worked on a number of research and evaluation projects both independently and with CUCR. These have recently included following four projects located across the South East involving arts-based delivery with 'hard to reach' young people.

Donna Woodhouse

Donna is Senior Lecturer in Social and Cultural Issues in Sport and was the principle field researcher for the Yorkshire case studies. Before coming to Sheffield Hallam, she worked in the voluntary sector as a community safety and community development practitioner on Safer Cities, SRB, Community Fund and Home Office financed projects, and for the Guardian's Football AllTalk web site. Her interests include qualitative research, community, females and sport, and young people, sport and social inclusion.

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