Innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic: Volunteers and voluntary sports organisations in England

Case Study 6: Getting involved in the local community

Research report for Sport England
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Sport: Wrestling
Size of club: 400
No of volunteers: Unknown
Own premises/land: None. Club is run through a religious community centre.
Age range: 5 to 75+
Paid staff: Coaches

What is the innovation?
During the Covid-19 lockdown period, the wrestling club diverted their volunteering into supporting the local community. Club volunteers contributed to a food service that provided food to those unable to prepare meals or visit the shops to buy food. The volunteers helped prepare and deliver 300 meals per day to the local community.

Why was this innovation implemented?
The club, as part of the religious community centre, had always engaged with the local community. During the Covid-19 lockdown, it became apparent that vulnerable members of the community needed a food service and so the club got involved:

“It was all hands on deck really and ...because our volunteers wanted to do it ...nobody really thought of it as hard work, because when you want to do something, it’s then a lot easier than when you don’t.”

What impact did this innovation have on sports volunteers?
All of the club’s volunteers were needed to manage 300 food deliveries per day. This was made possible because the volunteers shared a passion for their club and community. The activity fostered volunteer cohesion and teamwork:

“It was all hands on deck really and ...because our volunteers wanted to do it ...nobody really thought of it as hard work, because when you want to do something, it’s then a lot easier than when you don’t.”

What were the challenges faced when implementing this innovation?
The club were aware of how the Covid-19 pandemic threatened people’s mental health and that there was a risk of burnout among volunteers. Whilst volunteering was itself rewarding, it was also important to maintain a balance to health and well-being.

“It’s just a lot of hard work...[Volunteers] also need to time out. It’s important to look after yourself as much as you try to look after everybody else.”

What prevented this innovation from happening before Covid-19 restrictions?
The club have always been community minded, although the energy of members and volunteers typically gets channelled towards the sport. The unusual Covid-19 circumstances meant that the club were able to extend their community involvement.
Eight short case studies that showcase innovative practices in sports volunteering:

Case Study 1: Introducing technology to enhance participation

Case Study 2: Forming buddy groups to enhance engagement

Case Study 3: Using a survey of members to spark modernisation

Case Study 4: Using social media to attract new members

Case Study 5: Purchasing own land to offer an outdoor format of the sport

Case Study 6: Getting involved in the local community

Case Study 7: Implementing club membership management app

Case Study 8: Increasing Volunteer Inclusion and Diversity