Sport England Serious Youth Violence Summer Programme Evaluation:
Insight Report

Dr Carolynne Mason
Dr James Andrew Kenyon
Dr Caron Walpole

School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University

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1.0   Executive Summary

1.1   Sport England Serious Youth Violence Summer Programme Summary

During the summer of 2019 Sport England supported a programme of 56 community-based sport projects across England which aimed to utilise sport and physical activity to positively impact upon Serious Youth Violence prevention.

A total of £456,507 was committed by Sport England to the programme with the 56 successful applicant projects receiving an average of £8,151 each and funding for individual projects ranging between £3,700-£10,000.

The total number of individual participants targeted by the programme was 4,275. Monitoring data was collated for 2,991 participants, of which 87% were male, 40% were Black or British Black African, and 67% were aged between 14 and 25 years.

Geographically (refer to figure 1), the supported projects were located in Greater London (n=22), the North West (n=14), the West Midlands (n=7) and Yorkshire (n=13).

The majority of these projects primarily employed multi-sport/multi-skill coaching (n=32) with the remaining projects offering classes and coaching solely in boxing (n=10), football (n=7), basketball (n=6), and cycling (n=1).

Figure 1 Location of Sport England-supported sports projects

1.2   Evaluation Summary

A small-scale evaluation of the Sport England Serious Youth Violence Summer Programme was undertaken by Loughborough University, the purpose of which was to identify insights from the programme to inform future policy and practice that aims to harness sport and physical activity to prevent Serious Youth Violence.

The evaluation was based on qualitative case studies of eight funded projects, insights from which are summarised in this report and presented in greater detail in a separate report.

The school summer holiday period (mid-July to early-September) was considered by interviewees to be a time when young people are at greater risk of becoming involved in serious violence and knife crime and therefore this funding was deemed important and timely for the participants involved.

Stakeholder interviews highlighted that the funded projects were successful in engaging with hard-to-reach and marginalised young people who may not be engaging in any other positive activities and are therefore potentially the most at-risk of being impacted by serious and violent crime.

A number of benefits were identified for participants in the projects, including: providing a safe haven, personal development opportunities, and the promotion of health outcomes.

The case studies indicated that different sporting activities provide different opportunities for young people to succeed as individual sports such as boxing may offer different opportunities to more traditional team sports.

The success of the case study projects in engaging young participants was believed by interviewees to be reliant on the 'right' staff being involved in projects; the characteristics for whom included: their own lived experiences, their experience of working with young people with complex issues, their flexibility in approach, and their desire to make a positive difference to young people's lives.

Interviewees also expressed concerns that when the 'wrong' staff and volunteers are engaged in this type of specialist work the consequences can be very damaging.

Diversionary activities were considered valuable over the school summer holiday period but it was generally agreed that provision during the summer needed to be linked to other provision either side of the summer break as part of a more sustained approach to preventing serious youth violence.

The case study findings indicated that the reasons why young people get involved in serious violence are complex and that whilst sport can make an important contribution to tackling these issues, sport alone cannot change the communities in which young people grow up.

Working in partnership with other organisations was acknowledged as being key to keeping young people safe in the long term as sports organisations cannot work in isolation or provide young people with all the support that they need.

Whilst multi-agency approaches were considered vital it was apparent that this approach is challenging in some locations as a result of austerity which has led to the erosion of youth services.

There was consensus that long-term planning and long-term funding are required in order to bring about long-term solutions to serious violence and crime:
- Long-term planning is needed to tackle the underlying causes of serious youth violence to avoid 'painting over the cracks'.
- Some interviewees suggested that they could have used the funding in alternative ways to provide more sustainable provision, had there been no constraints on the ways in which the funding could be used.

2.0 Recommendations for Consideration by Government and Other Stakeholders in Sport

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the evaluation and are intended to inform both government and other stakeholders engaged in efforts to reduce serious youth violence through sport.

1. Sport is a valuable tool that can be used to engage some of the most inactive and at-risk young people in positive activities but the mechanisms by which this prevents serious and youth violence are not well understood and are not typically articulated by project staff. Many of the case study projects aimed to keep young people safe but this is a broad aspiration rather than a direct attempt to prevent serious youth violence in the long term. It is therefore recommended that sports organisations are supported to critically engage with the work that they undertake in order to identify how the planned activities will result in prevention and to ensure greater alignment between activities undertaken and the intended outcomes for participants perhaps using theory of change approaches.

2. Project staff indicated that complex issues such as serious youth violence and knife crime require complex and long-term responses where sport is one element. It is therefore recommended that the specific opportunities that are presented by different types of sport-based projects in contributing to prevention efforts are identified.

3. It was commonly suggested that multi-agency partnership working offers the greatest potential for a long-term solution to the complex issue of serious youth violence, but this is challenging in a context of austerity which has resulted in a reduction of available and suitable organisations with which to partner. It is therefore recommended that consideration is given to ways in which sports organisations can be supported to connect with partners within, and beyond, the local area in order to develop collaborative working for the benefit of participants and organisations.

4. The efforts exerted to engage targeted young people provided an opportunity for longer term engagement which was not always fully realised due to the short duration of the projects. It is therefore recommended that consideration is given

to ways in which organisations can access sustained funding in ways that enable participants to stay connected to sport to access the protective and pro-social opportunities that exist within sport.

5. It was apparent that project staff have valuable insight and experience of engaging with marginalised young people and of developing educational and developmental activities often created in isolation resulting in duplication of effort. It is recommended that support is given to suitable sports organisations to share effective practice more widely and that consideration is given to developing resources such as workshops and toolkits on issues integral to this work to support sports organisations undertaking this work (e.g. ensuring a safe environment, positive strategies for bringing young people together from different parts of the community, mitigating risks, etc.).

6. Some interviewees suggested that as more funding is being aligned to this specialist work there is a risk that sports organisations who have not previously undertaken this complex work will attempt to gain funding without understanding the complexities of it or having the necessary skills and experience. It is therefore recommended that funders are encouraged to prioritise organisations that can demonstrate a high level of expertise in undertaking this type of work or those working with partners who have the necessary expertise.

7. The funded projects were very diverse in terms of their approach, their targeted participants and in their intended outcomes. Additionally, they were small scale and monitoring and evaluation requirements were intentionally light touch and consequently it is difficult to assess the contribution of the programme in preventing serious youth violence in the longer term. It is therefore recommended that sports organisations are supported to be able to demonstrate their impact in ways that are not overly burdensome.

8. Engaging targeted participants in co-creating projects has been shown to be a useful way of enhancing the effectiveness of sports programmes. It is therefore recommended that consideration is given to how the voices of young people can inform future funding decisions and project planning and delivery specifically in attempts to prevent Serious Youth Violence.

3.0   Programme Overview

During the summer of 2019 Sport England supported a programme of 56 community-based sport projects across England which aimed to utilise sport and physical activity to positively impact upon Serious Youth Violence prevention.

A total of £456,507 was committed by Sport England to the programme with the 56 successful applicant projects receiving an average of £8,151 each and funding for individual projects ranging between £3,700-£10,000.

The total number of individual participants targeted by the programme was 4,275. Monitoring data was collated for 2,991 participants, of which 87% were male and 13% female. The breakdown of the ethnicity of participants is shown in Table 1 and a breakdown of participants' ages is provided in Table 2.

Table 1: Ethnicity of Participants

Ethnicity	%
White	18%
Black or British Black African	40%
Asian or British Asian	14%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic	6%
Other Ethnic	4%
Not Known	18%

Table 2: Age of Participants

Age	%
13 and under	27%
14-25	67%
26+	2%
Not Known	4%

4.0   Evaluation Overview

The purpose of the external evaluation was to identify the insights from the funded projects in order to contribute to informing future policy and practice that aims to harness sport and physical activity to tackle serious youth violence.

The evaluation was based on eight qualitative case studies of funded projects that were selected in order to reflect the diversity of schemes that were undertaken.

Criteria for identifying the projects included:
- Location
- Target group of young people
- Approach adopted and sport utilised

The case studies were conducted by using semi-structured telephone interviews with a sample of key stakeholders from within each of the selected projects.

In total 13 interviews were conducted.

The detailed case studies are presented separately, whilst this report summarises the key findings from the case studies.

5.0   Key Findings

5.1   Overview Case Study Projects

All of the case study projects were located in urban areas in disadvantaged communities. However, there was considerable variation in the projects in terms of delivery, target groups and approach. Table 3 summarises the case study projects that were included in the evaluation.

Table 3: Case Study Projects

Lead Organisation	Location	Sport(s)	Target Group	Interviewee(s)
Ambition, Aspire, Achieve	London	Multi-Sports	Local young people aged 14-19	Interviewee 5
Aspire Amateur Boxing Club	Sheffield Yorkshire	Boxing	Young people leaving care	Interviewee 2
Fight for Peace	London	Boxing	Youth Offending Team (YOT) Referrals	Interviewee 1
'Get Fit, Feel Inspired': The Young Foundation	London	Football & Fitness	Local young Bengali men aged in their twenties	Interviewees 9-13

Joseph Lappin Partnership Limited (Anfield & North Liverpool Boxing Club)	Liverpool North West	Boxing	Local young people aged 10 to 19	Interviewee 4
LED Community Foundation CIC	Leeds Yorkshire	Multi-Sports	Local young people aged 13-19, known to be involved in anti-social behaviour and criminal activity	Interviewee 6
Target Football CIC	Liverpool North West	Football	Young people living in the Kensington & Fairfield ward	Interviewee 3
Westminster City Council Sport Unit	London	Basketball & Table Tennis	At-risk young people already engaged in other sport programmes	Interviewees 7-8

5.2   Aspirations for the Projects

The case study projects shared similar aims and objectives in that they aimed to keep young people safe during the duration of the summer and beyond as these quotes illustrate:

"We got involved because we are passionate about keeping young people safe, keeping them away from knives and keeping them away from gangs" (Interviewee 2).

"I am not being dramatic, I felt sick in my stomach when the summer holidays come. Because I was thinking, you know what, we're going to lose kids over the summer holidays [...] And a couple of weeks before the summer holidays, we'd had one kid slashed with a samurai sword, we'd had something like four shootings in a week, we'd had stabbings... it's a regular occurrence" (Interviewee 4).

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"In the past six months, during summertime, we had many, many, many issues, you know, in terms of knife crime and stuff like that....Nobody wants to see another person die and you know, it's just painful losing someone...So we started thinking about this stuff and we try and implement this with football... we should tackle this and try and get people diverted from that side of life to a normal, happy life" (Interviewee 10).

The case study projects adopted different approaches in attempting to keep participants safe with some being predominantly diversionary in approach whilst other projects aimed to be both diversionary and preventative in their approach. The projects were typically focused on the school summer holiday period (mid-July to early September) but interviewees were also aware of the importance of aiming to keep young people safe in the longer term. Being involved in sport in the longer term was generally considered to offer young people some protection against being involved in serious violence and knife crime as illustrated by the following comment:

"It's important that these kind of programmes are there to help people to get more aware and not to be able to be groomed and get involved in these gang-related issues" (Interviewee 7).

Many of the young people involved in the summer programme were targeted by their projects because they live in areas that experience high rates of crime and violence, and therefore the young people were perceived to be at a higher risk of being involved in such activities because of where they live. However, some interviewees indicated that many of these issues are no longer experienced only by young people in disadvantaged communities as the impacts of gang and drug culture are more widespread in other areas. Interviewees suggested that the issue of young people carrying knives is now more common across all socio-economic groups.
Some of the projects aimed to be diversionary in their approach in the belief that keeping them active during the summer break would protect them and reduce the risk of becoming involved in serious violence.

"I saw some really good kids in bad situations. Living in a very violent environment and been subject to it. They didn't know how to live any differently" (Interviewee 1).

In some communities, interviewees believed that violence is perceived to be normative in some of these young people's lives both inside and outside the home as illustrated by one interviewee who stated:

"Youth violence has touched all of their lives…. they have definitely all been impacted by it" (Interviewee 9).

Interviewees suggested that many young people carry knives because they believe everyone else is, and therefore they see a need to pre-empt being unprotected by possessing their own. Some young people admitted to bringing knives to the sessions they attended. Many of the projects therefore sought to try and educate participants to challenge existing ways of thinking and behaving that were perceived to be a reaction to the environment in which they were living. This approach typically prioritised approaches that promoted personal development through sport supported by educational workshops as illustrated by the following quote:

"It's about keeping the young people away from weapons and gangs in the first place, so they don't have to carry a knife in the first place. If you are a mechanic, you carry a spanner. So, it's about keeping them away from that arena" (Interviewee 2).

The risks that some young people are exposed to was illustrated by the loss of one of the participants at a project who was fatally stabbed two months after the end of the summer.

5.3   Programme Benefits

As indicated above, the funded projects identified different target groups for their projects. The majority of the case study projects (6/8) were, to varying degrees, extensions of existing activity where the specific need for the project over the summer was identified by staff who had a very good knowledge of the needs of the local community. Extending existing provision was pragmatic given the short lead-in time available for planning projects.

Some of the projects aimed to engage very marginalised young people who were not believed to be engaged in any other activities and therefore they were particularly hard to reach. For these projects engaging these marginalised young people was considered to be an important success which provided the opportunity to undertake development work which would otherwise not have been possible without any engagement:

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"I think the first success has to be that these young people engaged. You know, that, in itself is a real positive to us, because, as I say, when people have tried before there's not been much to engage them. So, the fact that they are willing to return, voluntarily, every week to engage has been a massive plus" (Interviewee 6).

The importance of a persistent approach by detached outreach staff was considered vital in engaging young people who are not currently engaged in positive activities:

"One team member did briefly know of some of the young people prior to the start of this provision which did help, however, the persistence to recruit the right young people by presenting at the local estates using a detached youth work approach and not just work with those already known to LED means that the main success factor was those young people turning up, talking to staff and participating" (Street Games Project Case Study).

Interviewees identified a range of benefits for participants engaged in the funded projects that they believed to be significant in achieving their aim to keep young people safe and away from serious violence and knife crime. The following section summarises the main benefits identified as arising from the summer programme for participants.

5.3.1   Safe Haven

A primary benefit of the projects mentioned by interviewees was the opportunity to keep young people safe during the duration of the summer. As noted above, some of the projects were targeted at young people who were considered to be at-risk because of where they live and were also considered to be at a heightened risk of becoming involved in serious violence over the summer break. Projects were therefore believed to provide a safe haven for the participants:

"They were safer while they were with us" (Interviewee 1).

One project lead stated that they tried to ensure that young participants were helped to develop strategies to keep them safe and noted that the relevant strategies would

vary between individuals. Vigilance and the noticing of warning signs were considered to be important skills to develop.

The importance of prevention rather than desistance was illustrated by the case of one participant who had been referred to the project because he was awaiting a court date for serious vandalism. He committed to the project fully and was a model participant in terms of his engagement and behaviour but due to the severity of his previous actions he was expected to receive a custodial sentence. He asked the project lead why he could not have attended the project before he got into trouble.

5.3.2   Personal Development

In addition to providing a means of protecting participants, interviewees typically indicated that their projects included personal development opportunities. These personal development opportunities were considered to be valuable in empowering young people to make positive decisions and to secure a wider range of positive outcomes for those involved:

> "To empower and prevent and keep people safe and just personally develop really" (Interviewee 1).

Many of the educational workshops that were developed were designed to try and enhance young people's ability to recognise that the decisions they make have consequences that can be very damaging even though they may seem necessary at the time. Interviewees suggested that some young people are in positions where they commit crimes because they see this is necessary to support their family at the time and therefore describing their actions simply as 'good' or 'bad' oversimplifies the situation they are in:

> "They make the right choice for them, but it has consequences" (Interviewee 2).

A common goal for some project staff was to raise the aspirations of participants and enable to them to be able to make positive choices in their lives as it was believed that this would help them to be prepared to make the right decisions in the future that would help secure their safety:

"If you give a kid aspirations then they have hope and then they'll have chances and then they'll have choices" (Interviewee 2).

5.3.3 Promoting Health Outcomes

A number of interviewees mentioned that the young people they engaged with were typically both physically inactive and also had issues with their mental health and wellbeing. An important outcome noted by interviewees was therefore the positive impact that being active had on some of the participants involved. The physical engagement in the project was believed by interviewees to result in positive impacts on participants' mental wellbeing because they felt positive about achieving something challenging and because the activity itself lifted their mood:

"[Young people referred through the YOT] are usually on the street a lot of the time, eating chicken and chips, smoking loads of weed, don't exercise, don't sweat any toxins out so they are full of rubbish. Exercise can help them to feel better" (Interviewee 1).

"It's developed behaviours, it's become part of their habits now and their weekly routine" (Interviewee 10).

6.0   Learning from the Programme

6.1   Success Factors

The following section summarises the key factors that were identified as important and integral to the success of the projects.

6.1.1   Staff Dedication and Experience

A key element of the success of the case study projects was the dedication and experience of the staff teams which ensured that they were able to work with young people who are often hard to reach and mistrustful of new adults. The effective staff have a good understanding of the lives that the young people are living, the pressures they are under and of the communities participants live in. This enabled them to develop projects which were either extensions of existing projects or were based on the experiences gained through previous projects. The experience of staff and their knowledge of the local community was important in getting projects up and running quickly.

6.1.2   Building Relationships with Young People

The projects benefited from staff who were able to develop authentic relationships with participants which enabled meaningful work to be undertaken. Different strategies were adopted to develop these relationships including creating a welcoming and positive culture and ethos. At one project eating together proved very effective in achieving this aim:

> "Certain people in the group are quite shy or they just find it hard to talk but having food opened it up because you have to talk. One of them opened up and said, you know, this is the only thing I look forward to each week" (Interviewee 11).

6.1.3   Workforce Diversity

It is well known that there is a lack of diversity within the broader sports coaching community. Some of the interviewees indicated that their projects benefited from having experienced and mature BAME coaches who were able to connect with BAME participants in ways that other coaches may not be able to. It was also noted that these coaches were positive role models particularly when they had grown up in disadvantaged communities and therefore understood first-hand some of the pressures that participants experience on a day to day basis.

6.1.4   Understanding of the local context

Interviewees suggested that it was important to have good local knowledge of the primary issues relevant to the particular cohort such as local tensions between different groups of young people. The value of this knowledge was key to designing appropriate projects, to recruiting young people and to engaging meaningfully with young people within the projects. It was also important in being able to access additional support for some young people.

6.1.5   'Right' Sport

There were different sports that were selected for the case study projects and interviewees described how different sports offered different opportunities to engage young people and to promote positive outcomes for young people. Team sports were valued for creating opportunities for connecting and bonding with others and thereby developing teamwork and communication skills. Individual sports such as boxing were valuable for young people who lack confidence or who do not consider themselves to be sporty to able to engage in, and see progress on an individual level, and were therefore useful for developing self-esteem and confidence in young people who may not wish to engage in team sports for example:

> "They are in a gym where they are not competing with anyone else, not being judged and in a building where if they are not performing, they won't get kicked out" (Interviewee 2).

The way in which the sporting offer is delivered is important as prior experiences of sport may have been negative and because competition can create tensions between participants if not managed well. An interviewee suggested that in mainstream competitive sport, children and young people will only be selected for the team if they are talented and most of the young people that were targeted for these projects would not be sufficiently skilled to be selected. Competition and personal development were both believed to be important in motivating inactive young people to become more physically active.

6.1.6   Multi-Agency Working

A key strength of some of the case study organisations was their ability to work with other local organisations to ensure that young people can access specialist services when these are considered to be necessary:

> "... we work very closely with Alder Hey [Children's Hospital] and we have a bank of mentors and counsellors, that within 12 hours will pick these kids up and do initial assessment with them..." (Interviewee 4).

Good relationships with local police was considered valuable particularly in trying to prevent young people being criminalised as an early age as this potentially results in greater problems in the future:

> "They don't want to criminalise a young person, if it can be helped, as [such young people] can prove to be a bigger problem in a few years' time" (Interviewee 4).

6.2   Challenges

The following section summarises the key factors that were identified as presenting challenges for the projects.

6.2.1   Timeframe

The most commonly mentioned challenge was the short lead time in which to plan and implement the projects. This issue was compounded by delays in funding being released by Sport England.

Another challenge was the short duration of the projects. Whilst interviewees agreed that the summer was an important time to be able to offer activities, interviewees suggested that six weeks is a short time frame in which to be able to deliver meaningful opportunities for young people. It was suggested that where projects engaged with new participants the first three weeks of the project can be spent understanding the young people's current needs which is essential in order to try and support them in the longer term. This groundwork is intensive and therefore it is important that there are other opportunities for participants to progress on to after the summer activity to fully capitalise on the work that has been done.

6.2.2   Participant Dynamics

An important challenge for projects was to ensure that the young people that were involved in projects did not present a threat to each other. This was particularly problematic where the participants were recruited from a broad geographical area and where staff had limited information about the young people recruited to the project. In one project (Fight for Peace) the recruitment did not go as anticipated and as a result the participants were a mix of local young people and young people referred by the Youth Offending Team. The needs of these two groups in terms of delivery were not always compatible.

6.2.3   Voluntary Participation

Not all young people involved in the projects were there voluntarily. In some cases, they were required to attend as a result of court orders, and this meant that not all participants were willing to engage in the projects from the outset. In such cases staff worked intensively to overcome the barriers.

6.2.4   Physical Preparedness

Many of the participants in the projects were inactive and therefore engaging in sport and physical activity and sport provided by the projects was challenging initially as some young people were starting from both low fitness and low physical literacy levels. Project staff adapted their approach in order to ensure that young people were able to access the sport and physical activity at a level that met their needs to ensure that they were able to access and engage with the physical elements of the projects.

6.2.5   Positive Pathway

The time-limited nature of the projects meant that where new participants were engaged, project leads sought to transition them into other available opportunities to continue their engagement and physical activity. This was challenging because young people typically want to continue with the project they have attended over the summer and starting somewhere new is not a desirable option for them. Given the efforts that staff exerted to engage the participants in their projects this issue is perceived as a wasted opportunity to provide longer term support for vulnerable young people:

> "Give the kid the number of a boxing club and you support them that day. Take them to the club and support that club and you support them for a lifetime" (Interviewee 2).

For the projects that worked with local communities to offer diversionary activities over the summer break this issue is less pertinent since the positive pathway was typically in place already:

> "We'll get into building up the relationships, so they know that they can come every Monday and Friday and they can do some sport and some activity of their choice. And once you've got those relationships you can start educating them and working on stuff" (Interviewee 3).

> "Once they've got that progression, we try and develop and support direct and skills they need to be able to achieve in the future, whether that education, training, employment. And they are involved with us as long as it takes to do that process" (Interviewee 5).

6.2.6   Attractiveness of Sport

Whilst the case study projects successfully reached their target groups it was suggested by some interviewees that there are many vulnerable young people for whom sport is not perceived to be sufficiently attractive for them to choose to be engaged in. For some young people the attractiveness of the rewards they perceive to be associated with gang and drug culture are greater than they perceive to be available through sport.

6.2.7   Engagement of Marginalised Young People

It was suggested by case study interviewees that engaging marginalised young people is much more challenging and time-intensive than engaging with less hard-to-reach young people. Building relationships with young people takes time and therefore where projects seek to engage with new young people this needs to be taken account of in the planning of projects.

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School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
LE11 3TU

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