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Everton in the Community

Developing Communities

EitC Premier League Kicks and National Citizen Service

Final Report

October 2020

Dr Chris Stone
Dr Jen Hough

Liverpool Hope University
SEARCH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the staff working on the EitC PL Kicks and NCS programmes during the periods of research for making us feel welcome, discussing crucial aspects of the work with us and making the experience thoroughly enjoyable. Likewise, thank you to the young people for sharing their thoughts and not giving us a hard time for asking so many questions.

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PREMIER LEAGUE KICKS AND NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EitC deliver two major youth engagement programmes: Premier League Kicks and National Citizen Service. The former is rooted in a traditional open access youth work approach and operates twice weekly throughout the year. The latter is focused around an intense four-week programme aimed at 16-year olds that involves two weeks of residential engagement followed by the development and completion of a social action project.

The two programmes attract quite different demographics. PL Kicks participants are predominantly male and live locally to the Spellow Lane Hub where the sessions take place. NCS participants tend to be from areas suffering less deprivation and has an even gender balance. PL Kicks is more ethnically diverse but such participants tend not to be engaged as strongly as their white peers.

The strengths of EitC's youth engagement programmes are the strong relationships that develop between young people and staff and the (potential) connections between these programmes and other more targeted programmes within the organisation's portfolio.

Safe Spaces

The PL Kicks intervention provides a safe space for young people to express themselves and create distance between themselves and risks associated with growing up in the area. However, it must be seen as more than just a physical space. Youth engagement must encompass notions of social space defined by social practices and relationships, cultural space where values, rights and cultures are created and discursive space that is able to accommodate differing perspectives and forms of expression, where there is room for dialogue, confrontation, deliberation and critical thinking. These are the criteria that could be used as measures of success with indicators for each that allow records to be maintained in the form of reflections embedded within the engagement process.

Positive activities and social action

The activities provided by PL Kicks are limited, particularly for young women, but participants are on the whole content with the offer available. That may be because they have become conditioned by their own social situations to be grateful for any such provision. NCS shows that presenting young people with an opportunity to plan and take ownership of a social action project that is meaningful to their own sense of community, injustice or wellbeing has positive outcomes. The PL Kicks offer could be extended to include the possibility of young people involved 'buying-in' to a common goal of which they can take ownership and is pertinent to their own sense of community and social concerns. For those whose concerns do not extend to the wider community due to personal circumstances and adverse childhood experiences placing them at risk the impact of playing football needs to be evaluated in terms of the ludic qualities of the activity itself as much as the wider developmental associations. When workshops are put on, their design needs to be addressed to make them more engaging within the respective structures of PL Kicks and NCS.

Trusted relationships

Much of the work that takes place with young people is about building trust and building relationships - between young people themselves, between young people and the staff and between young people and wider society. PL Kicks and NCS provide a space to develop 'weak ties' between young people that may or may not develop into stronger bonds or useful connections. The notion of weak ties is seen as crucial in building social capital through 'bridging' from one group to another. PL Kicks in particular provides the opportunity for young people to build trusting relationships with staff over time who are seen as mentors, advisors, buddies and confidantes at different times and for different participants. The consequent support that can be offered is reliant on building such relationships and this is a great strength of the programme.

Non-Formal and Informal Education

Education in its most holistic form is about engaging with people in a way that makes them want to learn. The very nature of open access youth work is providing the information and opportunities for young people to make qualified decisions based on that information when the need arises. What is important is that the advice on offer is well informed in the first place and young people respect the advice due to the way it is being given and the person from whom they are receiving it. The difficulty with youth work that promotes informal education such as that described here is being able to demonstrate the outcome of such conversations, which is what many funders expect. Arguably, however, such engagement is the outcome and when demonstrating the impact of the work, it is about demonstrating how and when such conversations are taking place.

Opportunities, Aspirations & Personal Development

Aspirations for the future differ greatly between participants on NCS and PL Kicks. The former tend to come from areas less rooted in deprivation and low socioeconomic background than the latter. Nonetheless, self-confidence was the key outcome remarked on by participants on both programmes. There are qualitative differences in what that means to different individuals and there will also be quantitative differences in levels that were not measured as part of this research but should be part of future evaluations. As confidence grows and the PL Kicks programme has developed there is a growing culture of volunteering. This needs further development and broadening particularly given the employability programmes that already exist within the EitC portfolio and the potential opportunities available within Everton FC more widely.

Support Structures

One of the strengths of the youth engagement programmes is how they benefit from wider support structures through the expansive set of projects within the EitC portfolio and wider expertise that predominantly serves the football club. Within the programmes themselves, participants can be categorised based on risk factors and protective factors. Other factors should also be included as more is understood in terms of participants' potential for development so that young people can begin to be seen in terms of capacity for and direction of development as well as concerns about risk. The question then is how Everton in the Community as an organisation can impact upon the structural inequalities

that the young people with whom they engage are facing. There is a great opportunity to utilise their reputation and relationship with Everton Football Club in order to amplify the voices of young people and local communities and advocate for social change beyond the plight and personal challenges of individual young people. It is this kind of structural support that is truly empowering. EitC can be crucial in developing 'structural resilience' through an asset-based model for community development and youth engagement.

Conclusions

The PL Kicks programme attempts to address areas of concern by providing safe spaces and the opportunity for self-development through building trusting relationships and gaining other key social skills. NCS aims to build better understanding through social mixing and encouraging collaborative unions across different communities to aid a more cohesive society. The latter tends to develop young people's sense of independence and self-confidence, as well as exposing the inherent social conscience extant within the majority of participants. The former provides a gateway for young people to receive support if needed but is predominantly somewhere to relax and have fun.

The PL Kicks programme housed in the Youth Zone at Spellow Lane is a good example of open access youth work that provides a safe and secure environment for participants to develop new relationships built on trust – with other participants and with staff, the latter acting as important adult intermediaries between protection, supervision and motivation. Through these modes of interaction, staff become positive role models and trusted confidantes and are able to encourage positive interactions amongst participants who gain experience of forming 'weak ties' amongst themselves.

Likewise, the Everton NCS programme is staffed by a committed team with varying levels of experience and operates well within the constraining critique of the national programme itself. Participants were positive about their experiences during the programme but improvements could be made in terms of how the workshops in phase two are designed and managed as well as connecting young people with the wider aims of EitC.

There needs to be more evidence showing what participants are gaining from their attendance, no matter how small or large their progress is. This should be set against specific criteria that are holistic enough to not dictate the engagement process but do reflect what staff and young people feel the aims of the programmes are, in line with the overarching mission of Everton in the Community. A progressive approach towards evaluation should be adopted that involves a methodology more embedded within the work itself. It should reflect the engaged approach on which the foundations of youth work are built as well as being critically distant enough for reflective processes to be of value.

Shifting the perception from 'at risk' to 'resiliently resourceful' young people

Young people who attend PL Kicks sessions have low ambitions and their expectations for the future are limited by attitudes ingrained over multiple generations. The priority at present is to provide a space that is safe and secure, fun and enjoyable, where young people have the opportunity to develop social relationships and build trust in supportive adults who can steer them away from negative experiences. This should not be

underestimated and is the minimum expectation for open access youth work. However, alongside being able to signpost young people who need support in overcoming problems in their lives, more could be done to help participants develop positive attributes and take control of their lives.

Relationships between staff and participants have been built successfully in order to help young people who are perceived to be 'at risk' enough to intervene and challenge their choices, providing them with alternative routes for self-management. They should also be strong enough to encourage young people to build on their inherent resilience and resourcefulness to help them challenge their perceived limitations.

There is clearly a culture of support and safety built around fun and 'banter' that has been developed within PL Kicks and NCS. With the PL Kicks sessions in particular, a culture of opportunity is beginning to be developed as well but this must be seen as more fundamental to the purpose of the sessions whilst not losing the informality attached to relationship building. Fundamental to youth work is supporting young people to explore their own identities and ambitions as they progress through a significant life stage transition. If certain aspects of those identities are to some extent already fixed by their socio-economic position and localised expectations centred on 'risk' and 'deprivation' then part of the challenge for youth workers is to encourage young people to embody alternative narratives as part of their self-definition.

This should be done as part of an asset-based community and youth development approach that runs not only through the youth engagement strategy but connecting community development programmes within education and employability. In this way young people can see a place for themselves within the organisation (not necessarily in any formal sense as a participant, volunteer or employee but as an agent of change), their local environment (including the organisation but extending into the community, their family and 'the authorities') and the mutual future trajectory that might be co-developed.

Investing in staff training needs

The strength of any youth work team is the combination of skills, interests, characteristics and background that maximises their ability to engage with different kinds of young people with different kinds of issues. It is important to continually assess the 'mix' that is on offer, particularly around current issues relating to youth culture and identity politics. The better the staff knowledge around such topics as social media bullying, sexuality, ethnicity, mental wellbeing or criminal activity, coupled with the excellent engagement skills and understandings of the socio-economic situation in which participants exist, the greater the capacity for informal education.

Young people's knowledge of such issues should be seen as a resource and participants themselves encouraged to become 'experts' to show how increasing practical knowledge can be used positively to help inform and educate others as well as themselves. Where there are ongoing issues effecting young people, 'experts' could become part of the staff team. Such expertise may come from outside agencies, from staff who supplement their local knowledge with wider understandings of the issues and through helping young people themselves to nurture and challenge their own opinions and experiences.

Residentials, unique experiences and cross pollination of projects

NCS had a greater effect on those participants who were from more insecure backgrounds – whether that background be defined in general terms such as their socio-economic situation or in terms of more personal characteristics. Young people's identities are extremely fluid and life is often characterised by self-consciousness. For participants who already possess self-confidence and have opportunities to be involved in extra-curricular activities there was a level of ambivalence about their experience. For those with lower expectations due to their socio-economic position there was evidence of growth when asked to self-reflect.

This would suggest that there are benefits to be gained more for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Opportunities to run targeted programmes and events alongside PL Kicks and NCS that combine the best of both should be available. Such targeted programmes should provide new experiences, widen social networks, increase expectations and aspirations but be designed through dialogue with participants. Residentials provide liminal moments, outside of 'normal' life to redefine personal and communal identities. This should be made more available to the young people attending PL Kicks sessions.

One of the strengths of the youth engagement programmes is their location within and relationship to other EitC provision and the wider support structures available from the football club itself. There are good examples of how young people, identified to be in need of extra support, have been signposted into other interventions provided by EitC but this seems to be based on a deficit model rather than the more constructive Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) model. If the PL Kicks programme is a gateway for engagement that allows staff to develop trusted relationships with young people in order to encourage positive behaviour, closer links to the employability programmes should be developed as well as seeking creative solutions to building on the 'weak ties' that young people develop within sessions that respond to the barriers facing participants in terms of social mobility.

An annual 'Community Day' that brings participants together to provide something for the wider local community, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging by them having a place, purpose and common goal, but which also allows participants to contribute as much or as little as they want, could provide an initial focus point to build on the points above.

Diversity and demographics

The socio-economic data about young people on the programmes is not collected but it can be extrapolated from the residential information alongside interview and observational data that participants on the PL Kicks programme face multiple challenges related to the social context in which they are living. Meanwhile, NCS may attract young people from a wider socio-economic scale, yet it is mainly encouraging social mixing across different strata of a relatively middle-class participant base.

The main criticism of the PL Kicks programme would be that it is reinforcing gendered differences. It is an overwhelmingly male space in terms of participants. Interactions between the young men and women in attendance are managed well and seem to be positive. However, strategies on how to change the gender balance need to be considered

as well as continuing to explore the best ways to challenge the dominance of football within the sessions and beyond.

The ethnic profile of PL Kicks is far more reflective than NCS of the local population more generally. However, more could be done in engaging young people from BAME backgrounds as the length of engagement amongst young people from ethnic minority communities is generally shorter than within the white majority. Positive action around the employment of a more ethnically diverse work force could be one solution.

Monitoring & Evaluation

The challenge for the PL Kicks programme is to retain the informality of open access youth work whilst simultaneously being able to formalise the outcomes enough to be able to demonstrate young people's development without such processes becoming too onerous.

There has been an increasing desire to embed evaluative processes within youth work that is reflective of the softer outcomes that such work aims to achieve rather than the hard outputs that quantify the work without recognising where small steps in development are achieved. The Views system, for example, has adequate functionality for such monitoring regimes to be undertaken. However, it either still requires an increased administrative burden on practitioners themselves or is engaged with at some disconnect between the practical work and the reporting of such work.

The ideal compromise is perhaps to identify a specific role that encompasses both youth work engagement with the sessions but with the primary purpose for collecting the stories that evidence youth work for what it is, i.e. building positive relationships in order to empower young people to make a difference in their own lives. Thus, the reporting of progress is the result of building the same sort of relationships with participants but the ultimate goal is to narrate the process of change rather than be a key operator in such change. This could be achieved through a closer relationship between students studying youth work at university and the sessions or through creating a paid post with that as part of the job description. In this way the monitoring and evaluation becomes part of a continuous process more akin to Participatory Action Research approaches advocated by progressive educationalists.

Recommendations

1. Reassess the PL Kicks offer in terms of number of sessions available at the Youth Zone and numbers of young people attending in order to develop stronger relationships with more of the participants and vary the offer available in order to increase the capacity of staff to affect actual change in different ways.

2. Consider the offer for young women and those from BAME backgrounds. The aims of PL Kicks are barely being met in terms of young women's participation. Furthermore, empowering them to take control of their future in positive and realistic ways should be more clearly expressed. Develop a strategy for diversifying the staff team in terms of ethnicity and explore the long-term retention of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

3. A more 'formal' approach to informal education. A way of showing progression and growth. Make a more identifiable connection between informal, non-formal and formal education without the need for formalising the engagement that the open youth work approach depends upon for success.

4. Through discussion between staff and with young people themselves, develop clear criteria for improving developmental aspects of the offer to young people without losing the informal nature of the sessions and relationships. This will help change the overriding culture from 'protective' to 'developmental'. Young people must be able to see that there is more to PL Kicks sessions than simply 'playing footie'. Whilst no participant should be forced, coerced or feel excluded for not being more engaged, a clear understanding of the possibilities open to them should be regularly reiterated. Choice is the foundation on which youth work settings should operate but developing the work to encourage young people to see that other options might have some value as well as the football offer is a necessity.

5. Each member of PL Kicks staff takes ownership of a particular issue. Having a 'champion' for each area that may concern young people and their development (e.g. LGBTQ+, racism, gender, social justice, CSE, healthy living, county lines exploitation, economic inequality, etc.) would build confidence in the staff team and show further commitment to supporting participants' development. Each champion could be paired with a member of university staff with academic expertise in that area for the mutual benefit of learning from one another. This would strengthen the partnership of EitC and Liverpool Hope University and provide specialist support and developmental opportunities for PL Kicks and Hope staff, improve community engagement and share good practice.

6. Raising the aspirations of young people could also be linked to the local universities by forging stronger bonds between the institutions. Informally encouraging young people to view further study as a possibility by breaking down the often self-imposed barriers to this pathway (through organised visits to campuses, 'Pre-Freshers' events etc. post Covid-19 restrictions) could open up new possibilities to the young people and help them realise that they can achieve more than they may believe, even simply by becoming familiar with the spaces. Similarly, develop a stronger working relationship with the employability side of EitC as an embedded aspect of the youth engagement work.

7. Use the NCS model to develop an approach for working with some of the young people that attend PL Kicks sessions for whom the former programme is not desirable. In other words, provide more opportunities to stretch the participants beyond their comfort zones. Expand trips to football tournaments to become wider learning experiences. Increase the opportunities for short residentials. Connect PL Kicks with the corporate charitable aims of the football club through planning and delivery of an annual social action project, e.g. an EFC Community Day, that will develop further young people's sense of belonging and ownership of the Everton PL Kicks identity.

8. Develop a more coordinated approach and way of monitoring young people's pathways into more formalised volunteering opportunities.

    - The NCS programme is wide reaching and has the aim of activating young people's communality and potential to affect change. However, subsequent connection with wider EitC objectives is limited or unrecorded.

    - PL Kicks can act very much as a gateway for those that begin to take on informal volunteering responsibilities. There is of course limited capacity to develop more formal volunteering within PL Kicks but there is enormous potential within the wider Everton family.

9. Design a pathway that leads to volunteering opportunities abroad. This could be through attaching an Everton in the Community element to pre-season tours whereby partnerships with youth organisations should be established in destination cities. Alternatively, partnerships with youth organisations working with similarly disenfranchised young people in other countries should be sought and cultural exchanges can take place with a small number of young people who have demonstrated their commitment to their volunteering 'careers'. This can be used as a carrot to encourage young people to volunteer in the first place as well as to maintain commitment. In this way they become ambassadors for the organisation that has helped develop them as well as gaining experiences that are likely to be unavailable to them otherwise.

10. The following should form the basis of evaluation:

    - Dialogue – the foundation for learning outcomes in a youth work setting. Meaningful dialogue is not always immediately clear. But as soon as a particular issue is raised and becomes apparent an initial reflection should be recorded. This can then be updated as the conversation develops. It may be that this happens over a very short period of one particular session in which case the whole journey can be recorded simply in terms of the context, issue and resolution. However, it may be an on-going discussion amongst the young people, between participants and staff as well as amongst staff themselves.

    - Storytelling workshops should be held in order to capture appropriate qualitative 'data'. External facilitators could be used to maintain standards of objectivity if so desired. Facilitation could be taken on by staff members as such a format for evaluation becomes more established.

    - One means of maintaining and increasing informal education is through evidencing staff knowledge base. It is thus recommended that learning and training in relation to current and ongoing issues affecting young people is encouraged. When such learning is used in practice, which may not happen but does not mean it is not of value, this should be clearly shown. This should not be seen as the reason for undertaking such learning.

    - A focus on key drivers for individual and collective change amongst local young people.

        - Self-awareness of their situation and how it can be changed

- Forming and developing new connections within and beyond the sessions
- Challenging pre-conceived ideas
- Self-initiated social action projects (with a clear definition of what that means for local young people)
- Evidence of self-reliance
- Creating opportunities for developing the above (even if they fail to achieve those aims)

11. This report should be seen as the beginning of an ongoing process that encourages critical reflection on the part of the staff and begins the process of working with young people to develop the youth engagement strategies for those that need it to focus on extricating themselves from poverty, challenging deeply ingrained attitudes around their social worlds and seeing the possibilities of long-term commitment from a local institution such as Everton Football Club and Everton in the Community.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Everton in the Community

One of the claims made by Everton in the Community (EitC) is that they, "...provide life-changing opportunities particularly for young people, aiming to give them a fresh start in life and opportunities to grow, develop and become active and engaged members of society."[1]

Some of these opportunities are provided through the Education and Employability provision of the organisation, including the Everton Football College (formerly Everton Free School)[2] and New Futures Pathways Programme (formerly Working Futures and Premier League Works)[3] - the social impact of which have been previously reported as part of the partnership between EitC and Liverpool Hope University[4].

This report is focused on youth engagement opportunities provided by EitC that are based on more traditional youth work models that aim to provide such opportunities through non-formal approaches. The two primary programmes through which this is delivered are Premier League Kicks (PL Kicks) and the National Citizen Service (NCS).

Both PL Kicks and NCS would fall under the remit of a 'Universal' early intervention as outlined in the Government's recent Serious Violence Strategy (see below) as both programs are, 'administered to everyone within a defined population regardless of risk' and tend to be 'soft-touch and deliver a range of positive impacts ranging from behavioural outcomes to educational attainment and health.'

Both are also able to refer any safeguarding concerns to more 'targeted' programmes or organisations, which have a more specific and individualised approach[5].

[1] https://www.evertonfc.com/community/about-us/purpose-vision-mission
[2] https://www.evertonfc.com/community/employment-and-education/the-projects/everton-football-college
[3] https://www.evertonfc.com/community/employment-and-education/the-projects/new-futures-programme
[4] https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/research/documents/SEARCH - Social Impact of Everton Free School Report.pdf
https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/research/documents/SEARCH - EitC Employability SROI Report.pdf
[5] HM Government (2018) Serious Violence Strategy. London: Home Office (p42) available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf

1.2 Premier League Kicks

PL Kicks is funded by the Premier League and is delivered by the charitable arms of 90 professional football clubs across England and Wales. The vision of the programme is, "inspire children and young people to achieve their potential and improve their wellbeing..."[6]

According to the Premier League website PL Kicks has the following aims:

- Increase playing, coaching and officiating opportunities in football and a range of sports (8-18yrs)
- Enhance physical and mental wellbeing, including self-esteem, ambition and social skills
- Strengthen communities with a culture of volunteering, social action and positive role models – supporting education, training and employment pathways (focusing on 16-25yrs)
- Work in partnership with young people, the police and other stakeholders to support the younger generation with the societal challenges they face (e.g. youth violence) and to improve community safety
- Inspire young people to develop positive, supportive relationships with one another and the authorities
- Promote integration and champion equality, diversity and inclusion

This is done through a focus on employing local people as key workers, "with 20 per cent of the coaching and delivery staff being former participants, often hailing from the same area in which they are now working."

EitC works in partnership with the Premier League Charitable Fund, Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver numerous PL Kicks sessions across Merseyside each week for young people aged between 8-19.[7]

The research on which this report is based was carried out with participants in the age group 12-19 at sessions held every Tuesday and Thursday evening at the EitC Hub, Spellow Lane, L4. Observation was carried out at sessions over a six month period from February–July 2019. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 14 young people and 6 youth workers.

The sessions are modelled on an open access youth work approach. From the staff perspective, the main aims of the programme are:

- To provide an alternative to engaging in anti-social behaviour
- Provide a safe space to socialise with friends and meet new people

Bearing this in mind the findings are guided by a perspective that identifies the positive outcomes, in terms of reacting to and supporting young people at risk of anti-social behaviour, and in relation to the interactions that take place and the social spaces that are created for young people. It is also informed by a critique rooted in dominant understandings of youth work as a more proactive process of empowerment.

Figures for the period 1 September 2018 - 31 August 2019 show a total of 1489 individuals attended at least once. There is a small amount of replication in this data but for the most part is an accurate reflection of attendance. For the purposes of this research, young people were considered to have been engaged in the PL Kicks programme if they

[6] https://www.premierleague.com/communities/programmes/community-programmes/pl-PL Kicks
[7] https://www.evertonfc.com/community/youth-engagement-programmes/the-projects/PL Kicks

attended eight sessions within the research period between September 2018 - August 2019. This generally shows commitment for a month if the sessions were attended consecutively.

It could be that participation was intermittent, meaning a different kind of engagement, but that shows that such individuals were willing to return to the sessions every few weeks. This provides a baseline attendance of 397 young people that we would consider to be engaged with the PL Kicks programme to a level that it will have some effect[8].

An important aspect of this is to undertake some research to establish why more than 1000 young people engage with the programme for such a limited time.

It is a strength that the programme is reaching such large numbers but concerning that many do not attend more persistently. This may be due to them attending sessions elsewhere and just coming along to the Spellow Lane sessions a few times with their mates meaning they are still being engaged but it may be for numerous other reasons.

The profile of those we are classifying as engaged can be seen in figures 1-5.

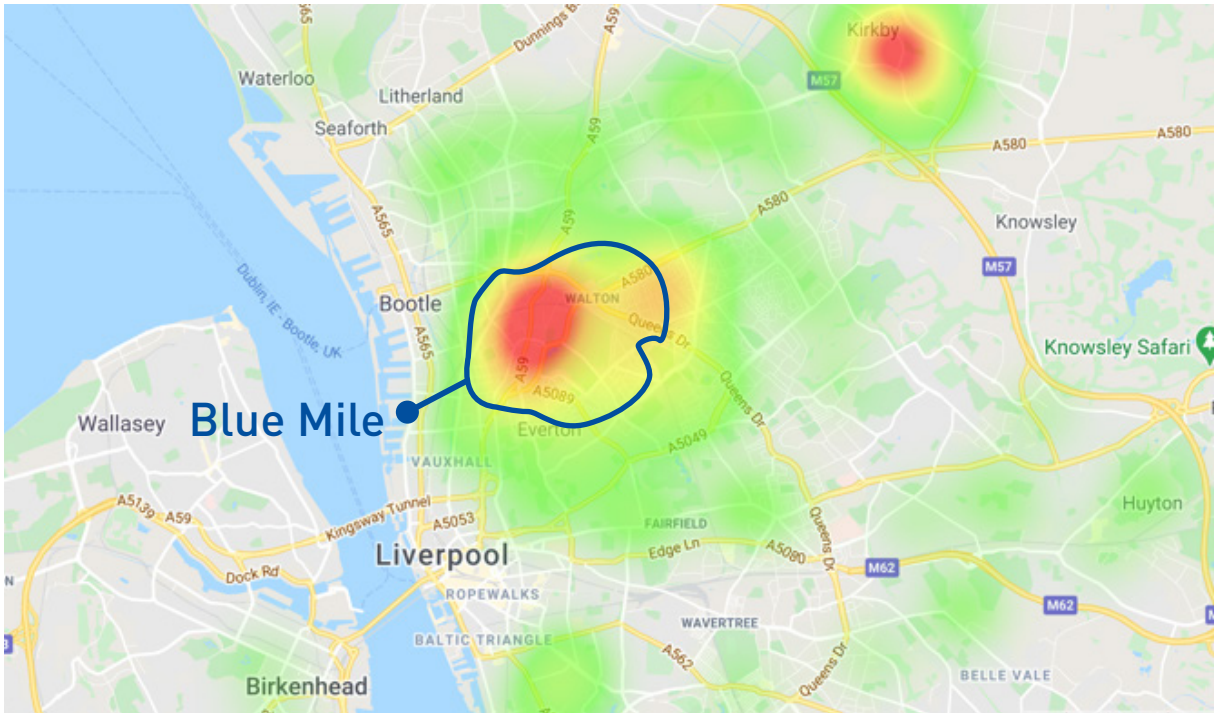


Fig.1: Home address of participants attending PL Kicks at Spellow Lane

[8] It is acknowledged that attending just once shows some engagement with the programme that is not to be overlooked and such individuals may have benefited from attending just a few times but in terms of the findings detailed in this report in which building trust over time is so crucial it would be difficult to claim that they apply to such infrequent or short term engagement.

Fig.2: Age Profile

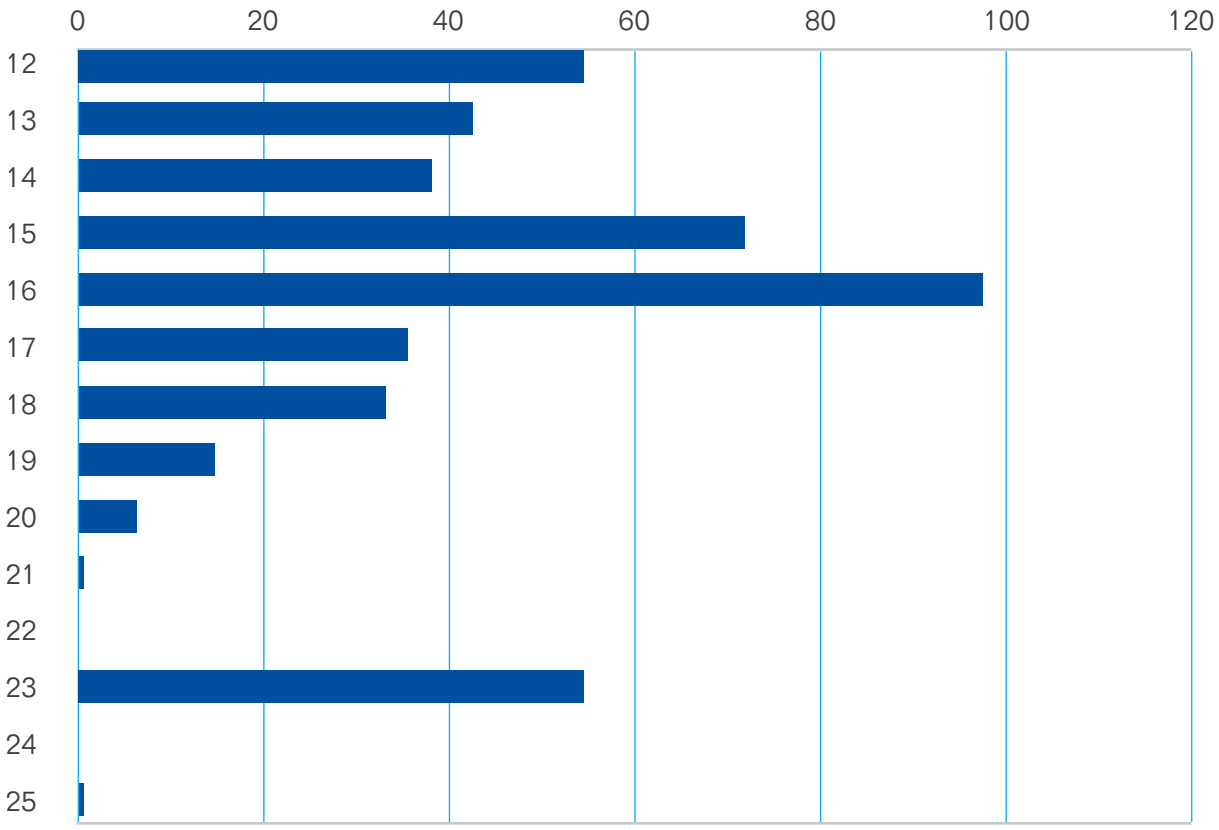
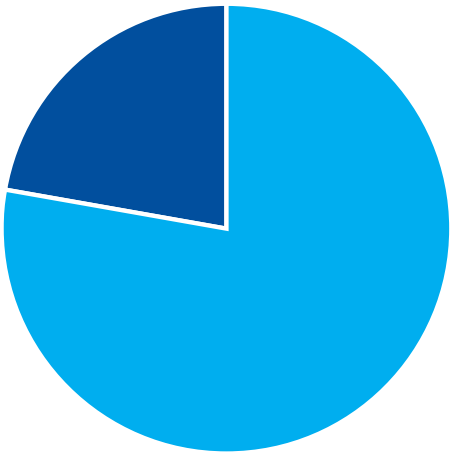
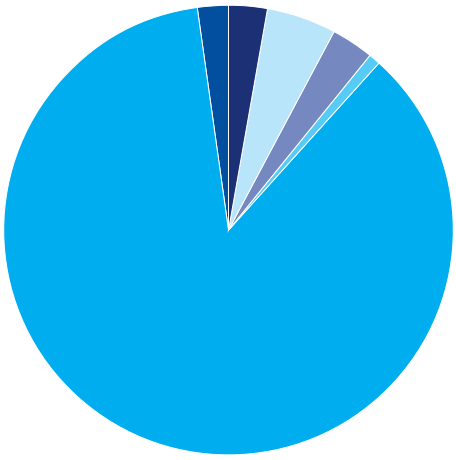


Fig3: Gender



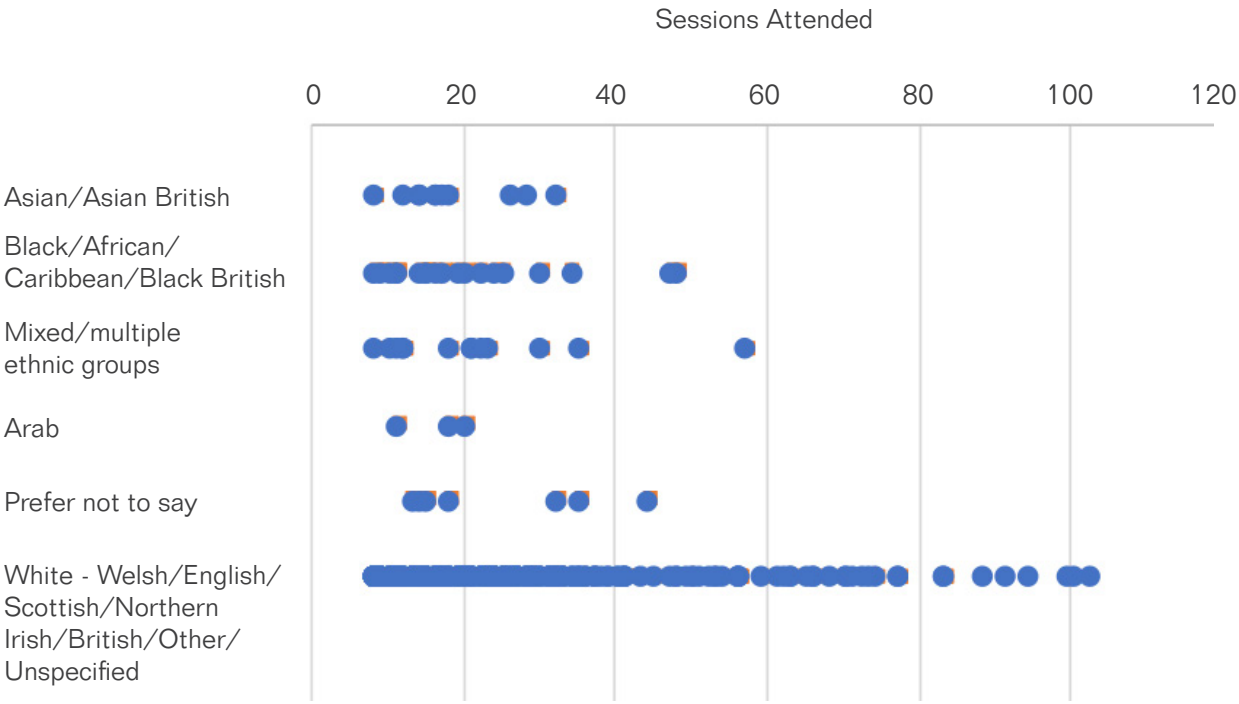
Male	310	78%
Female	87	22%

Fig.4: Ethnicity



Asian/Asian British	11	3%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	19	5%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	13	3%
Arab	3	1%
White - Welsh/English/Scottish/ Northern Irish/British/Other/Unspecified	344	87%
Prefer not to say	7	2%

Fig.5: Number of sessions attended by ethnicity



As can be seen from the heat map in figure 1, the large majority of PL Kicks participants are extremely local and live within the area defined by Everton as the 'Blue Mile'. Numbers are highest for young people approaching school leaving age.

There is a drop off after the age of 12 until rising significantly at the ages of 15-16 before dropping off considerably. As young people change schools they are most likely encouraged to explore new opportunities which then tail off. They then look for more independence in their mid-teenage years when opportunities are still limited by their age and continuing dependency on parental support in most cases.

It is unsurprising that numbers drop as young people approach their 20s. The gender split is heavily skewed towards boys and young men which is unsurprising given the focus on football which, despite women's football now having a much higher profile, is still a sport that is male dominated.

The ethnic profile of participants is fairly reflective of the local population but in terms of long-term engagement the programme is less successful in its retention of young people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds.

1.3 National Citizen Service

The National Citizen Service (NCS) is a national programme funded predominantly by the National Government (98%) with additional income generated through parental contributions and corporate sponsorship (2%)[9].

NCS is promoted as 'a youth program like no other' for 16-17 year olds whereby issues facing young people can be tackled through an experience that 'engages, unites and empowers young people'[10]. The key indicators are as follows:

- Social Cohesion - Cultivating stronger, more integrated communities by fostering understanding between you and your neighbours from different backgrounds.
- Social Mobility - Building essential skills for work and life, making sure you can get ahead and are prepared for whatever the future holds – think of it as investing in our country's future talent.
- Social/Civic Engagement - Engaging you in social action in your community as well as the democratic process, creating more understanding of your responsibilities as a citizen and your potential to affect change.

The focus for the program is a timetable of activities across four consecutive weeks during the school summer holiday period. This is divided up as follows:

NCS Programme Model	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
What?	Outdoor activities in teams of 12-15 young people making friends with people from various backgrounds	Discover hidden talents and develop life skills like public speaking and teamwork	Develop and deliver own social action project in their local community
Standard Summer Model (4 weeks)	Residential 5 days (4 nights)	Residential 5 days (4 nights)	Non-residential 60 hrs over 2 wks

Adapted from Kantar (2020:9)[11]

The research period covered a single wave from start to finish of a four-week programme during summer 2018. Phase 1 consisted of camping in 6-person tents at an outdoor activity centre in Staffordshire.

Outdoor activities included, raft building, climbing (Jacobs Ladder, pegged rock face and adapted tree trunks) – with associated skills such as belaying and positive support, a day long hike of approximately 6 miles, wilderness skills such as building a fire and making a shelter, along with numerous puzzles, games and challenges.

Phase 2 consisted of a residential at a local university's halls of residence where each participant had their own bedroom with shared shower and toilet facilities on each floor housing between 6-12 young people.

[9] According to the NCS Trust's annual report and accounts for the year ending March 2018 a total of £185.7m was invested in the programme. https://wearencs.com/sites/default/files/2018-11/Annual%20Report%202017%20-%202018.pdf

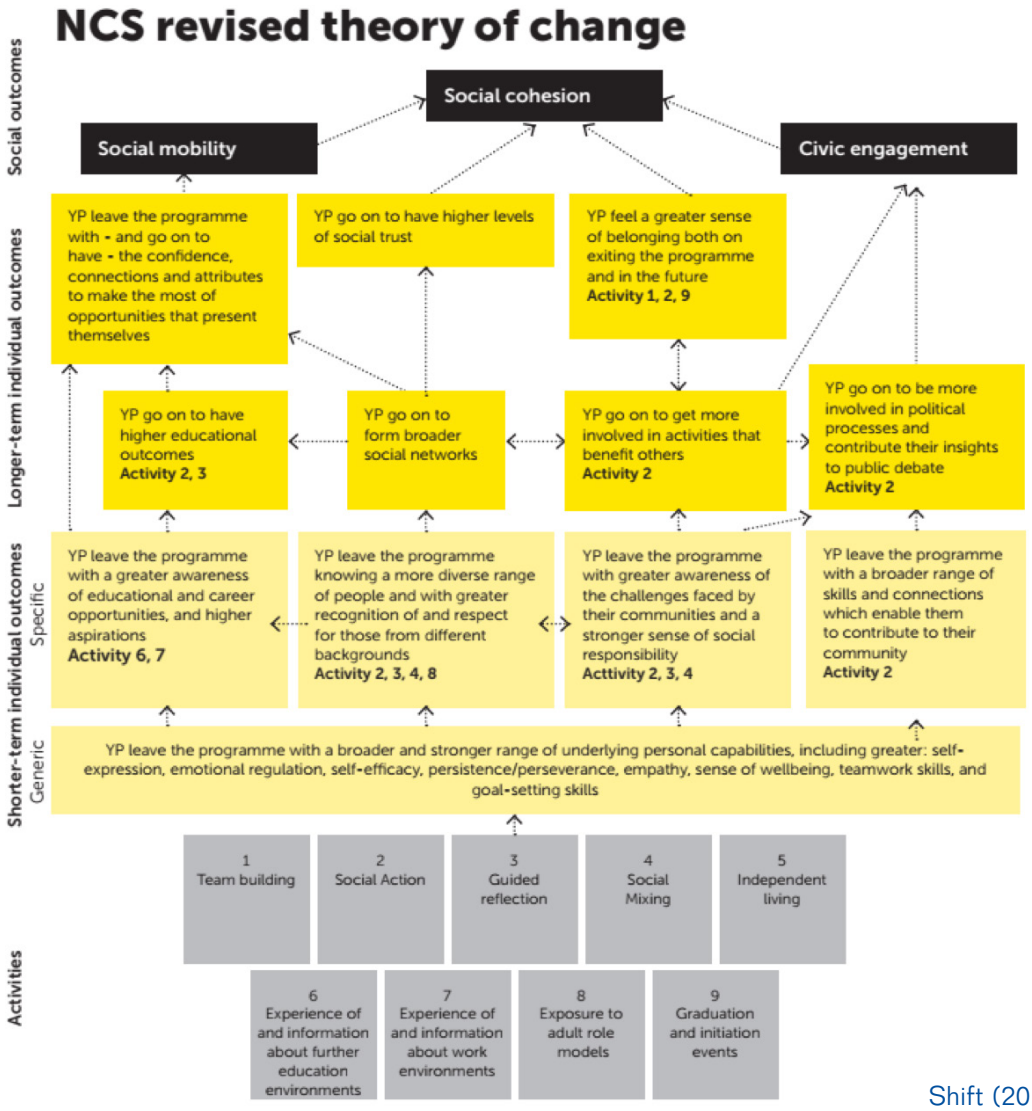
[10] https://wearencs.com/our-objectives-and-impact

[11] Kantar (2020) *National Citizen Service 2018 Evaluation: Main report*. London: DCMS

The following workshops were attended during the day: Drumming, Parliament and the Democratic Process (delivered by UK Youth Parliament); Racism and Stereotyping (supported by the Anthony Walker Foundation); Drugs and Alcohol Awareness; Digital Safeguarding; First Aid; Sport Leadership (not accredited); Finance and Banking (in partnership with Barclays Bank). Fun activities were organised during the evenings, including a treasure hunt, trivia quiz, sporting activities and games and a 'school disco' on the final evening.

Phase 3 was carried out over the final two weeks. The first week began with presentations from local community groups such as the Greenbank Project, Canal & River Trust, James Greenop Foundation and projects within EitC such as Knowsley Veterans Project and EitC disability programme. This was followed by groups working together to plan their social action project, amongst themselves with support from staff and then by reaching out to appropriate members of the local community.

The social action project was then put into operation and carried out in the final week. Projects included support for a homeless family centre in Prescot, organising a food and clothing bank at the Everton Hub, litter picking in Wavertree Park and a cake sale. What all this activity is designed to achieve is explained in the NCS theory of change:



Shift (2017:9)[12]

[12] NCS Theory of Change, completed by social enterprise Shift for the NCS Trust. Shift (2017) NCS *Theory of Change*

The following heat map shows the home addresses of participants on the NCS programme during the research period:

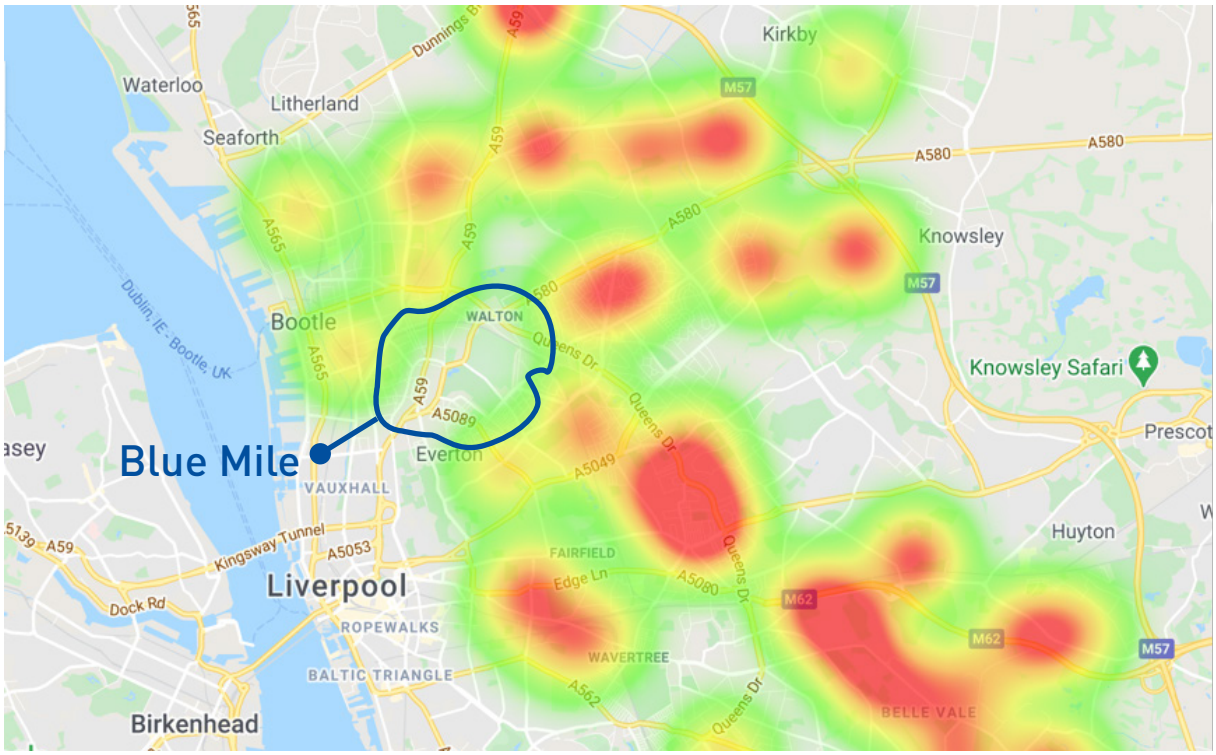


Fig.6: Home address of participants attending NCS during research period

As can be seen the areas from which NCS participants are far more spread out across the region compared to the PL Kicks programme which has a far more localised participation base. Notably, the area classed as the Blue Mile around Goodison Park is virtually uncoloured; the higher numbers of participants, as indicated by the warmer colours, are resident in parts of the city far less effected by deprivation.

The word cloud below summarises the feelings of NCS participants interviewed for the research.

1.4 Current Policy and Research

Introduction

Youth work provision has faced more than a decade of cutbacks as local authority funding has been reduced by successive Governments. Increasingly, formerly public sector services have been provided by Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs), social enterprises and the private sector, funded through charitable sources and private-public partnerships. As a consequence, operations have become target driven and the work dominated by quantifiable outcomes and outputs. The effect of this has been to diminish the practice of open access youth work in favour of targeted youth support work[13].

The DCMS Civil Society Strategy 'Building a Future Society that Works for Everyone'[14] states that, 'The government is committed to making sure all young people have opportunities to develop the skills, networks, and resilience that can improve their life chances, fulfil their potential, and to support them to avoid negative pathways in future…' (p41) and that they recognise, '…the transformational impact that youth services and trained youth workers can have, especially for young people facing multiple barriers or disadvantage.' (p42)

Furthermore, The Home Office has recently committed £11 million to a new Early Intervention Youth Fund to provide support to communities for early intervention and prevention aimed at helping to tackle the root causes of and steer young people away from crime[15]. As part of the Serious Violence Strategy, a multi-faceted approach is proposed to address the increase in violence-related offences in England and Wales. This includes examining early intervention strategies, risk and protective factors and community support. Their findings report that between the ages of 13-19 young people are more likely to commit violent offences, with the peak age being 15 generally, but 19 for the most high-offending individuals. The figures drop most dramatically at the age of 20, at which point it then reduces consistently, so the most at-risk target age range is largely accommodated by the PL Kicks and NCS programs. Other risk factors identified from a variety of sources and studies collated in the report include issues such as:

- Childhood abuse and neglect
- Substance use
- Aggression
- Involved in antisocial behaviour
- Low self-esteem
- Gang membership
- Family socioeconomic status
- Anti-social parents (including substance abuse)
- Poor supervision
- Bullying others
- Urban areas
- High crime
- Local deprivation
- Delinquent peers

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Several of the risk factors identified above come under the banner of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The charity 'Young Minds' identifies ACEs as including issues such as maltreatment, violence and coercion, adversity and adult responsibilities[16]. It also identifies that the majority of young people (52%) do not experience any ACEs at all, while 23% experience one, 16% experience

[13]See St Croix (2016) *Grassroots youth Work: Policy, passion and resistance in practice*. Bristol: Policy Press

[14]DCMS (2018) *Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future Society that Works for Everyone*. London: Cabinet Office available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732765/Civil_Society_Strategy_-_building_a_future_that_works_for_everyone.pdf

[15]HM Government (2018) *Serious Violence Strategy*. London: Home Office available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf

[16]Brennan, R. et al. (2019) 'Adversity and Trauma Informed Practice: A Short Guide for Professionals Working on the Frontline'. Available at https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3091/adversity-and-trauma-informed-practice-guide-for-professionals.pdf

two to three and 9% experience four or more. Those who fall into this last category are seven times more likely to be involved in violence than those who experience no ACEs and 11 times more likely to use illicit substances or end up incarcerated[17]. It is also pertinent to note that, "While ACEs occur across society, they are far more prevalent among those who are poor, isolated or living in deprived circumstances. These social inequalities not only increase the likelihood of ACEs, but also amplify their negative impact."[18]

Furthermore, whilst direct correlations between criminal behaviour and socio-economic position are complex and difficult to justify, it is clear that poverty does have an impact on crime through a multiplicity of causal chains and pathways, all of which may singularly have a weak individual influence but together are associated with experiences of living in poverty. A number of studies, in particular, have found that childhood poverty and the effects of growing up poor does have a strong impact on persistent youth offending. The suggestion is that adverse family, individual, school, neighbourhood and peer factors combine to increase individual susceptibility to crime. In other words, growing up with deprivation does not necessarily lead to criminality but the structural disadvantages associated with such an environment increases that risk[19].

Risk, Resilience and Grit

What much of this narrative amounts to is how political discourse has interpreted the individual's role within a 'risk society'[20] and the neo-liberal preponderance for self-governance, personal liability and individualised responsibility. It has placed individual agency at the centre of poverty reduction with a view to 'developing character and resilience' so that people are better able to help themselves through periods of adversity and hardship. It is recognised that resilience is a product of so called 'stressors' that exist to greater or lesser extents throughout the life course and that, "Challenges facing youth can range from short-term severe stressors to long-term enduring stressors, or to shocking stressful events."[21]

In political terms, though, for young people growing up in areas that are defined by disadvantage, and the full implications of that in terms of increased likelihood of adverse childhood experiences and risk of anti-social or criminal behaviour, resilience is seen as something important that can be developed. Such an understanding arguably misinterprets the original definition of resilience as the, 'ability for a socio-economic household to 'bounce back' from shocks and adversity through the activation and mobilisation of latent social, cultural and economic resources.' It turns a dynamic, relational conception of resilience into a static characteristic or trait to be cultivated – especially amongst those afflicted by socio-material insecurity[22].

Even within studies of resilience following trauma no individual demographic, personality or biological factor has been shown to significantly predict or enhance an individual's resilience[23]. That said, within such trauma-based research, developmental researchers have observed that children who ultimately evidenced resilient outcomes despite facing corrosive life circumstances were able to utilise an array of resilience-promoting factors, including person centred variables (e.g. personality) and socio-contextual factors (e.g. supportive relations)[24].

[18]Webster, C.S. & Kingston, S. (2014) Anti-Poverty Strategies for the UK: Poverty and Crime Review. Project Report. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

[20]See Beck (1992) Risk Society: Towards a new modernity. London: Sage

[21]Zolkoski, S.M. & Bullock, L.M. (2012) 'Resilience in children and youth: A review,' Children and Youth Services Review. 34:2295-2303

[22]Dagdeviren, H., Donoghue, M., & Promberger, M. (2016). Resilience, hardship and social conditions. Journal of Social Policy, 45(1): 1-20; Donoghue, M & Edmiston, D (2019) 'Gritty citizens? Exploring the logic and limits of resilience in UK social policy during times of socio-material insecurity,' Critical Social Policy, 40 (1):7-29.

[23]Southwick, S.M., Bonanno, G.A., Masten, A.S., Panter-Brick, C. & Yehuda, R. (2014) 'Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives,' European Journal of Psychotraumatology. 5(25338):1-14; Saner, E. (2020) 'I'm a survivor! How resilience became the quality we all crave,' Guardian [online], 24 Nov 2020

[24]Werner, E.E. (1995) 'Resilience in development,' Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci. 4:81–8; Bonanno, G.A., Westphal, M. & Mancini, A.D. (2011) 'Resilience to Loss and Potential Trauma,' Annual Review of Clinical Psychology. 7:511–35

Resilience studies do suggest that there are windows of opportunity for facilitating resilience through preventive interventions. The transition years of late adolescence and early adulthood act as a window of opportunity. This is a period of rapid brain development when executive control systems that support better planning and self-regulation are maturing. In addition, opportunities often open during this window as young people find mentors. This confluence of opportunities, planning, support, and motivation set the conditions for positive change[25].

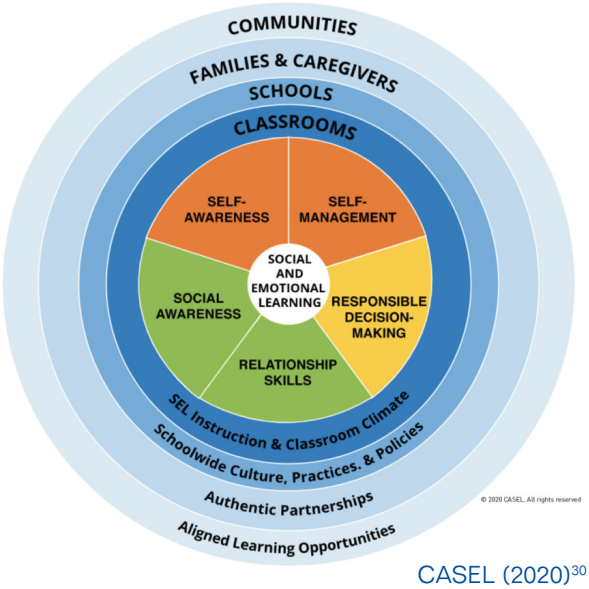
It is noted that not all forms of stress or challenge are 'bad' for children. The development of adaptive skills and self-regulation systems appear to require experience with stress and challenges to optimize for an adaptive and healthy life, in a similar way to the immune system being more effective as a consequence of exposure to disease.

The suggestion made by scholars studying resilience is that interventions targeted at readiness for jobs and education, targeted at alleviating violence and human insecurity, or targeted at social justice to enhance fairness in access to resources are among the most effective ways to enhance resilience[26]. What this suggests is the notion of 'structural resilience' – the building of robust structures in society that provide people with the wherewithal to make a living, secure housing, access good education and health care, and realise their human potential. In other words there is a need to provide people with the resources that facilitate their ability to create a better future and construct meaning in life[27].

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is becoming an increasingly central concept in the development of children, "with implications across learning, building and maintaining relationships, and early support for mental health and wellbeing"[28]. It is generally agreed that SEL is, "The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."[29]

How this is proposedly achieved is illustrated by the SEL Framework shown in Fig.8 below:



CASEL (2020)[30]

[25]Masten, A.S. & Barnes, A.J. (2018) Resilience in Children: Developmental Perspectives,' *Children*. 5(7):98

[26]Southwick, S.M., Bonanno, G.A., Masten, A.S., Panter-Brick, C. & Yehuda, R. (2014) 'Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives,' *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*. 5(25338):1-14

[27]Ager, A., Annan, J., & Panter-Brick, C. (2013). *Resilience - From conceptualization to effective intervention*. Policy Brief for Humanitarian and Development Agencies.

[28]Wigelsworth, M., Verity, L., Mason, C., Humphrey, N., Qualter, P., Troncoso, P. (2019). *Primary Social and Emotional Learning: Evidence review*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available from: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Social_and_Emotional_Learning_Evidence_Review.pdf

[29]CASEL (2020) *What is Social and Emotional Learning* (SEL)? https://casel.org/what-is-sel/

[30]CASEL (2020) *SEL: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where are they Promoted*? https://casel.org/sel-framework/

Whilst this model has the 'classroom climate' and 'schoolwide culture' as its primary levels for developing SEL, the aligned learning opportunities provided by communities are an important element .

The core competencies identified within the model can be broken down into a number of key sub-skills:

SEL Domain	SEL Sub-domain	Skill	Description
Self-awareness	Identifying Emotions	Increase emotional vocabulary	Increasing emotional vocabulary with view to promote emotional recognition and understanding in the self and others.
	Accurate Self-perception	Increase emotional vocabulary. Development of self- reflective questioning technique.	Increasing emotional vocabulary and the development of self-reflective questioning techniques to enable accurate analysis of behaviour and provide an understanding of how others perceive behaviour. Self- reflective questioning helps children to account for their actions, make appropriate behavioural choices and consider how they can adapt
Self-Management	Self-discipline	Calming techniques to manage behaviour	Kinaesthetic calming techniques help children relax and promote body awareness. Technique is modelled to support physiological symptoms typically experienced when facing challenge or dealing with anger or anxiety.

Social Awareness	Perspective Taking	Developing metacognitive self-reflective questioning techniques (egocentric speech) to rationalise the actions of others.	Accessible scenarios and modelling techniques promote self- reflective questioning, forethought and promote empathetic understanding.
	Empathy	Emotion recognition in others. Increased emotional vocabulary.	Three varying types of empathy were uncovered (cognitive, emotional and compassionate). Cognitive empathy is the ability to recognise and relate to another point of view or circumstance. This is achieved through self- reflective questioning technique (e.g. 'how would I feel questions?') Emotional empathy looks to expand emotional vocabulary and identify emotions in others. There is no focus upon reaction/action taken to help others. Compassionate empathy is the use of emotional and cognitive empathy together. This involves recognizing another person's point of view and thinking about an appropriate solution to help improve/change the situation.

Relationship Skills	Communication	Overcoming barriers	Accurate expression of feelings, needs and opinion is promoted through modelled communication technique and strategy. Actively listening to others and knowing the appropriate people to communicate a problem to.
	Relationship Building	The development of tolerance, acceptance and an inclusive mindset.	Analogic examples model how people can be different but still be friends/allies. Tolerance and acceptance of incompatibility and difference is promoted, fostering inclusive mindsets whilst encouraging children to be themselves.
Responsible Decision Making	Identifying Problems	Autonomy and internal rationalization of a problem.	Development of schemas that support effective problem rationalization and assessment.
	Solving Problems	The development of problem solving strategy. Confidence in choosing an appropriate solution to a problem.	Modelling problem solving strategy highlights how there can be multiple solutions to a problem with some being better than others. Considers consequences of bad choices.

Adapted from Wigelsworth, et al. (2019)[32]

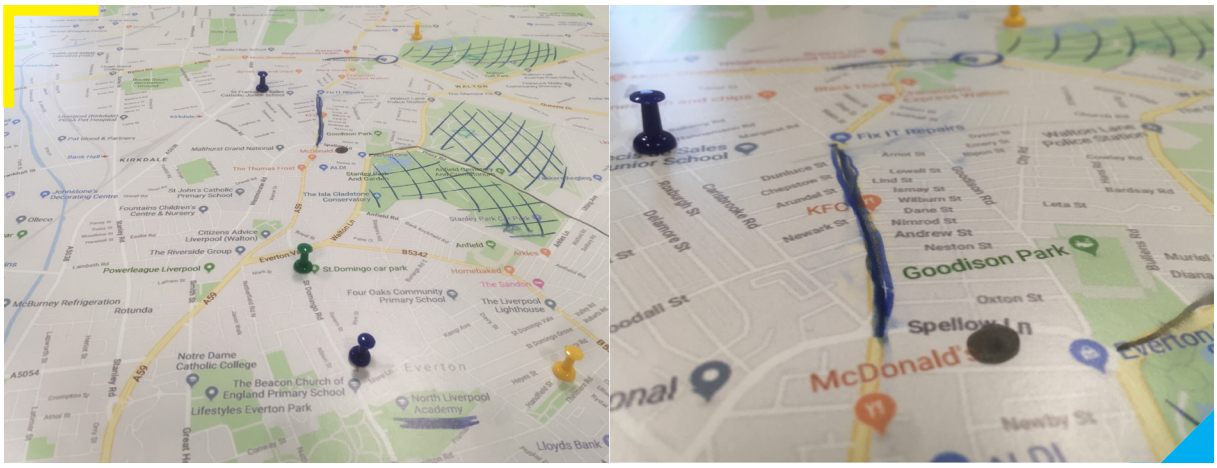
These arguably make-up much of the primary engagement techniques applicable to youth engagement strategies suggesting that SEL can be a crucial outcome for youth engagement programmes.

It has been suggested that improvements in SEL can be linked with improvements in self-perception and positive behaviour, reductions in emotional distress and conduct problems, school engagement, and academic attainment. These factors have also been linked to long-term outcomes such as financial stability in adulthood, and reductions in adult antisocial and criminal behaviour[33].

[32]Wigelsworth, M., Verity, L., Mason, C., Humphrey, N., Qualter, P., Troncoso, P. (2019). Primary Social and Emotional Learning: Evidence review. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available from: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Social_and_ Emotional_Learning_Evidence_Review.pdf

[33]Ibid.

2. METHODOLOGY



The findings in this report are based on sustained engagement with the programs over a number of weeks in order to build trust and rapport with both staff and participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six members of staff and 44 young people. This was supplemented by informal conversations and participant observation during two distinct periods in which researchers spent time on the programs.

Participant observation was carried out during a four-week period in which researchers joined one particular NCS Wave from 30 July 2018 - 24 August 2018. This included spending the first week camping and partaking in the activity program, staying in university dorms and joining in with the workshops and activities in week two, observing the groups as the young people plan their social action project in week three and finally visiting a number of groups during the final week as they operationalise their social action project.

Observation and informal conversations with PL Kicks staff and participants was also carried out over a 26-week period from March - August 2019. On average one session each week was attended at the EitC Hub on Spellow Lane during this period.

Interviews were carried out following a period of (participant) observation and were guided by fieldnotes collected during observations. Interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed. This was done as an iterative process with the two methods combining in order to triangulate the findings. It was also undertaken with reference to the aims of the programmes in question and the context through which they have emerged. Namely, the partnership between the football authorities and law enforcement agencies in the case of PL Kicks and the neoliberal concept of the Big Society that informed the development of NCS.

Interview and observational data were analysed using a grounded theory approach that is dynamic and in no way deterministic. The findings are applicable to the contexts in which the research was carried out and recommendations should be seen as part of an ongoing dialogue aimed at discovering and overcoming gaps in knowledge, the outcome of which is to inform and supplement the practical knowledge extant within participants and providers involved in the study.

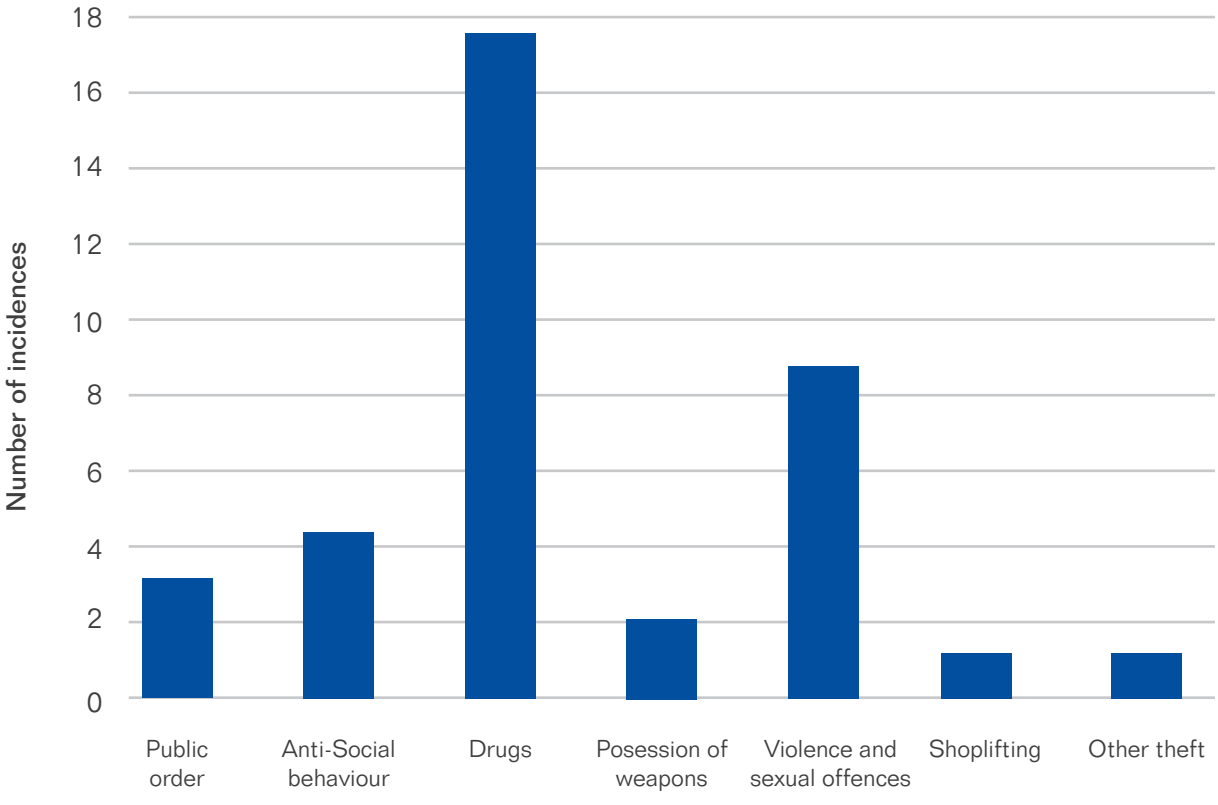
[34]Glaser B.G. & Strauss A.L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Safe Spaces

Statistically, in the year ending September 2019, there were a total of 44,771 'knife or sharp instrument' recorded offences across England and Wales, with 'assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm' accounting for 45% of the total figure[35]. In the more specific area surrounding Spellow Lane where the PL Kicks programme is based, there was a variety of offences committed, ranging from 'bicycle theft' to 'anti-social behaviour' (ASB)[36]. During the research period, the most prevalent offence was 'drugs' followed by 'violence and sexual offences'. Many of the outcomes for the two main offences included drug possession warnings, cautions or local resolutions. There are also numerous recordings of ASB, but given the nature of this outcomes are not recorded. There were a significant number of offences where either the court result was not available or the suspect was unable to be prosecuted. Indeed, in all of the cases of 'violence and sexual offences', the results were either unavailable, 'unable to prosecute suspect' or 'investigation complete: no suspect identified'. This is indicative of the strong 'no grass' culture within the Liverpool area.

Criminal Activity around Spellow Lane (March-August 2019)



Source: Data.Police.UK (2019)

[35]ONS, Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2019, 23 January 2020 [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2019]

[36]Data for crime statistics around Spellow Lane is taken from Data.Police.UK (2019) for Merseyside 2019. Available from: https://data.police.uk/data/archive/

According to the Community Inspector for the Spellow Lane area there is no evidence that crime rates, and in particular ASB, reduces on the nights that PL Kicks operates. It was, however, stated that not observing a significant reduction in calls when PL Kicks is in operation is not necessarily surprising, as the initiative is viewed more as a long-term strategy by police to reduce offending and for young people to engage more positively with their local community. It was also noted that the local community team do see the benefits of this service and support its development moving forward.

Young people themselves are very matter-of-fact about the area in which they live:

> *"You're still stereotyped from where you're from but there's different areas within areas. I think my area where I've grew up, I've been lucky. But like where my nan lives, she's on the estate next to me, it's very like riddled with crime. It's not a nice place but it's how it is."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

> *"...the gangs, it doesn't bother me because I've seen it every day, you see it all places, you're never going to get rid of them and they don't really do anything bad, they're just like there and that...but like you don't really want that but you're going to get it anyway."*
>
> **(Female participant)**

As the staff realise, what this leads to is young people having a normalised vision of the consequences of disadvantage surrounding them and a lack of awareness about, and therefore desire for, how things might be changed for the better, whether it be their own situation or wider social issues.

> *"They don't think they need help because it's normal. [Talking] about drug dealing, one of their family's probably drug dealing so it's normal to them. They don't see it as a danger. They probably know someone who's been stabbed, they've probably seen someone being stabbed, it's normal to them... Not that it's normal, because it's not normal if that makes sense. It's not normal but it's normalised. So they don't see it..."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

This is evident by the blasé way in which young people discuss knife related crime:

> *"[The area] it's not bad, I would say that. Sometimes it gets a bit dangerous, sometimes with kids just being stupid... Just with knives and that."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

Though the figures for the local area suggest knife crime is not a significant problem, a study published in 2010 found that at least 30% of young people had carried a knife, with a peak age of 14[37]. Significantly, 'possession of an article with a blade or point' had increased by 17% and the number of 'knife or sharp instrument' related offences increased by 46% since comparable records began in 2011, so it is likely that these figures have increased[38]. It was evident that participants were aware of knife crime but a desire not to get involved with such behaviour means avoidance is possible because of embedded local knowledge.

[37]This study was conducted on young people between the ages of 12-17 from 1998-2003. See McVie, S. (2010). *Gang Membership and Knife Carrying: Findings from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime*. The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, Edinburgh University.

[38]Given changes to collection and recording of data beginning in 2009, reliable statistics on knife crime offences prior to this data is not available and comparable data is only available from year ending 2011. See Allen, G. & Kirk-Wade, E. (2020) 'Knife crime in England and Wales' Briefing Paper: Number SN4304, 6th October 2020, *House of Commons Library*. p.4 [https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn04304/] and ONS (2019) *Crime in England and Wales: Police Recorded Crime*, 18 July 2019.

"I wouldn't say [this area is] safe, no. It's not safe but I feel safe because I know people from round here and you know what it's like. And when you've got an understanding around here you know what to do, what to act like, you know what to not get involved in, people that you don't get involved with and people you just don't talk to. I'm just going to carry on doing what I do. Yeah, it used to be alright but then obviously there's a lot more knife crime because of all the people who think they're hard to carry."

(Male participant)

In order to tackle issues such as youth violence, there has to be viable alternatives to high-risk behaviour as well as safe spaces. This is more than simply challenging gang related violence and knife crime. As one member of staff explains, there are particular concerns about "...the girls that come here [to PL Kicks]. They'll be in the park until late at night and stuff like that and it's not necessarily a safe place for them to be whereas this is. And parents know that when they're here that they're safe." For some young people, of course, the risk extends into their own homes which may not feel a safe space due to familial abuse, over burdensome care responsibilities or more mundane intrusions as a consequence of sharing small domestic spaces with siblings or prying parental control.

"... what Kicks does is just provide an environment where young people can come, be themselves, enjoy themselves, maybe sometimes have an escape from what is going on, whether it's their home life, their school life... the staff, they make it fun, enjoyable and a place where young people want to go."

(Male staff member)

As another member of staff recognises, the participants, "are potentially [all at risk] in their own way. That doesn't have to be crime, it can be other things like poverty, stuff like that. Just because of the area we're from…" This understanding of local youth contexts is crucial in transferring the overriding rationale for the provision from criminality to socio-economic precarity.

The young people themselves express this sense of security through a recognition of how they are treated whilst attending the sessions.

"[You feel safe] because you've got people like [staff name]. They're all just dead nice and they speak to you... it's like they're not treating us like kids. At school you are like kids aren't you but here you can be independent."

(Female participant).

Safety is relative. From the perspective of some it is about being out of danger. For young people themselves it is related to freedom. The freedom to express themselves without being judged. There is no doubt that during sessions the PL Kicks intervention provides a safe space for young people to express themselves and create distance between themselves and risks associated with growing up in the area. However, it is the extent to which that safe space in physical terms extends into the psyche of those young people attending. Young people's spaces must be seen as more than just physical spaces to also encompass notions of social space defined by social practices and relationships, cultural space where values, rights and cultures are created and discursive space that is able to accommodate differing perspectives and forms of expression, where there is room for dialogue, confrontation, deliberation and critical thinking[39].

[39]Moss, P. (2006) 'From children's services to children's spaces,' in E.Kay, M.Tisdall, J.M.Davis, M.Hill & A.Prout (Eds.) Children, Young People and Social Inclusion: Participation for what? Bristol: Policy Press

These are the criteria that could be used as measures of success with indicators for each that allow records to be maintained. Such records need not be formalistic nor indeed formulaic but in the form of reflections embedded within the engagement process that can be captured as part of the dynamic nature of youth work practices.

In contrast, the spaces in which NCS operates are, designed to be slightly uncomfortable for participants in terms of pushing themselves beyond the familiarity of their everyday geographies of existence. However, there are question marks about the ability of staff with relatively little training to be able to support young people in extremely exposed situations.

Whilst there are more experienced staff with appropriate youth work skills working on the programme, it places a lot of responsibility on a small team to be vigilant about safeguarding issues that might be revealed in the most subtle of ways. This was voiced as a concern by some participants:

"I appreciate that [the leaders] are similar to my age but at the same time I was like... if there was an emergency would you know how to deal with it ...one of my friends who is on this has certain mental health issues and stuff like that and there were a few points where I was like, 'I don't know if they're going to be able to deal with that.' Maybe they could and I just couldn't see it but on the outside it looked like we were on our own with that..."

(Female participant)

From observational research, there were occasions when a significant number of staff were occupied by a specific issue that had arisen which led to concerns being expressed amongst other young people. These concerns were managed in a way that relied on the compliance of the majority. With so many young people on site this was possibly the only way to adequately deal with such situations which unfortunately reinforces top-down regulatory frameworks.

FITTING IN AND **STANDING OUT** ON NCS

With their well-manicured nails, vividly painted lips and cheeks full of foundation, Anna and Eli tow their large suitcases across the muddy field towards their tent under the trees. They look out of place in the wilderness of the High Adventure Camp on Cannock Chase and are not too sure about what they have agreed to now that they are actually about to start their NCS 'adventure'.

Their appearance belies an underlying insecurity, their attitudes suggesting an upbringing rooted in strong familial ties and sometimes misplaced understandings of what fitting in requires. Anna is keen to point out that she has always tried to keep out of trouble and avoid confrontation, though as she speaks, it sounds like she often is the target of abuse: "I don't like arguing with people, I don't like fighting, I don't like stuff like that, it scares me but at school it was just everyone arguing to get at me and I don't argue with people..." She was removed from mainstream education because, "When I used to go to school someone would say something and then there'd be rumours going round and stuff like that. And then people would make stuff up about me… my mum had to go to court because I was never in school."

The two girls became close friends in year nine, a time when they both started being bullied and a point since which Eli has adopted a guiding and protective role over Anna. "It started with me and then when Eli started coming round with me in school… she started getting bullied as well." Eli echoes her friend's incomprehension as to the reasons behind it, but reveals a telling sign about the girls' management of their identities and insecurities:

"People have always pointed fingers at me and Anna. I dont know if it's because me and Anna wear more make up than other girls … I like to take care of my appearance, not for other people but for myself. I get my nails done for myself, not for other people and I think so many people are so fast to judge us and say that we're trying to impress other people when we're just trying to impress ourselves really."

Despite having little experience of organised extra-curricula activities with her peers, when NCS was promoted to her, it was something Anna was very sure she wanted to do. Her brother, Joe, and best friend, Eli, were persuaded to join up. Eli's cousin, Mark, had nothing better to do so convinced a couple of friends to get involved because, "the camping sounded fun." Their favourite pastime was getting stoned and he was the personification of charmingly intelligent underachievement.

The rest of the group in which they had been placed consisted of girls with a more academic bent and somehwat sheltered upbringing. It meant that this particular group had a very real social mix.

Dressed and styled to go to a party, Anna and Eli are keen to assert themselves during the ice-breakers but the risk of falling into a dirty pond on the first day's raft building exercise sees them refuse to take part. The lads are similarly disinclined to get their feet wet, conveying a cool attitude towards the notion of anything that

might lead to humiliation. An attitude that itself leads more to distancing themselves from the rest of the participants than any sign of weakness associated with failure. For young people who are expected to fail but simultaneously chided for it, such behaviour is not unusual.

As the activity week progresses, attitudes change a little, but the lads remain detached from the group. Mark's charm and competitive instincts revealed moments of humility in supporting weaker members of the group to overcome their fear of heights on some of the climbing challenges but at any hint of jocular criticism he and the other boys recoiled.

Anna and Eli, on the other hand, began to gradually distance themselves from their male kinsfolk and gradually got to know some of the other young women with whom they were sharing their living space. The contrast was most remarkable during a fun activity that had participants attached to each other by a rope, blind-folded, trying to negotiate a maze whilst being squirted by water. Rumours of the activity had led to the lads participating with great reluctance. As a consequence of their disgruntlement they became the target of increased water attacks, feeding their existing sense of victimhood and leading to rebellion. A situation that was not handled well by staff due to individual relationships with such characters needing more time to build trust and respect.

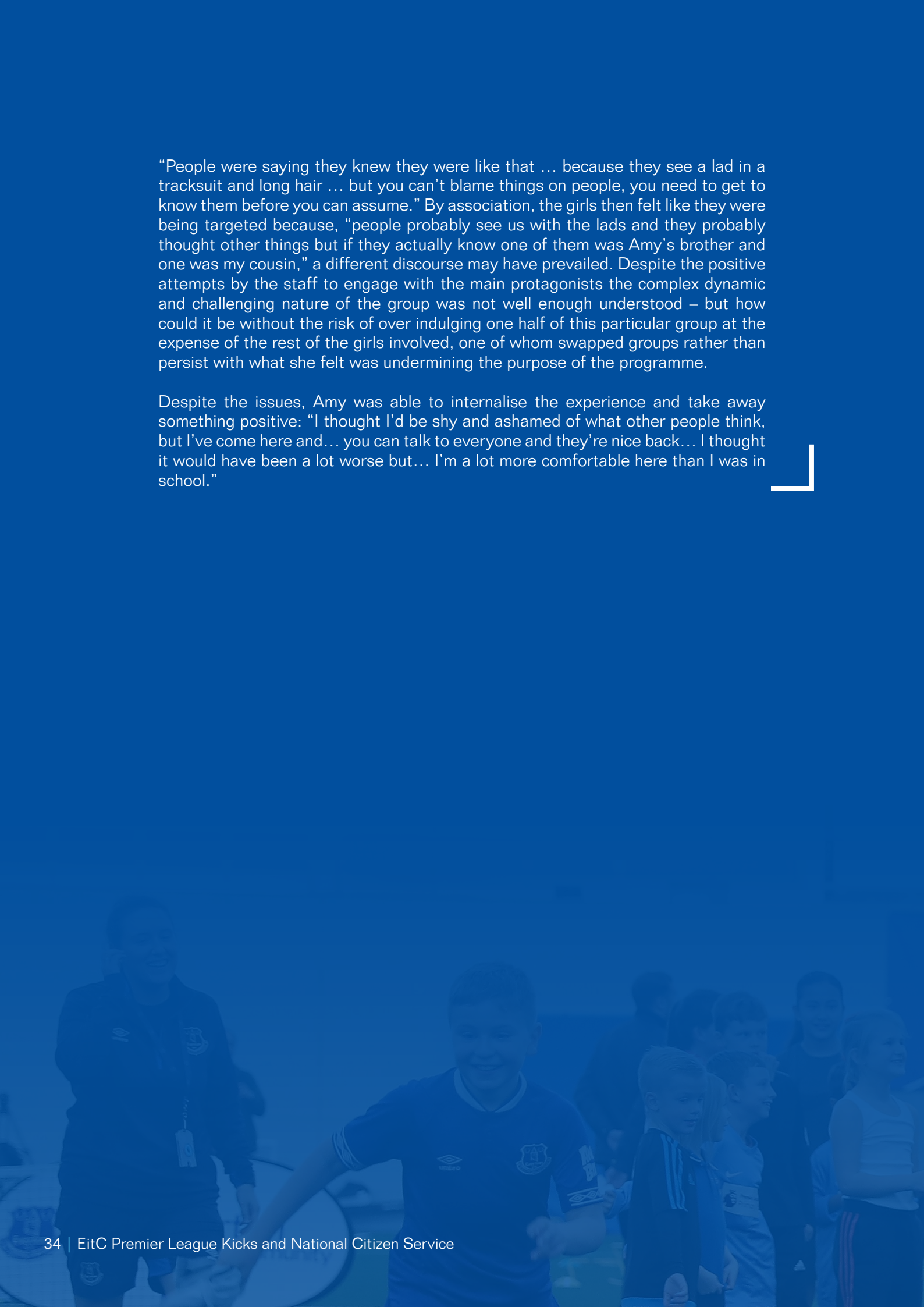
Anna and Eli, on the other hand, despite their trepidation, took support from one another as they so often have, but also comfort from the fact that the other girls were equally unsure about what was ahead. Squeals of panic mixed with delight as the first sprays of water rained down. Recoiling from the slightest sound or touch, the girls demonstrated a stronger trust in the programme, in their own relationship and in the support of the group.

By the end of the week, fences had been mended and barriers had broken down to a degree. During a six-mile hike on the final day conversations were easier to come by. Joe revealed his former love of fishing as we stopped by a lake for a bite to eat. A recreational pursuit that ceased following estrangement from his father. Anna talked about her desire to become a professional dancer, but with no formal training her hopes may be misdirected by a self-perception of her abilities honed in front of the bedroom mirror. Her self-confidence should be admired, though, and would be something to redirect and cultivate within youth engagement practices of a more long-term nature. Unfortunately, within this context, such aspirations are likely to remain under-developed.

In week two the lads' penchant for pot aroused the suspicions of staff, who seemed determined to weed out the perpetrators – feeding their self-perpetuating sense of paranoia. Rather than a supportive environment for young people with such issues, their adventure became a battle of wills and a game of cat and mouse whereby the staff felt they had won once their suspicions were proven. The lads felt no sense of loss because their expectations were met. The offer of support through other EitC provision was given but with no existing relationship to EitC the Pyrrhic victory risked undermining the progress made by Anna and Eli.

"People were saying they knew they were like that … because they see a lad in a tracksuit and long hair … but you can't blame things on people, you need to get to know them before you can assume." By association, the girls then felt like they were being targeted because, "people probably see us with the lads and they probably thought other things but if they actually know one of them was Amy's brother and one was my cousin," a different discourse may have prevailed. Despite the positive attempts by the staff to engage with the main protagonists the complex dynamic and challenging nature of the group was not well enough understood – but how could it be without the risk of over indulging one half of this particular group at the expense of the rest of the girls involved, one of whom swapped groups rather than persist with what she felt was undermining the purpose of the programme.

Despite the issues, Amy was able to internalise the experience and take away something positive: "I thought I'd be shy and ashamed of what other people think, but I've come here and… you can talk to everyone and they're nice back… I thought it would have been a lot worse but… I'm a lot more comfortable here than I was in school."



3.2 Positive Activities & Social Action

"...this here is an environment where we just want to get young people off the streets, work with them, build something and then a bit further down the line... you can maybe be a little bit more driven towards [fulfilling outcomes]."

(Male staff member)

Youth work has undoubtedly become increasingly target driven. Within policy literature this amounts to a focus on positive activities and social action. The latter is a key element of NCS as the programme aims to build relationships over a short intense burst in order for young people to work together on a community project. Whilst PL Kicks is built on more informal approaches the underlying offer to young people is the provision of 'positive activities that encourage stronger, safer communities through the development of better relationships between young people and the authorities.'

There were contrasting views from participants about the activities around which the NCS programme is designed. The key selling point of the programme is the residential in the first week on which young people are pushed beyond their comfort zones through predominantly physically and emotionally challenging activities within a remote rural setting.

"I think a few people didn't really like being pressured to do something that we didn't want to do with the activities... I think it's because the leaders wanted me to push myself out of my comfort zone so they were very like forceful like "do it, do it, have a go, do it" ... there was a boy in my group who looked like he wanted to cry because people were saying, "do it, do it" and that's not that nice for someone who is shy and doesn't want to do something ... because that boy who I think looked upset in that situation didn't come back and hasn't been back since. So maybe if the leaders weren't as harsh maybe he would have come back."

(Female participant)

This seems to be the exception rather than the rule whereby the leaders misjudged the character of the individual. While there were inevitably a small number of participants who did not make it through the week, on the whole staff were supportive and young people responded positively to the challenges - both organised and unexpected.

Where there was less agreement was the workshops that were organised during the second residential week of the programme. Of course, within a large group of young people with different interests, responses to the topics will vary. Where some found the Youth Parliament or managing personal finances workshops boring, others came away with a better understanding of the political system or having learnt valuable life lessons around personal banking.

In a typically neo-liberal perspective (and therefore perfectly suited to a programme designed as part of the Big Society), participants saw the workshops as part of their duty; an obligation as payment for the more enjoyable aspects of the programme – namely a sense of freedom and independence, fun and social bonding. The overwhelming view was that their design needed to fit better with the overall approach of the programme. Participants suggested that they would get more from them if, "we worked outside more and did the skills outside instead of just sitting down getting bored," and "making them fun so we understand and know key terms and that. What to use it for and when to use it."

"Doing it one after each other like that in a slog is not very entertaining or fun, even if that's not the point.... have it half and half where half of the day is about these workshops, about teaching you life lessons and stuff, what to avoid and what to do. And the other half is fun, playing games, maybe after those things so your brain can think about it."

(Male participant)

Many of the young people found the experience of living for a week in student halls of residence extremely liberating. It was not all about fun but also living independently and taking responsibility for yourself.

"I have family issues at home and [the week spent at] university was like a holiday for me, it was a break."

(Female participant)

"The food from university... We don't normally get that sort of choice [at home]... It was different every day and usually when you're at home you stick to one meal."

(Male participant)

"I really liked it [at the university]. It was my own little space. I really liked that... I've been getting up on time [which] I was never able to do. I was always late for school."

(Female participant)

The social action aspect of the programme was generally seen as positive with young people getting a sense of responsibility, ownership and achievement from their projects. For some there was disbelief that people would actually donate money and enter a raffle organised by teenagers.

One participant suggested that she, "didn't think anyone would give me money. They'd just think I'm like taking it for myself." But having as a group persuaded local businesses to donate prizes and organised to bake some cakes between them to sell, she was amazed and proud of the amount of money they raised for their chosen charity that provides counselling services supporting young people 'like us':

"...it was really good how we did that, to organise that. Because the team leaders, they didn't tell us how to do it ... We came up with so many ideas and then I'm thinking to myself this is what adults do, this is what people help do and we're doing it... I thought we were going to raise £15 but we raised £100... It really makes you want to do more and go on to build it up more and help more."

(Female participant)

One young woman discussing what being charitable normally means suggests that you might collect money for doing something and then the school, for example, just passes it on to whatever cause. She says that:

"...with what we're doing, because you're kind of like on the front lines and you see it, it feels more personal... you're actually the one transferring the things. Whereas normally in school you'll have a cake sale, you'll raise a bit of money but you don't really see where that goes. Whereas this feels more kind of like you're the one helping..."

(Female participant)

For others, the social action projects provided a seemingly simpler sense of satisfaction. As researchers spent a day walking round Wavertree Park with one group picking up litter, one young man, who was surprisingly engaged with the activity considering his lack of enthusiasm for this part of the programme so far, said he had learnt a lot about, "the importance of giving back to the community … [Because] you can't enjoy a park like this if it's full of litter."

There is no doubt that presenting young people involved with NCS an opportunity to plan and take ownership of a social action project that is meaningful to their own sense of community, injustice or wellbeing has positive outcomes. This is particularly true for those young people who do not normally have much experience of either undertaking projects for themselves or from engaging in volunteering or charity work.

The PL Kicks programme is based upon activities to engage young people and provide a distraction rather than the development of any social action projects. That does not mean that it would not be possible to do so but it would need to be developed through a desire expressed from participants themselves. Such a desire can however be infused into

and enthused about if staff had the capacity and encouragement to do so. A slight culture change is needed in helping young people attending PL Kicks sessions to realise they can apply the confidence they gain through attendance and volunteering to achieve wider outcomes. The possibility of change is instilled in so much interaction between staff and young people who are at risk but going further in order to develop self-belief in their abilities to, in some small way, bring about change to local structures would be of even greater benefit.

Regarding the activities that are available during the PL Kicks sessions, both male and female participants noted that the opportunities for young women coming to the sessions are limited:

> *"If they tried it [offering sessions around music for example], I reckon you'd have loads of different groups coming here. Like people who come here, you've got girls coming here who just sit in the corner, like maybe they should do something for them, do something that girls enjoy. You have footie and some girls and lads might want to mix and that. That would be good."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

> *"I like the way we can sit down and talk with everyone. [But] there's nothing much for the girls. It's just lads playing footie and the girls sit and do nothing... girls aren't allowed to play [football] with boys. [Would a girls only football session work?] Probably not because we'd probably get laughed at by everyone and like all the lads, it would be funny but all the lads would be like... All the lads would just laugh."*
>
> **(Female participant)**

This is recognised by staff who will have brainstorming sessions with the young people, particularly the girls, to consider what they would like to be doing because, "There's no point in us continually saying, this is what we're doing, this is what we're doing, this is what we're doing. Some of it has got to come from them to say this is what we'd like to do." They are prepared to consider all options, though have to explain that certain activities are not possible. Options such as going bowling have been accommodated. Dance sessions were organised and "cookery is always popular" but the former didn't last and the latter is restricted by lack of facilities.

This is one of the difficulties with open access youth work. It is young person centred but unless enough enthusiasm for extending the offer is shown changes are not forthcoming. That enthusiasm is often led by a single individual, whether it is a charismatic young person with a hold over others in the group or a staff member with the persistence to develop ideas proposed by young people and maintain an ongoing interest. A difficult task when it is always easier to revert to familiar routines (for all of us, including both participants and staff). Routines that are popular enough with the young people to keep them returning, i.e. football (for the boys) and hanging out (for the girls).

> *"Sometimes I think the older group are just satisfied with what it is... come, chill with your mates, you can make something to eat sometimes if you want, have some music on, chat to your mates, play footie and then go home. But sometimes I think... we could be doing more with them."*
>
> **(Female staff member)**

The question is what more could be done and to what end? For meaningful open access youth work to take place the activities are simply there to encourage young people to attend, maintain their interest and offer opportunities for development. The real work is done through building relationships with the young people through these activities and whilst they are in attendance so that participants can be challenged and encouraged to become more self-reflective individuals.

Researchers observed a discussion between staff members when several of the participants were noted as being hungry during the sessions. Staff sat and worked out how this could be managed while being fair and tactful, and priced up equipment and groceries in order to make toasties and provide other snacks. This was a positive action to mitigate the issues facing the young people who use the facility. This could have been developed further as not only was it a good opportunity to provide the desired end (ensuring participants were not hungry) but there could also have been a way to engage the young people in the process by offering them further activities (growing food, understanding budgets, cooking etc.). However, staff were also mindful of the limitations they faced with time, facilities and finances.

Staff admit that they, "struggle to get young people to want to come [to organised events]… like workshops…" Some will say they want to attend something but fail to turn up and when asked why, "they said [they] don't want to. [They] just want to play football." This points to an inadequate approach either to engaging with young people in a manner that they are willing to attend something outside the usual provision or that the workshops are not seen of value by those attending the sessions.

This is again possibly down to a reactive rather than proactive approach, itself brought about by the large numbers in attendance that lead to a focus on managing sessions rather than engaging with each participant at a level required to build a strong enough relationship for young people to want to do more than 'just play football'. That is not to underestimate the value of a space where young people can 'just play', whether it be football or any other ludic activity. With numerous other pressures on these young people such opportunities may be scarce. However, if that is the case, the positive aspects of 'just playing' should form part of the evidence base for helping young people to develop.

Many of the young people expressed a desire for PL Kicks sessions to be available more frequently. Having such a dedicated facility for them to play football or just come and hang out for a couple of hours on two evenings a week without any financial outlay is recognised by some as a great asset.

"I'd say everyone that comes here is happy with what they've got. It's a good quality pitch, good staff, good environment, safe environment and it's free... youth clubs like this usually cost £3 ... some parents are like oh, we can't do that, I need to do this this week, sorry. It's allowing kids to come two times a week to play footie for a couple of hours which is really good."

(Male participant)

However, there is also a complacency that means many young people do not appreciate what is on offer. This is a concern for staff because,

"Young people now just expect everything being given to them. Us just giving them football is just normal for them... It's not appreciated. It's not in a nasty way, it's because they've always had stuff like that.... they just think they're owed that sort of thing maybe... they don't understand we're there to help. They don't see that. We're just there as something for them to do."

(Male staff member)

Furthermore, there is a feeling that whilst staff would be happy to do sessions every night if there was capacity and demand for doing so the 'kids would get bored':

"They'd get bored of me... get bored of seeing everyone every day. There's only so much that you can offer them. Playing football every night is brilliant but 100% they get bored. Then that's when they probably would start doing other stuff. Two days, I'd like to say I'd do every day, I'd like to say it would be brilliant but I just still at the same time don't think it would work."

(Male staff member)

The key point here is the focus on playing football as the only thing available and that as enjoyable an attraction as that is, it would start to become boring and lead to young people exploring other less positive pastimes. This is where it needs to be recognised that the offer must extend beyond football.

Sessions on alternative nights might be structured differently and be more targeted and less open access but still in line with the main aims of the programme. As one participant explains: "If you want to go somewhere like [another youth club] and do activities then yeah, but sometimes you just want to come here and hang out." (Female participant)

So, anything extra must still be underwritten by the voluntary nature of young people's involvement and control over the development of their relationships with others as it is notable how crucial to young people the informal approach within the EitC PL Kicks program is. All interviewees commented on how they are treated and respected by staff (as evidenced in Section 3.3).

Of course, not all options are available but as one staff member observes, it is about how you move forward in trying to accommodate the opinions of young people that is important:

"...they might [request something] and you go okay so that might not be realistic but how about if we did this instead, or tried doing this. They're quite open to it, because you're listening to them. You've listened to their idea and you've explained why it might not be practical, so as long as you just don't say no. If you say no to them, then it's going to get their backs up and they're going to say you don't listen to us anyway. ... as long as you explain to them why that might not be possible and offer an alternative ... then they're quite willing to go, okay then. They're not going to just shoot it down straight away but they do like the reason behind it because they give you their opinion, so they want the reasons why if it's not [possible]."

(Female Staff)

It is keeping this dialogue open enough that is fundamental to open access youth work.

The NCS model adapts this notion in a more prescribed way with 'guided reflection' activities written into the design of the

programme. These were not conducted as regularly as suggested and had mixed success. Youth work should be about developing young people's abilities to reflect on their own situation, in the immediacy of a particular activity and as a long-term strategy for mental and emotional wellbeing.

The difficulty with self-reflection is its articulation. It is an activity that we all engage in as part of human consciousness but as soon as it is made into a formal activity, the very essence of what self-reflection is becomes moot. Guided reflection, therefore, should be more aligned with the core values associated with youth work, taking place in those moments when leaders can have 'active conversations' with participants to help them reflect on what they have achieved or problems they have encountered.

This can be supported by group activities that encourage communal reflection but not necessarily. In this way, reflection is embedded within the whole programme rather than as a separate activity. It may also help staff take such processes more seriously as it is in a way what they are constantly doing as part of their leadership role. It is acknowledged that this is not necessarily a consequence of how EitC and the staff choose to operate but how they are directed by the design of the programme itself.

3.3 Trusted Relationships

"I didn't want to tell [my parents about how I was feeling] because I didn't want them to be disappointed about the fact I was smoking weed and stuff like that ... I did want to stop but I didn't want to at the same time because it was to cope but then obviously I looked at it differently with help from these lot [staff at PL Kicks]."

(Male participant, 17)

By providing a safe space and attracting young people through the provision of positive activities, trusting relationships can begin to be formed. This is particularly significant given the evidence for an increase in youth violence during recent years. While actions such as antisocial behaviour or even carrying a knife does not automatically signify something like gang-association, there is increasing evidence that there is often shared genesis or stimuli . As a sense of belonging or seeking social bonds is often argued as a reason for gang membership in particular, and motivations or risk factors can also include low social capital, lack of alternative opportunities, educational exclusion and financial pressures, creating trusted relationships between authorities, communities and other young people is vital[41].

"[My first aim for new kids is] for them to make mates.... My first thing is to try my best to get that person accepted... [then] see how we can help them, what we can do, is there a need for anything, why are they here, sort of thing. Maybe they're just here to play football, maybe it is just to make mates. Maybe it's just because they've got nothing else to do. Those are the questions I ask myself when they come. Football goes out the window. Obviously, that's just the key to get them there."

(Male staff member)

Much of the work that takes place with young people is about building trust and building relationships - between young people themselves, between young people and the staff and between young people and wider society. These relationships are all two-way. Sometimes trust needs to be built within the young people themselves, sometimes trust needs to be built with those who engage with young people. Research suggests that young people who do not have supportive networks are unable to cultivate appropriate social skills or build positive relationships, so are more likely to become involved in intergenerational maltreatment[42]. Therefore, putting in place positive support structures could break the transmission of maltreatment cycle and work towards building healthier communities generally. And that is an important part of the relationship building process because as one staff member points out, "While they're here we're trying to teach them about respect and we're trying to give the local community a better perception of them."

Trust and respect alongside honesty and reciprocity are the building blocks of youth engagement. The role of the youth worker is as an enabler for young people to make sense of themselves, their lives and their world[43]. Within the PL Kicks programme,

[40]Palasinski, M. (2013). 'Security, Respect and Culture in British Teenagers' Discourses on Knife Carrying. *Safer Communities*, 12 (2), 71-78.

[41]See for example Wood, Jane. (2014). 'Understanding gang membership: The significance of group processes' *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*. 17

[42]Thornberry, T. P., & Henry, K. L. (2013). 'Intergenerational continuity in maltreatment'. Journal of *Abnormal Child Psychology*. 41: 555–569.

[43]Young, K. (2006) The Art of Youth Work. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing

these aspects of engagement are built over time, and are designed into the work as an embedded part of the open-access approach.

> *"When the young person first attends, I wouldn't go, what do you do in your own time. You just give them open questions and just let them talk and you'll overhear them talk with their mates. Then you've got an idea of what they are doing in their spare time. .... [You] talk to them when they're playing football, have a bit of fun with them, bit of banter .... Further down the line, that's when you will obviously build a better relationship with them..."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

Once that relationship has been built the young people feel confident that they can share with staff many of the issues that are prevalent within their lives. The voluntary nature of such dialogue is what sets apart the way that young people engage with PL Kicks staff compared with other adults such as teachers or family members.

> *"Most of the time they just tell us [when there are problems] because we have got such a good relationship with them ... some of these young people who have been attending here have been for three, four years so we've kind of seen them growing up and we've evolved with them. So they have that relationship with us where they'll come in and say, 'Oh [staff member name], guess what, this has happened.' They might not necessarily know how they're putting themselves at risk when they're telling me it but they just tell me anyway."*
>
> **(Female staff member)**

NCS has a very specific design that aims to build trust through the nature of the activities and the living environment of the first week in order to achieve specific outcomes in the final week of the programme. One of the longer-term individual outcomes expressed in the NCS Theory of Change is, 'higher levels of social trust'. Such an outcome is beyond the scope of this research as it would need a more longitudinal approach or for notions of social trust to be explored with former NCS graduates 5-10 years later. For the latter, it would be difficult to isolate the experience of NCS, with all manner of other encounters and wider socio-economic background also needing to be considered. Nonetheless, for the duration of the programme participants were able to reflect on the relationships they had formed with each other.

> *"Before I come here, I thought, 'people aren't going to be very nice because I've had that most of my life,' and then I come here and it was completely different... I thought I'd come in and they'd be quite snotty people but they're all dead nice."*
>
> **(Female participant)**

> *"In the first two weeks... we are doing activities where we have to rely on someone else to help you and you're just having a laugh with everyone. So, it weren't like, 'oh, there's someone from Norris Green and someone from Huyton.' It was like, 'we're all in NCS together,' so it's just like a collective thing."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

> *"[Before] I was thinking, what if I don't meet anyone I like. What if it all goes wrong? ... It was more of a kind of trust thing. To trust people that you don't know but that you meet and you think, 'oh right, I won't get on with them.' But then you actually end up getting on pretty well with them and stuff like that... it's been a big confidence boost. I wouldn't say [I'm] not as shy but like [I'm] not as hesitant to enter into new situations."*
>
> **(Female participant)**

> *"I think I've met better friends on NCS because I don't normally make mates that easily and [for example] I just clicked with [name of other participant]... He's just funny. I've never met a person like him... [My other friends] like to just sit on the Play Station and don't really go out."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

"...the first week, like, no one spoke. But then I think people got to know each other more. But I don't think people became friends. Like we know each other now, we're not necessarily friendlier."

(Female participant)

There are so many things to consider in terms of how young people interact with one another and the effect that experience has on individuals' personalities. The purpose of any youth engagement work, however it is structured, is to provide the opportunity for young people to engage with one another and support the process through helping young people reflect on those relationships and their own attitudes and identities. What is noticeable is that the majority of NCS participants tended to remain within their own friendship groups except when certain tasks required them not to. That said, friendships were formed between young people that would not ordinarily come into contact with one another but these were not necessarily durable beyond the context of the programme itself. Whilst participants themselves might see that as a criticism of what they have been through, it is not necessarily the aim of NCS. Social trust may have increased because of the 'weak ties' that were formed. The intensity of the programme means that participants' expectations were for stronger ties to be made – such is the nature of friendship at that age.

Social relationships are also, of course, gendered in their make-up. The difference between young men and young women's understandings of and development of their relationships with other PL Kicks participants can be neatly summed up in the following quotes:

"[The reason I kept coming was] the staff really, they're dead nice. Dead sound like. Not like teachers in school where they just nag at you, just dead calm, anything you want to speak to them about they'll listen."

(Male participant)

"...it's not like [the staff] are here to mind us and look after us. It's like they are here to have a chat. We have little chats together and us girls come up here and we just talk about... sometimes we talk about boys or... we'll just talk about what's going on."

(Female participant)

"I've made a lot of other mates from like other schools because I've came here."

(Female participant)

"[Since I started coming] I've been able to socialise more with different people that I wouldn't know, in my age group and that... like the lads who play footie and that, you get put on teams with them so obviously then you've got to get to know them, got to get speaking to them."

(Male participant)

There is a subtle difference between how the boys and the girls view both their relationship with staff and with other participants. Both use teachers at school as a reference point and note how they feel able to speak about whatever might be on their mind. For the young women the sessions facilitate general discourse on their lives whereas for young men it is about having a sounding board for discussing something in particular. Similarly, relationship building for the boys is based on instrumental need as a consequence of playing football and communicating with team mates whereas for the girls whose experience of the space is more fluid, friendships are formed through chatting together.

It is clear that many of the young people attending PL Kicks have strong kinship ties within their immediate domestic unit and through extended family or estranged parents and step families. For some this means they have caring responsibilities for younger siblings or are expected to visit older relatives. By extension, close friendships and allegiances built during their formative years mean that widening the 'circle of trust' is not easy.

What PL Kicks provides is a space to develop 'weak ties' with similar young people that may or may not develop into stronger bonds or useful connections. The notion of weak ties is seen as crucial in building social capital through 'bridging' from one group to another. Strong ties often exist to bond individuals within their own networks or communities of kinship and friendship but weak ties can be utilised for social mobility[44].

> *"Basically every lad who comes here just wants to play footie and make new mates. I've made loads of mates coming here since I've started... there's some I'd talk to them but I don't like going out with them... Like my proper mates I've knew them longer so I trust them whereas [Kicks mates], I don't know them enough to trust them [yet]."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

In this case, the weak ties are with others of similar social standing but in essence provide participants with the experience and opportunity for developing the skills needed for gaining more useful bridging capital. A simple measure for this aspect of young people's social development is to regularly ask participants to count and categorise the connections they have with other participants. This will be a dynamic process as previous relationships can be reviewed and rescored alongside new connections being added. The important thing is that it only becomes a measure of development by having comparative data over time.

The other key relationship that develops is that between the young people and the staff. This is something the staff prioritise from the outset.

> *"All of the staff here. I know I can talk to them, especially [names staff] are the main ones I'd go and talk to and go to if I need anything or if I need any help, I know they'll be there, no matter what... Stuff I've told them about myself and what I've been through I would not have told them two years ago... [Things that] I wouldn't want to tell my family [because] I don't want them worrying about me."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

There are many challenges that young people face, including increased exposure to violence, substance abuse and organised gangs grooming vulnerable individuals to engage in criminal activity such as County Lines[45]. Within the Liverpool city region in particular, there is a distinct and historic 'no grass culture' with a strong emphasis on excluding the police from the management of crime and deviance on numerous levels. This issue has been acknowledged publicly not only by Merseyside Police Chief Constable Andy Cooke on several occasions[46] - an unusual move for such a high-ranking officer - but it has also been raised by Liverpool's mayor Joe Anderson numerous times as well in press interviews[47].

As a result, management of issues such as anti-social behaviour is often contained within communities, and organisations need to work with these communities rather than facilitate a top-down approach to addressing youth engagement and reducing deviant behaviour. PL Kicks specifically aims to 'strengthen communities' and 'inspire young people to develop positive, supportive relationships with one another and the authorities.' Building positive relationships with staff they can trust offers young people a voice and support system which can be vital to their social development and wellbeing.

[44]Granovetter, M. (1973) 'The strength of weak ties,' *American Journal of Sociology*. 78(6):1360-1380.
Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Wellman, B. & Berkowitz, S. (1988) *Social Structures: A Network Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[45]County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/drug-trafficking/county-lines
[46]For instance, on his official Twitter page https://twitter.com/MerPolChiefCon/status/1235243650407428097 and in press interviews: https://www.itv.com/news/granada/2020-03-04/elderly-woman-injured-in-burglary-in-liverpool
[47]See for example: https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/joe-anderson-calls-end-no-17183779

Whilst issues such as local crime and socioeconomic constraints may put added pressures on young people, they also face the very ordinary anxieties common to many whatever their social background.

> *"It's hard being my age, everything that's going on. We've got exams and stress and even when I'm upset I can just sit there with [names staff] and have a little chat with her about what's going on and I can tell her and she won't judge me at all and I can just say to her, yeah, this is what's going on and she'll give me good advice what to do and it really helps."*
>
> **(Female participant)**

Sometimes staff provide the only positive adult support as young people perceive themselves as the object of suspicion as they seek independence and room for growth on their own terms.

> *"...there's a bit of a gap like when you hit a certain age, there's stuff to do for kids and there's stuff to do when you hit 18 and then there's that awkward gap when you're not quite 18 and you're not really a kid and you're just like, "what do I do"? and I think sometimes adults will kind of see kids walking around and be like oh, what are those teens doing, they must be up to no good and it's like, "we just have nowhere else to go".*
>
> **(Female participant)**

There is often a thin line between vigilance and surveillance. Youth workers need to play numerous roles as illustrated in the table below.

Character	Role and skills
The boss	The senior member of staff. Serious and business-like but friendly and willing to listen. Occasionally involved in delivery but generally one step removed.
The buddy	Keen to involve all participants, reaching out to those who aren't joining in and relating to everyone on their level.
The teacher	An essential part of the 'deal' of participation but often viewed as militating against the fun of sessions by participants. A facilitator conducting head counts, taking registers and completing monitoring forms in sessions. Also likely to lead on securing accreditation and developmental pathways.
The joker	Engages with participants across age ranges and genders. May have a particular sporting skill but makes use of personality before expertise. The joker is uninhibited and transmits an enthusiasm for activities not by leading sessions but by being a part of them.
Mr Cool	Sometimes less immediately engaging, it is their 'aura' – based on locally valued knowledge of what's in and what's out, how to look and how not to look, and embracement of youth culture – which appeals.
The geezer	Currency is based on a more immediate identification with the locality and social background of participants. The geezer's engagement is defined by the social outlook of participants and the fact that they are 'known'. While harsher and more competitive than the 'buddy', in a dispute with authority the geezer will almost always say the young people are right.
The expert	Sessional worker who is employed specifically for their possession of a [particular] skill rather than traditional youth work skills.

(Positive Futures, 2006)[48]

[48]Positive Futures (2006) *Positve Futures Impact Report*. London: Home Office https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6207/2/A9RCAF8_Redacted.pdf

In NCS there is perhaps a need for a better balance of character types or adjustment to when certain character types are employed.

> *"It's kind of weird because on the one hand you can really appreciate that they can kind of relate to you and they can understand the issues that you have but then sometimes there are situations when you think like if I tell you this or if I need it can I trust you to be the adult in that situation. And it's like finding that balance between authoritative figure and friendly person."*
>
> **(Female participant)**

It may be difficult to make such adjustments, especially during the prolonged periods in which staff are engaged with the young people 24 hours a day on the residential aspects of the programme. Nonetheless, as the programme progresses and the staff-participant relationships develop, the programme moving young people towards the social action project, staff need to make better use of the stock they have built as 'Jokers' to become more like 'Teachers' (although remain distinct from the 'teachers' in school). This is not easy to achieve but is vital to the success of NCS in helping young people get the most out of the programme. That said, some staff clearly get the balance right as one young man highlighted that, "they've been firm but fair. They won't let us take the 'Mick'… we're alright to have a joke with them but they won't let us take it to stupid levels."

Part of the critique of NCS is the notion that "all young people on NCS are 'unknown strangers' just waiting to meet each other for the first time."[49] Similarly to the findings of other research, our work found that it is not necessarily interacting with new people that is important but the opportunity to spend time with familiar faces in a different, more intense environment. As one young man explains:

> *"My best mate, he's been arguing with some kid here since before NCS for like six months maybe … and he's forgave him for it … to be able to forgive someone is just a real weight off your chest. So, I just took a leaf from his book… [It didn't happen as a result of NCS directly but] because it's the type of person he is and I'm around him quite a lot because he's my best mate but being around him 24/7 he's just rubbed off on me."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

Whilst it is clear that NCS offers less opportunities for developing relationships over time, the youth work skills that some staff members have do come to the fore for young people who are not so extrovert:

"I didn't really have any mates in my group so I was always at the back talking to [particular staff members] because they're older and have got loads of experience. And I was just like learning from them as a person." (Male participant)

[49]Mills, S. & Waite, C. (2018) 'From Big Society to Shared Society? Geographies of social cohesion and encounter in the UK's National Citizen Service,' Human Geography. 100(2):131-148

3.4 Non-Formal and Informal Education

"... What we do is we're not school, we're not college, so we have to always be very careful that when they come here, we're not trying to force things onto them. If they want to just come here and chill for an hour and a half with their friends, for me that's great..."

(Male staff member)

"The primary role of the youth and community worker is to act as a facilitator of learning."[50] This takes place through active conversations within youth work settings as part of the interactional process between young people and staff. "All youth and community workers need to strive to be bilingual… able to engage in particular local talk and also in the formal languages of education and the wider society."[51]

They need to access a variety of 'conversational repertoires and registers'. The former represents the contingent themes and topics that emerge in conversations from the realities of the participants' lives. The latter is an understanding of the kind of language being used and the best style in which to respond. They might be 'street' conversations or 'parental' conversations, formal or informal. They might be boasting or inspiring conversations, based on bragging rights or chat-up lines, praise and astonishment. Humorous conversations full of jokes, banter, backchat may be combined with more private and personal listening, advising or admonishing, storytelling and folk wisdom[52]. Furthermore, when addressing issues such as knife crime or gang related behaviour the use of educationally centred responses are seen as effective solutions alongside traditional criminal justice responses[53].

The typical profile of young people attending PL Kicks sessions is less associated with crime and more with school-based disruption. Whilst there are spurious, yet often widely accepted, links between school exclusion and criminal behaviour, research suggests any connection is more likely to be associated with parental supervision and the responses from significant adults following transgression. Any correlation is therefore related to the capacity of guardianship during periods of exclusion from school[54].

Thus, we can begin to ask questions about the contribution of programmes like PL Kicks as part of educational alternative provision (AP) the purpose of which would not exactly be to provide an alternative to mainstream

[50]Batsleer, J.R. (2008) Informal Learning in Youth Work. London:SAGE (p5)
[51]Ibid.
[52]Ibid.
[53]Foster, R. (2013). Knife Crime Interventions: 'What Works?' *The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.SCCJR Report No. 02/2014.*
[54]See Hodgson, P. & Webb, D. (2005) 'Young People, Crime and School Exclusion: A Case of Some Surprises,' *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice.* 44(1):12-28

education but to help young people negotiate their way through life when that form of education fails them and other adult input may not be adequate enough by itself. That is not to put the blame on to parents, who may themselves need more adequate support structures as a consequence of systemic inequalities, but to provide appropriate assistance where needed. Thus, EitC's youth engagement work needs to be embedded within the lives of the young people with whom they want to work whilst also maintaining enough distance so as to remain disassociated enough with the more formal or familial relationships that may be a source of stress for young people.

Learning can take place in a number of ways as illustrated below:

Formal Education	institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system, spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university
Non-formal Education	any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children
Informal Education	the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment

(Coombs & Ahmed, 1974)[55]

For PL Kicks staff one of the key aims of their work with young people is, "to educate them around any of the issues that are affecting them, in an informal way… Through the conversations that we're having with them we're able to talk to them around [stuff] like alcohol and drugs, relationships, antisocial behaviour..." (Female staff member). One young man explains how this works in practice:

> *"[At the end of the session] I always go to the foyer there and I start getting my boots off. Then one of the staff will come out and talk to you, understand the situation, hear your side, blah, blah, blah and get an understanding that if you talk to them as an adult then you're guaranteed to get away with it in a way but not get away with it. Not like getting away with it, I'd say you get a better understanding, instead of giving them cheek and making it worse for yourself."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

Interestingly, the self-understood baseline for unacceptable behaviour is not right or wrong but the punitive measures that might be the consequence. He explains that he has, "only ever been told to not come to one night whereas others have been told not to come for a couple of weeks. I got told one night because they understood, I guess, the character I was in a way…" and because, "I get along with them."

His discussion revolves around only being banned for one session compared with others who might have been told not to return for much longer periods. Such sanctions are seen as a last resort by staff but still have to be imposed when more restorative approaches fail. In this case, the young person involved understood that this was possibly because of a 'good relationship' that he felt he has with staff. Likewise, staff recognise the need and potential to help him develop appropriate methods of self-control as a result of having built that relationship.

[55]Coombs, P. H. & Ahmed, M. (1974) *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Youth work settings are excellent sites for social and emotional learning (SEL) which has been promoted as part of recent Government policy on character, resilience and grit. They tend to provide opportunities for informal and non-formal education. With the increasing tendency for outcomes to be quantifiable much funding is linked to the demonstration of non-formal education that is easier to measure and evaluate. In the case of PL Kicks and to a lesser extent NCS (due to the design of the latter being based on non-formal education) it is the informal learning that is key to the work's success. The difficulty is finding (consistent) ways of demonstrating such informal education.

In the first instance it is necessary to identify some loose measures of what informal education looks like in this particular context. This is not easy as it is, in some ways, anathema to the practical philosophy on which open access youth work is based. However, it is about seeing measurement in different terms to the usual quantitative method of achieving outputs whilst also attending to the time-consuming approach to developing case studies. What knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights are young people gaining? Sometimes it might be easy to identify a skill that has been improved through the sudden realisation that a particular young person is communicating with staff in a different way, for example.

Similarly, it is fairly straightforward constructing a case study for an individual who has begun to volunteer within the project or even started to respond to staff requests for help and undertake volunteering tasks. It is less easy to show more subtle ways in which young people may take a different attitude towards a controversial issue or become more responsible for themselves.
What is encouraging is that due to the positive relationships that the participants have with staff (see Section 3.3) when problems emerge they are happy to bring that to them:

> *"There was an issue months ago about a knife... and they couldn't wait to come in and tell us what had happened... They told us the whole story of it. Then we had a conversation about knives and the dangers and stuff like that. They're comfortable enough to come in and tell us about stuff like that and we would then talk to them about what they can do or things like that."*
>
> **(Female PL Kicks Staff)**

The difficulty with youth work that promotes informal education such as that described here is being able to demonstrate the outcome of such conversations, which is what many funders expect. Arguably, however, such engagement is the outcome and when demonstrating the impact of the work, it is about demonstrating how and when such conversations are taking place. This is recognised by one member of staff who notes that:

> *"I'm here to support them, helping them become a better young person. Advise them on the risks. I can never say to a young person, stop doing that. I can only advise them on [why] they shouldn't be smoking. So if there is someone smoking... we can only advise them of the risks. It's another way of parenting, isn't it really."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

Education in its most holistic form is about engaging with people in a way that makes them want to learn. The very nature of open access youth work is providing the information and opportunities for young people to make qualified decisions based on that information when the need arises. What is important is that the advice on offer is well informed in the first place and young people respect the advice due to the way it is being given and the person from whom they are receiving it.

On the notion of whether more formal approaches would be a good thing, it is again about getting the balance right:

> *"It would have its good points, yes, and it would have its bad points. The good points are obviously they would do more. The less they're doing stuff they shouldn't be doing, but they've got to grow up themselves. Obviously, we help them essentially grow up but every person has got to make their own mistake first. We*

can essentially guide them around not to make a certain mistake but as you know growing up, the best teacher of life is experience. If they're constantly with us, which would be good, I'm not saying it wouldn't if it could happen, but then they're missing out on building their own experience really."

(Male staff member)

Again, a lot of what is being expressed here is reactive rather than proactive. It is acknowledged that the baseline for working with young people in this part of Liverpool might be low due to the general levels of deprivation in the area and the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) many participants may have faced. This is understandable and driven by a maternal/paternal or sororal/fraternal instinct to protect young people.

Young people subjected to ACEs at home can negatively impact traditional educational attainment and experiences . Therefore, having spaces in which young people can build more positive and trusting relationships can increase social capital in other areas of their lives, such as in school. So, informal or non-formal education can have a wider impact, even on traditional forms of learning and attainment. Indeed, a notable aspect of the research was the uptake of proposed 'revision sessions' which emerged from a conversation between the researchers and female participants in particular. During the conversation, one participant stated that her brother was 'dead clever' but that she was 'shit at everything'. Yet when pressed, she stated that she did not like school but did like cooking, and proceeded to show pictures of gourmet style-meals on her phone, which she proudly stated she had cooked for her parents. When praised by the PL Kicks staff and researchers, she responded in a self-deprecating way that her 'brother can cook as well… and he is clever'.

This would have been a good opportunity to develop this conversation more in terms of non-traditional education and encourage this area of interest as a viable alternative for future development. For instance, drawing on any knowledge of related popular culture such as TV programmes, competitions and social media celebrities who utilise such skills would enable staff to develop this dialogue, both at this point and in future. They could also quickly conduct research into culinary courses or apprenticeships in the local area, and suggest this in future conversations. The young person may then begin to consider options they may not have been informed about in a formal educational setting and realise that there are adults who are willing to discuss such options with them. Building this dialogue with the young person would take time and should be nuanced to avoid disengaging them. Demonstrating that there are opportunities available for them to further develop skills outside of school or EitC programmes, as well as having a place to discuss that, would aid raising aspirations and help to remove often self-imposed barriers.

In such situations, young people should be encouraged to run with an activity in which they have a strong interest to develop what might be labelled a social action project in order to express their talent. A Bake-Off or Masterchef style competition could be developed to encourage engagement as the memes of popular culture are utilised to help young people realise their own potential. Staff are fully committed to promoting and pushing such ideas but again are hampered by capacity. It is in such situations as this that engagement with partner organisations, the wider Everton 'family' and the use of volunteers from beyond the youth engagement programmes might be of use. The role of the PL Kicks staff is then to enthuse and support the project through already existing strategies of engagement based on the strength of their relationship and encouragement of young people's own identities.

As discussed in section 3.2, one of the difficulties facing the delivery of the workshops as part of the NCS is the range of interests and levels of understanding within such a large cross section of young people. However, participants did feel that they had benefitted from more informal learning that is embedded within the design of the programme.

"I think my people skills have got better [by talking to the staff] who are 18 and upwards... [older kids] don't [usually] talk to you and then you don't talk to them so I think I've got better with that [and] you need that in the workplace because everyone is different ages."

(Female participant)

"I've been living with like 5, 6 other people in a tent, with like 30 others talking to them... they've got different views and they bring it in and then you kind of think more... you're spending like a week, 24 hours a day, with them so you're going to talk to them about [quite personal things]... you kind of listen and it's like, 'I get where you're coming from'... you still like believe in your views but you're open-minded then to learn."

(Female participant)

"I learnt that I've got more determination because I wanted to give up half way but I was like you know what, I'm gonna do it."

(Female participant)

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT THROUGH THICK AND THIN?

The focus group of female participants chat noisily, perhaps nervously, unsure of what the researchers want from them. A discussion about their opinions of school ensues. One of the girls immediately begins to describe herself as 'thick', stating that she was 'going to fail' her impending GCSE exams. This was echoed by all of the young people in the conversation, and given their evident strained relationships with teachers, had the potential to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Some of the young people expressed concerns and anxiety around their upcoming exams and felt that they were not supported in the traditional school space (with one participant noting that they were taught 'outside, in a car park'). The suggestion by one of the researchers of trying to help through a 'revision workshop' was met with enthusiasm and with the support of the staff, two sessions were organised for the following couple of weeks.

The researchers purchased small quantities of stationery to create 'revision packs', which included cartoon themed erasers, to help engage the participants and negate any barriers they may have to revision tools. While the participants altered slightly between the two sessions, the young people spent an hour, on each occasion, in one of the rooms separate to the main youth engagement spaces working on revision strategies, close analysis of poetry and general educational discussion.

While it may have been too close to the exam period to make any significant developments with specific content/curriculum, having a space where they could discuss aspects of work they may not have felt comfortable discussing in the 'traditional' educational setting proved positive, one participant again remarking that they feel 'thick' in school and that their 'teachers hate them'. They suggested that they did not feel that here because the researcher was 'not like [their] teachers'.

Another participant remarked that they struggle to revise at home as it is 'so noisy' with younger siblings, and that as they are expected to provide care for their brothers and sisters, 'it was hard to find the time' to study. They stated that having this space on a more regular basis would be useful, but that it might still be difficult to concentrate with 'everything else going on there'. One suggestion which came from the discussion between the researcher and the group was that opening the classroom prior to the start time for the older group would mean that they had somewhere to work for at least an hour but this would not detract from their time at PL Kicks where they socialised.

It was interesting too that this exercise took place with the female participants as it was easier to have this discussion with them given that they were not distracted with football or other sports/games. It was also facilitated by the staff who helped to initiate that conversation and support the participants in actually engaging with the sessions. This typifies how the relationship with staff members is crucial in engaging the young people in a wider context, outside of the usual remits of what the girls in particular expect from PL Kicks. It also demonstrates that this is possible and that the young people are open to try different activities with the right encouragement and perceived benefits.

Although limited due to the close proximity to the exam period, it was still a successful interaction with one participant stating to the researcher after sitting their GCSE exam that, 'I remembered what you said to me about [close reading poems] and kept looking at my unicorn rubber and it helped me to think [about] what you said'.

3.5 Opportunities, Aspirations & Personal Development

"Youth work as informal support engages with the social situation of young people, their rights and needs, and also with their emotions and personal development."[57]

In order to deal with the instability resulting from ACEs, young people may exhibit aggression or engage in risk taking behaviour as a coping mechanism. As a result, this may lead to further negative outcomes for the young person, such as deviant peer relationships as mechanisms of support, or due to their own violent behaviour, rejection from peers. Not having supportive relationships with primary caregivers or other appropriate adults can create a misrepresentation of what constitutes positive interactions or attachments. Consequently, this creates a distorted impression of what traits young people should value in individuals, often leading to negative friendships or associations, as this type of behaviour has been normalised by their caregivers[58].

For young men who are unable to control their emotions PL Kicks offers a controlled and monitored space where the usual punitive measures that are embedded in the rules of football as a sport are supported by developmental approaches:

> *"when I started coming I was dead naughty... Fighting and arguing... They used to say to me come back in two weeks or something because I used to be in a lot of trouble... If I were to get like a hard tackle, I'd [try to] hurt them ... [or] I'd say something and it would just kick off. I've got a high temper. So I snap easy but I've learned to control that now..."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

PL Kicks staff have a mix of experience and training in terms of youth work and sports coaching. They understand that the main attraction, for young men at least, is the opportunity to play football but that that is a means by which to build relationships through football related 'banter' as well as instilling some discipline through the rules of the game. Added to this, though, simple exchanges with those waiting to play allow staff to build rapport and begin to build a profile and understanding of the young people attending the sessions.

> *"We look at developing their confidence, building their self-esteem, raising aspirations... represent Everton community, being part of something, a sense of belonging."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

For one member of staff the welcoming environment means that even when a young person comes on their own, because of the effort made in getting to know them and encouraging them into groups within the sessions, that young person keeps coming and taking part which, "shows an improvement in their self-confidence ...there's a number of examples down here. They still come on their own but they've made friends. This opportunity gave them that and they don't feel isolated and that can translate back into their whole life." This may be true. The difficulty is being able to evidence how such an opportunity translates into their life more widely.

Interviews with participants reflects this, with confidence being the primary benefit highlighted when asked about how participants have changed as a consequence of attending PL Kicks sessions. This was generally couched in terms of being forced to engage with people they did not know through being put into their football team without their friends. This is an important part of the youth work offer that is perhaps not being maximised for the benefit of young people attending. This may be linked to the capacity of staff to engage adequately with the large numbers of young people at each session.

[57]Batsleer, J.R. (2008) *Informal Learning in Youth Work*. London:SAGE (p12)

[58]Dodge, K. (1983) 'Behavioral Antecedents of Peer Social Status' *Child Development*. 54:1386-1399. Kupersmidt, J. B., Coie, J. D., & Dodge, K. A. (1990. 'The role of poor peer relationships in the development of disorder' in S. R. Asher & J. D. Coie (Eds.), *Cambridge studies in social and emotional development. Peer rejection in childhood* (p. 274–305). Cambridge University Press.

It may also be due to a preponderance on concentrating on those young people that seek attention, often through negative behaviour traits.

That said, there is a growing culture of volunteering that has been developed as some participants are being asked to undertake small duties within sessions. This is a cornerstone of PL Kicks and 'volunteering' within grassroots sport more widely – the latter existing on the goodwill of participants to make sure facilities are booked, equipment maintained, refreshments prepared, transport provided and any number of other requirements.

For participants with low aspirations and low self-esteem it is a slow process of building respect for the provision they have, convincing them to contribute to that provision and then offering the opportunity to feel an essential part of that provision. As one staff member highlights: "…even for them to explain a session or explain an activity or explain a game, that's giving them that power to do that … giving them that sort of responsibility to do that." She goes on to say that, "they get worried and nervous about things, especially when you give them a bit of responsibility and it's just making sure that you're reassuring and bolstering them up to say, you've done the right thing, you've done great at the end of the night."

In so doing, though, it encourages others to become more involved in organising sessions.

> *"...at the moment we've got young people who are wanting to volunteer. So they're feeling confident and comfortable enough now that they've been coming for some time to try and work with the younger groups. Try and develop their own skills to try and share something back with the others. ... it gives them that bit of... authority is not the word I'm looking for but it gives them that bit of responsibility."*
>
> **(Female staff member)**

This is the first step in developing a culture of belonging and encouraging young people themselves to take ownership of the programme. There are targets to meet but they should be secondary to deliberate action that helps the possibility of long-term change for not only the young people attending but belief in the provision more widely.

> *"[Just] one person a few months ago [started] volunteering and when someone has seen them get that kit, they were like, I want to do that. So now we've got five or six people volunteering... If that can keep happening then once they are in: raise their aspirations, tell them there's more to it. It's not just coaching. We can do this, this, this, this."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

The focus on receiving a 'kit' is interesting, as although this may be perceived as wanting to receive 'free' items, it is more likely to be due to the sense of belonging which comes from wearing these branded items of clothing. The standard kit given to staff and volunteers then becomes a sort of non-formal uniform, the visual aspect of which identifies the wearer as part of a desirable group or team, and one with some responsibility, authority, and credibility. Earning this 'uniform' – which is not distinguishable between staff and volunteers – enables the participants to work towards an increased sense of belonging and purpose that they have had to earn through hard work and commitment. Participants hold staff in high regard, and there is an identifiable sense of pride which comes from informal conversations with volunteers and the staff recognise the value of this type of volunteering for raising aspirations (as above). The young people also appear to recognise the responsibility which comes with volunteering:

> *"Since I've been volunteering ... [younger participants] recognise me ... so obviously you've got to behave because they're the ones looking up to you. So if they see one of the older ones doing this, that or the other then they're going to do the exact same."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

The question is the extent to which that responsibility can be developed even if formal volunteering is not necessarily appropriate or desired. This is partly an issue of semantics and how volunteering has become increasingly defined by formalised opportunities. It is also an important part of 'grassroots governmentality' that can place young people at the heart of developing a desired community through (sport) volunteering[59].

One of the short-term outcomes for NCS is that, "young people leave the program knowing a more diverse range of people and with greater recognition of and respect for those from different backgrounds." For the young people on the EitC NCS program diversity is fundamentally defined by socio-economic background, geography and popular cultural interests. As one female participant illustrated with her response to a question about how other people she has met are different: "Maybe their style of music or the way they dress or what background they come from and what place they come from."

> *"I [already] know some people from Blue Coat [School] and we just don't get along. And then I met some [on NCS] and they were all really nice. They were all nice but I never ever thought I'd be friends with them."*
>
> **(Female participant)**

There was limited diversity amongst young people on the NCS programme in terms of ethnicity and when directly asked in interviews sexual orientation was not a topic that emerged in terms of meeting different people. However, at a time when mental health issues are much more prominent, it was clear that there were young people participating with various concerns about their mental wellbeing. Where NCS did seem to fail was its provision for young people with physical disabilities.

Nonetheless, many young people expressed surprise at their own ability to get along with 'different people' – by which they mean people they do not know rather than people who are particularly different from them. "It's got me to talk to people that I wouldn't usually talk to but it's got me to like understand people that I wouldn't usually understand. I'm not saying I agree with them but I understand them." (Male participant) The structure of the program encourages such interactions and the staff utilise their own outgoing tendencies to reinforce the social aspects attached to the program.

> *"It's just a big social thing... like even with the staff, the relationship with the staff and the [participants]... it's a good environment, the atmosphere... like even in the second week at the end of it all in the hall there was like five of us, staff and 16 year olds just dancing round the stage. It's just been fun all week."*
>
> **(Male participant)**

One of the aims of PL Kicks is to enhance the ambitions of young people involved. This is recognised by EitC staff who suggest that, "the aspirations are so low in this area it's unbelievable. No one has ambition." He intimates that there is motivation to get earning in order to afford the consumer items essential for young people to convey their identity but with employment opportunities limited the option of selling drugs becomes more attractive. One young man sums up his aspirations neatly: "I just don't wanna fail and be like on the dole and that." (Male participant)

As already noted, the Youth Zone where PL Kicks is based is located in a highly deprived area and issues associated with poverty and crime are acknowledged by young people as a normal part of their lives. That does not necessarily mean that, in physical terms, they aspire to physically get away from it.

[59]Mangan, A., Skey, M. & Stone, C. (2021) 'Grassroots governmentality: Exploring the role of sports volunteers in re-imagining community,' *British Journal of Sociology*

"If I was older and had the money I think I'd stay because I've lived here all my life and know the people around here ... Moving to a different place, it's alright like but it's just not home. So I'd prefer to stay."

(Male participant)

Of course, participants' perceptions of 'different places' are not necessarily well informed but that is not the point. Conceptions of home are informed by strong positive emotions, even when, objectively, the physical spaces being described are defined by poverty, disadvantage and in some cases violence or abuse. It is through challenging the structures that lead to such negative aspects that aspirations can be raised.

"...just to be able to do a little bit more... because ultimately they're coming two nights a week and it's football... We'd love to be able to take them out a little bit more... take them places they've never seen... They'll talk about it for months when they've been to Kicks tournaments... They may seem little things but to them I think when you see them in those environments as well, it just helps with engagement, motivation... [In] looking at confidence, aspirations and getting them to try new things, see new things... that's what we want to be about as well but with that comes a [financial cost]."

(Male staff member)

In sourcing the extra finances that may be needed to widen the offer available to include more off-site excursions more substantial evidence is required as to the impact of such activities. This, again, would be easier to achieve with an embedded research approach that utilises the same engagement processes of dialogue, trust, respect and choice on which youth work is built. Understanding young people's aspirations emerges through getting to know them over time. Accurate assessment of how such aspirations change as a consequence of their engagement with different activities relies on knowledge that emerges over time and ways of revealing such knowledge that participants themselves are comfortable with and has been developed with young people and staff as part of the engagement process itself.

There is a distinct difference between the kind of young people attending PL Kicks and those on the NCS programme. The former attracts a higher concentration of local youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Their expectations are to pass their GCSEs and get a job.

"[I don't know what I want to do] but my granda works on the railway, he's like one of the bosses and he said to me, "I could help you get on there when you leave".

(Male participant)

"I want to do stuff like what they do here, coaching and getting involved with young people and stuff like that. Football is all I know, football is my sport, that's my frame of mind, that's where my head is always at."

(Male participant)

That is not to deny that many might show greater aspiration, with college and university some kind of abstract ambition.

"It's when I seen my uncle go to university I was thinking in my head, that could be me in a couple of years if I put my head down."

(Male participant)

"I want to go to City College or go back to sixth form... [to study] health & social or sports... [and then] go to uni... to do like health."

(Female participant)

In order to help raise aspirations, the strict dichotomy of either traditional higher education routes or going straight into low-skilled employment could be further challenged by staff to demonstrate alternative pathways which might be more attainable – and viable – for the young people in attendance at PL Kicks in particular. While university study should not be discouraged, young people should realise that there are a variety of opportunities open to them, which they may not know if they do not engage in the formal aspects of career development at school due to aforementioned issues in this environment. While the staff are aware that they need to create a balance of the participants feeling they can approach them yet not enforcing them to do anything, it would be possible to encourage this type of dialogue more, especially around points in the year such as the exam period or as they reach the age of 16 and beyond.

It is encouraging that the youth work as a career choice is already being discussed by participants as noted above and the extension of the volunteering process within PL Kicks or NCS could further support this as many may not have previously considered this as a potential career choice. Other areas could also be explored with staff utilising their position in the young people's lives of being 'trusted and approachable adults'. Helping young people understand that there are viable alternatives to university, entry level, low-skilled jobs or even criminal activity to support their lifestyles could provide a pathway to raising aspirations for those who may not otherwise have the opportunity or willingness to have those conversations.

That being said, there is also a unique opportunity to build a stronger relationship between EitC and partner universities in order to develop a more formalised approach to mentorship between university staff and the young people, as well as more formal opportunities relating to the 'foundation year' provision offered. This entry point to higher education allows those from non-traditional education backgrounds or those who did not achieve the required grades during FE study to be offered a place at university on completion of a foundation year first. This particular route may enable a greater number of participants to view higher education as an achievable aspiration, and working with dedicated mentors or having 'away days' to the campus would also enable it to become a more familiar and accessible space.
NCS generally attracts young people from socioeconomic backgrounds less restricted by disadvantage. There are much greater numbers of participants who are in little doubt about the professional careers they hope to pursue and the higher education pathway to get there.

"Hopefully [I'll] go to college. Get my [qualification] in Law and then study Law at University."

(Female participant)

"[The] main reason [to do NCS] was probably for my CV and university applications."

(Female participant)

The second perspective about NCS was echoed by others with the programme being seen tactically as an important contribution to these young people's presentation of themselves on paper. Something that many of the PL Kicks participants are yet to consider but which is nonetheless potentially a key outcome of their attendance.

Informally focusing on more formal pathways outside of traditional further study routes could raise aspirations of young people. Coupled with the strong relationships that participants have with PL Kicks staff, there is more to be achieved here than in

traditional educational settings in terms of encouragement, confidence building and widening participation. While this will need to be achieved in a nuanced way to avoid 'feeling like school' there is great scope to explore future possibilities through informal discussion, links with other agencies and having a safe space in which to explore options. A clear and obvious pathway is to link more explicitly with EitC Employability programs, themselves rooted in more targeted youth engagement approaches[60].

There are currently more opportunities to do this kind of work with the young women attending PL Kicks sessions than their male counterparts. This is partly due to the structure of the sessions which lead to boys spending more time playing football and less time in a conversational space compared with the girls for whom the sessions are attended for that very reason, a discursive space where they can explore their identities. It is also partly due to the gendered lives through which young men and women are socialised into becoming who they are.

[60]As evidenced here: https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/research/documents/SEARCH%20-%20EitC%20Employability%20SROI%20Report.pdf

ON THE ROAD TO **WIGAN PEERS**

The lads were already restless as we reached the M58 on the north edge of the city. The joy associated with making fun of shoppers on Walton Vale and the juvenile attempts to impress girls waiting at the bus stop have given way to boredom as the EitC mini-bus struggles to keep its velocity on the motorway.

One of the advantages of PL Kicks is that programmes are run at numerous football clubs across the country and regular trips and tournaments are organised with participants of programmes hosted by other football clubs. To coincide with Everton FC's pre-season friendly against Wigan Athletic, a group of lads have been chosen as representatives of Everton Kicks to play a couple of six-a-side matches against their peers in Wigan. They will attend the match afterwards at the DW stadium courtesy of complimentary tickets as part of Everton's community ticketing policy.

Wigan is only 20 miles from the Youth Zone at Spellow Lane but the journey takes over an hour and having found the entrance to the leisure centre following a couple of circuits around the town centre's one way system, much to the despairing hilarity of the mini bus occupants, the lads are keen to take the field. The opposition do not seem very organised and the two matches result in easy victories for the Blues.

Some of the players involved are well known to the staff and this is an opportunity to spend some more intense time away from the distraction of the weekly Kicks sessions. For others it is an opportunity to get to know them a little better as well as giving them a taste of life beyond their usual daily lives. Also, although the lads all know one another from attendance at the weekly sessions they are not necessarily surrounded by their closest friendship groups. Thus, it is an opportunity to redefine their own identities for a short while as well as interact with one another without the qualifying pretentions attached to an identity defined by their own social history and perceptions of how it is viewed by others.

As the tickets for the match are distributed amongst the group they are reminded of their responsibilities, representing as they are Everton in the Community and Everton FC. This carries a lot of weight due to the relationships that staff have developed with the young people over time and the respect the latter have for the organisation providing these opportunities. Being trusted to 'behave' themselves whilst also knowing they are unable to stray too far and unlikely to want to due to the unfamiliarity of their surroundings allows the young people to feel more responsible for themselves and increases their trust in staff whilst the staff themselves can actually still maintain control.

As darkness falls and the mini-bus makes its way out of the stadium car park tiredness sets in and discussions about the choice of music for the journey home become strained. The team camaraderie that had been nurtured earlier in the day is beginning to wane.

"Yer ma' eats outta bins…"

The cultural initiation defined by 'mother cussing' is as prevalent within Liverpool as it is in other Westernised urban youth cultures. Having let the 'banter' develop for a while, though, there is a point at which the staff have to start managing the young people's interactions as the insults being traded travel the thin line between jocularity and harmful truism and the verbal jousting pushes some closer to physical retaliation.

These are important learning opportunities for young people who may well grow out of this form of interaction with their peers but will need to learn how to manage themselves when dealing with other criticism or requests to undertake tasks that are not to their liking from authority figures throughout their lives.

3.6 Support Structures

"...when it comes to some of the more hard-hitting issues that young people are presenting with, that are affecting them... I've never been offered an opportunity to go on any of that type of course. And that's where it's moving to now for me, to have the knowledge around those things... like suicide awareness, bereavement counselling, self-harm..."

(Female staff member)

There is a recognition that young people are facing challenges for which staff are inadequately prepared but at the same time remain the best placed to offer (initial) support. It is recognised that these youth engagement programmes may not be best placed to solve such 'hard-hitting issues' but for staff to be able to sign-post participants they must first be confident that they can provide adequate support in the first instance. To some degree that should come from a belief in the principles of youth engagement and the trusted relationships that staff clearly have with many of the young people. However, for front-line staff confidence in their own knowledge is important as the consequences of missing appropriate signals or being able to immediately engage with an area of concern might prove serious.

Young people experiencing four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including abuse, neglect and parental drug or alcohol use, are almost seven times more likely to be a perpetrator of violence as an adult, and almost eight times more likely to be incarcerated in their lifetime, than those with no ACEs[61]. Having a safe space, with trusted adults, can negate some of the effects of ACEs for young people, and move them away from the increased risks of criminality and disengagement. Although there are general motivations or risk factors which can lead to engaging in antisocial or violent behaviour, in order to tackle this effectively, geographical particularities need to be considered, as different areas initiate different responses to external stimuli or stressors. So, while there may be similarities in terms of issues such as social exclusion and opportunities, or lack of them, a 'one size fits all' approach may be largely ineffective at a micro-level. Organisations and initiatives which possess knowledge of the local area and communities within have the potential to provide this nuanced support.

It does mean that staff are faced with difficult decisions about who can be supported and to what degree:

"There's obviously young people in this area who are involved in gangs and stuff like that. Some of them have dipped in and out of being engaged with [PL Kicks] but some of the dangers they bring with them and the behaviour they were presenting was not suitable for this environment.... So we had to kind of like part ways with them. We offered them other things but they weren't at the stage where they were willing to want to do it... [and] we have got a responsibility to protect the young people that are already in here so it's a very difficult balance."

(Female staff member)

This suggests that there is a willingness to engage with more challenging young people but the current structure of the PL Kicks sessions means that it is not possible through

[61]Bellis, M.A., Hughes, K., Leckenby, N., Perkins, C. & Lowey, H. (2014) 'National household survey of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with resilience to health-harming behaviors in England.' *BMC Medicine*, 12(72)

that approach. This is unfortunate because as one member of staff explains, "[Kicks] isn't necessarily the place to tackle massive issues, it's a place to identify those issues and then that work can then be done in a smaller setting outside of it." In other words, PL Kicks acts as a gateway in accessing local young people from where they can be internally signposted to support programmes that are more focused on the needs of young people in those high-risk categories.

> *"We're probably restricted in what we can do with young people just because of time and what Kicks is about... You can't really give time to young people in the sense of what support they may need, which is why we've got the other programmes in place. That's the time when we can do more quality over quantity. Not that there's not good quality here but ... very rarely could you sit down here with a lad or girl for an hour and they open up. That's not what this is about. Being able to add that would be good but that's why we've put all the other stuff in place."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

As a consequence of the current structure some staff feel that it is too late for them to help certain young people.

> *"There's young people out there now who are [involved] in gang violence... Running drugs for older people... There's cars floating around looking for these young lads, which is a massive problem... [We can't reach] people who are already committing the crime. The scary thing is, those kids, some of them have fallen through the net and are just so hard to reach now because they're out there doing it. They're out there doing it and they're only 14, 15. There's nothing you can really do for those kids. We can offer them football sessions but they're past it."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

Nonetheless, once young people are engaged with the programme there is a determination to help.

> *"We've got a couple [of young people] that are on the verge of being kicked out. It's talking to them and trying to see what's behind their behaviour as to why they're in this situation and to see if it's too far gone, whether they can turn it around for themselves or if they can't, what options have they got going forward..."*
>
> **(Female staff member)**

What is difficult to assess at present is how 'at risk' various individuals are. As already noted, the majority of participants are not immediately at risk of criminal behaviour but due to growing up with disadvantage are at risk of lacking the opportunities to flourish and develop. It is again a matter of distinction. For the purposes of monitoring and evaluation, at least, participants can be categorised based on risk factors and protective factors. These can be built up over time as staff get to know more about the young people who attend rather than any formal collecting of data. Other factors should also be included as more is understood in terms of participants' potential for development. In this way, the programme can easily be profiled against certain criteria and young people can begin to be seen in terms of capacity for and direction of development as well as concerns about risk.

Of course, this must all be done within the boundaries of participants' voluntary attendance and alongside their perceptions of themselves. In other words, it should not change the nature of the work and the way in which staff engage with young people but will allow the organisation to show a snapshot of whom they are working with at any given time. It will also be able to show progress in terms of what the aims and objectives of the programme are. This will be aided by one member of staff 'collecting' this 'data' through existing youth work practices without abusing the relationship that exists.

One of the strengths of both NCS and PL Kicks being housed within Everton in the Community and the latter's relationship with

Everton Football Club is that the programmes, staff and young people benefit from wider support structures through the expansive set of projects within the EitC portfolio to which participants can be directly referred or the utilisation of protocols and expertise that predominantly serve the football club.

> *"When I first started coming here I'd say I was one of the kids that were bad and destructive and ruined the session and gave lip back to them – stuff you shouldn't do. And then I started smoking weed, didn't I, coming in here under the influence of drugs and [staff member] put me on one of these Monday sessions @41 Goodison so we go there."*[62]
>
> **(Male participant)**

The consequence of such an intervention has meant that this young man, "got off the weed altogether," and started to "focus" and "behave more responsibly" to the extent that he began volunteering on sessions, "because obviously with the passion for coaching and stuff like that, there was clearly an opportunity ... And so here [at EitC], they've helped me with a lot really."

There are other interventions and programme teams that young people can be referred onto:

> *"If we do identify someone who's got issues, someone who is struggling say, financially, we can refer them to neighbourhoods. If we identify somebody that would be a good volunteer we can get them involved in volunteering. If we identify someone that's coming in under the influence of drugs and alcohol we can engage them through a session."*
>
> **(Female staff member)**

Moreover, the EitC youth engagement programme is continually evolving.

> *"... there are young people that need a lot more time and commitment... [At Kicks] you'll be getting 30, 40, 50, 60 kids and really what you're trying to do for two hours is provide an environment where it's safe, welcoming and fun. You'll obviously get chances to have conversations but not really an environment where they might always open up ... Safe Hands evolved from that ... [for] those young people that need that intense one to one support, real wraparound support. They're quite high risk. They're probably further on than the support Kicks could give them."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

PL Kicks, then, is seen as a space to engage as many local young people as possible through offering them fun and enjoyable activities; most pertinently organised recreational football. Through this engagement, the relationships are built so that staff can identify issues that participants may be facing in their lives and then, where needed, address them or encourage those involved to get further support from other programmes that EitC organise.

> *"[For] some of these young people there could be quite serious things going on. I don't think there's anything that you can ever ignore... I think through those underpinning relationships, if someone says something then I'd imagine that staff would be quite confident.... five minutes later or if there's an opportunity a little bit later on [to ask], 'Is everything all right?' It's just those open questions really. Just to maybe open it up a little bit. Through that you might go, 'oh yeah.' You can shut it down. At the same time if it opens it up a little bit then it just allows us to act upon it really. If we feel we obviously need to take it on to whatever – safeguarding, the next step – then we can do that."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

[62]@41 Goodison Road combines two projects, Breathing Space and Safe Hands, that work with young people aged 10-19 whose behaviour puts them at risk of custody, or who are at risk of becoming looked after by local authorities. For more information about the work undertaken @41Goodison see https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/research/documents/SEARCH%20-%20Goodison%20Rd%20Final%20Report.pdf

During the research period no referrals from the PL Kicks programme to the safeguarding team were recorded. As already discussed, staff often deal with issues as they emerge on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis, some of which may relate to safeguarding concerns but which may not get reported because of the expertise that exists within the PL Kicks team and the other options available to them. Some participants, for instance, were signposted to and began attending sessions as part of the @41Goodison programme due to concerns related to smoking. In contrast, the following shows the concerns that were reported to the safeguarding team by NCS staff during the research period.

The concerns fall into one of two loose categories: long-standing trauma (62%) and programme-based incidents (38%). The latter are concerning but generally more easily dealt with and for which training can provide some preparation – though the pressure on staff during the adventure phase due to the very nature of attending to the needs of large numbers of young people would be a cause for concern. Again, this is more a criticism of the NCS structure and requirements rather than EitC's delivery. Some of the disclosure of more long-standing issues also would be concerning for inexperienced staff but more significantly perhaps would be the less direct signals that young people are displaying for which it takes experienced youth workers to identify and then know the best way to proceed.

Safeguarding Referrals from NCS - Summer 2018	
Female	Missing from home. Contact from Club staff encouraging to return prior to engagement on NCS – YP returned home.
Female	Disclosure of physical assault by another NCS participant (not on our programme)
Male	Disclosure of suicidal thoughts due to family bereavement and trauma.
Male	Disclosure of bullying throughout school and self-harm
Female	Disclosure regarding a female participant - concern raised regarding a male participant (same wave) who had behaved inappropriately prior to attending, pressure to engage in sexual activities.
Female	Young carer – disclosed a miscarriage whilst on programme
Male	Disclosed physical assault by another participant whilst on programme
Female	Disclosure of indecent exposure whilst on programme. (Group were working in Stanley Park)
Male	Disclosure of drug misuse and addiction
Female	Disclosure of neglect at home due to parent mental health
Male	Disclosure of chaotic home life and bullying at home.
Male	Concern raised regarding possible online grooming
Male	Concern raised possible eating disorder

Training for NCS staff is not extensive but does include a significant input around safeguarding. It is certainly not something that is taken lightly by the organisation but one day of role play exercises does not prepare staff and there were situations that arose that could have been handled in a way that was more sensitive to the needs of the young people involved.

It does seem that from the staff's perspective the development of young people is governed by reducing their exposure to and educating them about the risks of anti-social behaviour or managing their emotional and mental wellbeing. As already discussed, some staff feel that they are not knowledgeable enough about the issues that are emerging and have not been offered adequate training opportunities. This may be a communication issue between front-line staff and those with the power to make training requests.

> *"If there are things that arise, it's just looking at what are the needs for the support...? Do we just have a chat with the young people? Do we do some issue-based sessions ourselves? Do we feel it's a little bit further on [so we need to bring in external partners]...? If we need to... the club will put stuff on or... we have had staff who find training that is relevant to their role. As long as you can justify it then the [money] is there... Things change so much. Issues that young people faced two years ago... they will be different now. So, you've got to keep staff up to date."*
>
> **(Male staff member)**

The question then is how Everton in the Community as an organisation can impact upon the structural inequalities that the young people with whom they engage are facing. There is a great opportunity to utilise their reputation and relationship with Everton Football Club in order to amplify the voices of young people and local communities and advocate for social change beyond the plight and personal challenges of individual young people. It is this kind of structural support that is truly empowering.

Everton in the Community can be crucial in developing 'structural resilience' through an asset-based model for community development and youth engagement[63].

[63]Schulman S, & Davies T. (2007) *Evidence of the Impact of the 'Youth Development Model' on Outcomes for Young People – A Literature Review.* Leicester: National Youth Agency

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McKnight, J. & Kretzmann, J. (1996) *Mapping Community Capacity (Revised ed.)*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research. See ABCD Institute for further details: https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE IN **SAFE HANDS AT EVERTON** KICKS SESSIONS

By his own admission, Jake was disruptive at school. He also identifies himself as, "one of the kids that were bad and destructive, ruined the sessions and gave lip back to staff," when he first started attending Kicks sessions. At the time he was suffering with anxiety and depression as a result of losing his granddad three years earlier. He had not made the connection between the two and did not feel able to talk to anyone about how he was feeling. Over time he has been able to reflect on things and acknowledge what happened: "I wasn't dealing with it so I started smoking weed to try to hide it all."

He was offered counselling at school but suggests that: "I felt like I was a burden if I looked or asked for help so that's why I kind of dealt with it myself and then I started smoking weed and thought, 'I'm fine, I'll just smoke weed and I'll be fine.'"

This is not a case of cannabis acting as a gateway drug. Jake is aware of the issues involving groups of young people in the neighbourhood and across the city but is savvy enough to keep himself away from such street-based aggro. Nonetheless, his use of a recreational drug in order to avoid dealing with emotional difficulties, leading to further issues in controlling his moods and behaviour, and potential addiction, could have had repercussions.

Recognising this, staff began to make use of the relationship that had been built with him to suggest further support was available as part of another EitC programme, @41GoodisonRoad, which offers more targeted support for young people at risk. Staff commend him because, "He's responded brilliantly… He has stopped smoking weed and cannabis. He's attended all of our alternative stuff on a Monday night. He's actually referred on to the other programmes." They see him as 'typical of the type of young person coming to Kicks'. Not 'really naughty' but something has led him astray and with appropriate support and education his negative trajectory can be altered.

Being referred to the other programme on which there are young people with even greater challenges has given Jake better perspective. One member of staff suggests that, "I think it opened his eyes more to what we actually do and we're not just there moaning maybe, or what he sees as moaning. So now when he's come in, you could see him calm down. You ask him to do something he'd do it. I don't know what the change was but it happened. I think it was through obviously the interaction he had coming into the other group."

As a consequence, Jake notes that, "five months ago I fully got off the weed altogether and that's when I started focusing." He started volunteering during Kicks sessions and enjoys the responsibility he has been given and the need to set a good example to younger participants. The resilience that Jake now shows is the result of a combination of his experience of (not) coping with the stress of bereavement and the supportive intervention and opportunities provided as a consequence of attending PL Kicks sessions and the relationship he has developed with staff.

"I wouldn't change the stuff I went through because it does open your eyes to a few things and allows you to look at it differently. [It] gave me better ways to cope with stuff and it's allowed me to realise that I do have other people to talk to. Like I have trust in all of them now."

Jake sums things up by saying, "I started it as a tit messing around and at the end of it I'm now a volunteer here with kids looking up to you in a way and I've changed, in a way, because of the responsibility I've got."

4. CONCLUSIONS

Research shows a clear relationship between socio-economic position in childhood and risk of experiencing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and maltreatment[64]. Furthermore, young people in general are known to be increasingly involved in violent crime, both as perpetrators and as victims. The PL Kicks programme attempts to address both areas of concern by providing safe spaces and the opportunity for self-development through building trusting relationships and gaining other key social skills.

NCS aims to build better understanding through social mixing and encouraging collaborative unions across different communities to aid a more cohesive society. The latter tends to develop young people's sense of independence and self-confidence, as well as exposing the inherent social conscience extant within the majority of participants. The former provides a gateway for young people to receive support if needed but is predominantly somewhere to relax and have fun. Their emphasis on community, social action, cohesion and inclusivity and wellbeing helps to support what the Serious Violence Strategy identifies as 'protective factors', such as greater family stability, engagement in education and strong support systems[65]. They also contribute to the DCMS's Civil Society Strategy by helping participants to 'develop the skills, networks, and resilience that can improve their life chances, fulfil their potential, and to support them to avoid negative pathways in future… especially for young people facing multiple barriers or disadvantage.'[66]

The PL Kicks programme housed in the Youth Zone at Spellow Lane is a good example of open access youth work that provides a safe and secure environment for participants to develop new relationships built on trust – with other participants and with staff, the latter acting as important adult intermediaries between protection, supervision and motivation. Through these modes of interaction, staff become positive

[64]Walsh, D., McCartney, G., Smith, M. & Armour, G. (2019) 'Relationship between childhood socioeconomic position and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs): a systematic review,' *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 73(12):1087-1093

[65]HM Government (2018) *Serious Violence Strategy*. London: Home Office available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf

[66]DCMS (2018) *Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future Society that Works for Everyone*. London: Cabinet Office available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732765/Civil_Society_Strategy_-_building_a_future_that_works_for_everyone.pdf

role models and trusted confidantes and are able to encourage positive interactions amongst participants who gain experience of forming 'weak ties' amongst themselves[67].

Likewise, the Everton NCS programme is staffed by a committed team with varying levels of experience and operates well within the constraining critique of the national programme itself. Participants were positive about their experiences during the programme but improvements could be made in terms of how the workshops in phase two are designed and managed as well as connecting young people with the wider aims of EitC.

For the programmes really to be able to claim that they are meeting their aims there needs to be more evidence showing what participants are gaining from their attendance, no matter how small or large their progress is. These should be set against specific criteria that are holistic enough to not dictate the engagement process but do reflect what staff and young people feel the aims of the programmes are, as well as being in line with the objectives set by the funders and the overarching mission of Everton in the Community. It would be good to see a progressive approach that follows a similar but even more embedded methodology to that taken in the research for this report. The findings described here are the result of a relatively short-term engagement and have their limitations due to only being able to build a small amount of trust. Evaluations in the future should reflect the engaged approach on which the foundations of youth work are built as well as being critically distant enough for reflective processes to be of value. That said, there are some crucial conclusions that can be highlighted and should be taken into account before making any recommendations.

4.1 Shifting the perception from 'at risk' to 'resiliently resourceful' young people

Young people who attend PL Kicks sessions are growing up in an area with multiple development challenges. Their ambitions are low and their expectations for the future limited by attitudes ingrained over multiple generations. Whilst staff try to provide young participants with opportunities to make decisions about what they want from PL Kicks their socialisation into acceptance of anything that is more positive than other aspects of their lives means they seem satisfied with the offer that is available. That does not necessarily mean that more should not be done in developing a more proactive participant base.

The priority at present is to provide a space that is safe and secure, fun and enjoyable, where young people have the opportunity to develop social relationships and build trust in supportive adults who can steer them away from negative experiences. This should not be underestimated and is the minimum expectation for open access youth work. However, alongside being able to signpost young people who need support in overcoming problems in their lives, could more be done to help participants develop positive attributes and take control of their lives?

Such a task must still be done within the boundaries of informal education, so is not necessarily about social action but more about encouraging wider engagement opportunities. Volunteering on sessions is embedded within the PL Kicks program but it is not clear what the aims of such opportunities are at different stages of the volunteers' involvement. It is not necessarily about introducing a formalised

[67]The notion of weak ties is seen as crucial in building social capital through 'bridging' from one group to another. Strong ties often exist to bond individuals within their own networks or communities of kinship and friendship but weak ties can be utilised for social mobility

structure to the young people that they need to follow but is perhaps about having a clear understanding of where each and every young person attending is on their journey through an engagement process that aims to enhance their self-esteem, ambition and social skills alongside supporting education, training and employment pathways.

The traditions of youth work aimed at disenfranchised young people are rooted in an activist mentality that challenged the status quo and encouraged young people to do the same through dialogue and empowerment. As local politics has increasingly been replaced by identity politics, issues have become more individualised. Furthermore, young people grappling with life stage transitions and the emotional trauma attached to adolescence are often self-occupied and individually focused without the addition of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of different magnitudes leading to self-doubt and personal problems. Nonetheless opportunities for collective action should be encouraged. Of course, in some ways that is exactly what playing football represents: becoming part of a team, pulling together to achieve a common goal, having to accept boundaries governed by pre-set rules, etc. Can such attributes be more purposely extended so that participants can begin to transfer such collective action to other realms without losing the informality of the sessions?

The 'sport-plus' model can only be assessed if the aims are clearly set and the methods for achieving those aims are mapped out[68]. This is not easy when the heart of youth engagement is the willingness of young people to 'opt-in', which by definition also means they can 'opt-out' of activities perceived to be less enjoyable[69]. This is where the importance of building trusting relationships is so crucial. These relationships have been built successfully in order to help young people who are perceived to be 'at risk' enough to intervene and challenge their choices, providing them with alternative routes for self-management. They should also be strong enough to encourage young people to build on their inherent resilience and resourcefulness to help them challenge their perceived limitations.

NCS provides an opportunity for young people to work towards a specific goal of giving something back through the design and implementation of a social action project. For young people whose social capital is already relatively high this seems to be relatively easy to achieve but, in some ways, provides less of an impact on their overall experience. For those with more self-doubt the social action project is most rewarding as they internalise the experience through a sense of empathy rather than utility.

It was unfortunate that some young people who were showing signs of benefitting most from the NCS experience due to their challenging behaviour were not able to complete the programme because of the strict rules imposed on certain behaviour. This is not necessarily an EitC constructed issue but the result of the programme design itself. It does however reflect the pervading perception of seeing 'risk' as something to be managed rather than discussed, with the consequence that the potential for the programme to interrupt challenging patterns of behaviour is lost in favour of reinforcing authoritarian regimes that often lead to such behaviour in the first place. Such is the problem with short term engagement which does not allow strong enough relationships to be developed in order to successfully challenge those young people for whom such interventionist work would be of greatest value.

There is clearly a culture of support and safety built around fun and 'banter' that has been developed within PL Kicks and NCS. With the PL Kicks sessions in particular, a culture of opportunity is beginning to be developed as well but this must be seen as more

[68]Coalter, F. (2013) '"There is loads of relationships here": Developing a programme theory for sport-for-change programmes,' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 48(5):594-612

[69]Mason, W. (2015) 'Austerity youth policy: exploring the distinctions between youth work in principle and youth work in practice', *Youth Policy Special Edition: The Next Five Years: Prospects for young people*. 114(May):55-74

fundamental to the purpose of the sessions whilst not losing the informality attached to relationship building. Open access youth work of this nature is based on the voluntary involvement of the young people themselves and must not become dominated by targets or indeed prioritise instrumental outcomes.

Fundamental to youth work is supporting young people to explore their own identities and ambitions as they progress through a significant life stage transition. If certain aspects of those identities are to some extent already fixed by their socio-economic position and localised expectations centred on 'risk' and 'deprivation' then part of the challenge for youth workers is to encourage young people to embody alternative narratives as part of their self-definition. This is taking place to a degree but despite staff admitting that most participants are not high-risk in terms of criminal activity, that is what dominates their concerns. Of course, failing such individuals potentially leads to extremely damaging consequences. Arguably, it is equally important to raise expectations amongst those that remain untroubled by the socio-economic situation in which they exist.

This should be done as part of an asset-based community and youth development approach that runs not only through the youth engagement strategy but connecting community development programmes within education and employability. In this way young people can see a place for themselves within the organisation (not necessarily in any formal sense as a participant, volunteer or employee but as an agent of change), their local environment (including the organisation but extending into the community, their family and 'the authorities') and the mutual future trajectory that might be co-developed.

4.2 Investing in staff training needs

One of the clear differences between PL Kicks and NCS is the type of engagement approach utilised. Some of the staff work on both programmes but due to the different contexts, be it the intensity of 24-hour attention in the first couple of weeks on NCS or the short-term nature of it, the youth work skills are not employed in the same way. Part of the NCS design is that previous participants are encouraged to become mentors in subsequent years. They are not necessarily well versed in youth work. They may be supported by more experienced youth workers but their roles seem to be more administrative or reactive rather than proactive. Again, this is a weakness of the scheme more than that of EitC's implementation but there is perhaps a middle ground that needs to be explored.

The strength of any youth work team is the combination of skills, interests, characteristics and background that maximises their ability to engage with different kinds of young people with different kinds of issues. The PL Kicks team are very aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and come to the job through a variety of routes. It is important to continually assess the 'mix' that is on offer, particularly around current issues relating to youth culture and identity politics. The better the staff knowledge around such topics as social media bullying, sexuality, ethnicity, mental wellbeing or criminal activity, coupled with the excellent engagement skills and understandings of the socio-economic situation in which participants exist, the greater the capacity for informal education.

Whilst other agencies and authorities do occasionally deliver targeted sessions around emergent issues, it is important to build relationships over time through having some more regular presence wherever possible. This research relied on building (limited) relationships with staff and participants over time to allow some to open up in interviews. To begin with a regular presence builds a non-threatening association so that engagement with a different way of looking at their life worlds (in our case by sharing thoughts about their lives and the sessions being provided but might equally be related to any number of issues facing young people: relationship advice, concerns about the local area, bullying, crime or future job aspirations). Young people's knowledge of such issues should be seen as a resource and participants themselves encouraged to become 'experts' to show how increasing practical knowledge can be used

positively to help inform and educate others as well as themselves.

Where there are ongoing issues effecting young people, 'experts' could become part of the staff team. Such expertise may come from outside agencies, from staff who supplement their local knowledge with wider understandings of the issues and through helping young people themselves to nurture and challenge their own opinions and experiences. For instance, in the evaluation for the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership it was noted that a short (up to 1 day) training programme on ACEs and trauma-informed practice offered a significant increase in knowledge and confidence in this area for a wide variety of practitioners[70]. This would not be intrusive, or particularly time consuming, but the potential outcomes of this type of training (identified within the results reported during the VRP 19-20 evaluation) could significantly benefit staff and participants.

Again this must be done within the overall framework of informal youth engagement and through ongoing discussions with young people themselves. That said, young people also rely on direction from trusted individuals. If one of the aims of PL Kicks is to, 'Work in partnership with young people… to support the younger generation with the societal challenges they face,' then those challenges should be clearly defined (and regularly revised as the dynamic nature of young people's lives requires) and form the basis of the informal interactional processes. In doing so, it will help in evidencing the positive value of the work.

4.3 Residentials, unique experiences and cross pollination of projects

NCS had a greater effect on those participants who were from more insecure backgrounds. Whether that be in general terms such as their socio-economic background or personal characteristics. Young people's identities are extremely fluid and life is often characterised by self-consciousness. For participants who already possess self-confidence and have opportunities to be involved in extra-curricular activities there was a level of ambivalence about their experience. For those with lower expectations due to their socio-economic position there was evidence of growth when asked to self-reflect. This is supported by independent observation of their development during the course of the programme.

This would suggest that there are benefits to be gained more for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Opportunities to run targeted programmes and events alongside PL Kicks and NCS that combine the best of both should be available. Such targeted programmes should provide new experiences, widen social networks, increase expectations and aspirations but be designed through dialogue with participants. Thus, trips to football tournaments could include another activity and reflective sessions need to be designed that both engage participants and result in providing an evidence base of what works and what does not. Staff also need to reflect on what was achieved and where opportunities for development can be seized upon in the future. Explanations of the benefits to the young people must be continually reiterated to help them understand how small changes can make a big difference over time and such conversations included as part of the 'soft' outcomes that make up a crucial part of evaluating the value of youth engagement work.

The residential aspects of NCS provide young people the opportunity to explore their independence within a supportive environment as well as taking them out of their comfort zone and challenge their own preconceptions of their abilities – to undertake new activities and to overcome emotional and psychological stress. Residentials provide liminal moments,

[70]Some of the results given include 'good to very good' knowledge of 'Breaking intergenerational cycles of abuse through ACE informed approaches' which increased from 13.4% - 90.3% and 'good to very good' knowledge of 'The role of resilience in mitigating the impact of ACE' increasing from 18.8%-93.7%. See Quigg, et. al, (2020) *Evaluation of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership 2019-20 (Final Report)* pp. 28-37 https://www.merseysidevrp.com/media/1206/evaluation-of-the-merseyside-vrp-201920-sept-2020.pdf

outside of 'normal' life to redefine personal and communal identities. This should be made more available to the young people attending PL Kicks sessions. A clear structure could be designed with short local trips and football tournaments as a first stage, leading to overnight trips and weekend residentials with clear aims. Finally, it can build confidence and encourage PL Kicks participants to also experience NCS. The final stage would be travel and volunteering opportunities abroad.

Opportunities such as volunteering in Kenya that is promoted to NCS participants has an enormous impact on young people's materialistic outlook. Such opportunities to travel and experience other cultures are unique in developing young people and should be included within the overall development of an 'informal educational curriculum'. Working with outside partners and local organisations and education providers to replicate something similar for those attending PL Kicks would provide opportunities for engagement with other areas and cultures which participants would likely never experience, and this could be prefaced with other skills such as fundraising, demonstrating commitment and community engagement. This type of activity could form part of a longer-term strategy to improve engagement and retention and provide further opportunities for raising aspirations through wider experiences.

One of the strengths of the youth engagement programmes is their location within and relationship to other EitC provision and the wider support structures available from the football club itself. There are good examples of how young people, identified to be in need of extra support, have been signposted into other interventions provided by EitC but this seems to be based on a deficit model rather than the more constructive Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) model. If the PL Kicks programme is a gateway for engagement that allow staff to develop trusted relationships with young people in order to encourage positive behaviour, closer links to the employability programmes should be developed as well as seeking creative solutions to building on the 'weak ties' that young people develop within sessions that respond to the barriers facing participants in terms of social mobility.

An annual 'Community Day' that brings participants together to provide something for the wider local community could provide a focus allowing participants to contribute as much or as little as they want. Young people should be involved in the design of the day's events and what they want to include, football tournaments, cake sales, charity bingo, talent show, awareness raising, etc. Depending on the level of responsibility the young people want and the staff feel is possible, they can be more or less involved with organisation, both on the day and before hand, as stewards (with support from the Everton Stewarding team) or in promoting the event (with support from Everton PR and Marketing team). This should, for the club, the local community and fans, become a regular date in the football calendar as important as the first day of the season or the Merseyside derby. It should be a celebration of Everton in the Community and what the organisation stands for and could be held as an 'afterparty' once the football season has finished to illustrate that the club still plays an important role throughout the summer.

4.4 Diversity and demographics

The socio-economic data about young people on the programmes is not collected but it can be extrapolated from the residential information alongside interview and observational data that participants on the PL Kicks programme face multiple challenges related to the social context in which they are living. Meanwhile, NCS may attract young people from a wider socio-economic scale but it is mainly encouraging social mixing across different strata of a relatively middle-class participant base.

The main criticism of the PL Kicks programme would be that it is reinforcing gendered differences. It is an overwhelmingly male space in terms of participants. Interactions between the young men and women in

attendance are managed well and seem to be positive. However, strategies on how to change the gender balance need to be considered as well as continuing to explore the best ways to challenge the dominance of football within the sessions and beyond. This is not easy when the PL Kicks program is funded by an organisation like the Premier League, which is so associated with football. However, clearly evidencing the positive aspects of the work alongside an awareness of the deficits should allow the programmes to be used as a way of drawing down other funds in order to fill the gaps.

The ethnic profile of PL Kicks is far more reflective than NCS of the local population more generally[71]. However, more could be done in engaging young people from BAME backgrounds as the length of engagement amongst young people from ethnic minority communities is generally shorter than within the white majority. Positive action around the employment of a more ethnically diverse work force could be one solution.

Furthermore, a better understanding of the issues around diversity, multiculturalism and social inclusion is a must for staff working on NCS if that is going to be one of the workshops included within the programme. The partner organisation has a long history of delivering educational packages around anti-racism and for some participants, clearly was motivational. In some groups, however, the lack of knowledge around such issues from group leaders meant that the workshop did not maximise its potential. Similarly, the Youth Parliament sessions did not always speak well enough to the young people involved. Again, the partner organisation has an excellent track record but lacked support from group leaders in helping the interactions between young people and the workshop themes.

Designing a programme of workshops that interact with one another more closely as part of Phase 2 of the NCS programme would enhance young people's understanding and engagement with the workshops. This should be with a view to developing their own social action programmes through the contextualisation of social issues that they might want to tackle and the methods through which it can be done. Working within a role-playing methodology should be explored that builds on young people's feelings of independence within this phase of the programme and foregrounds the design of their social action project in the final phase.

4.5 Monitoring & Evaluation

The challenge for the PL Kicks programme is to retain the informality of open access youth work whilst simultaneously being able to formalise the outcomes enough to be able to demonstrate young people's development without such processes becoming too onerous. The M&E tool used, 'Views', is designed with such processes in mind but the question remains as to whether the reporting is still too detached from the engagement.

Monitoring and evaluation is essential but "... the things that make youth work special (its informality and responsiveness) also make it particularly unsuited to pre-planned outcomes and competitive monitoring technologies… For youth workers, targets can be distracting and demoralising; for young people they can be tedious and demeaning."[72] There has been an increasing desire to embed evaluative

[71]BAME communities make up 12% of the total population of Liverpool (6% in the Liverpool City Region; 4.5% County Ward - 6.8% Anfield Ward) (Office for National Statistics, 2011). For PL Kicks and NCS programmes reported here the proportion of young people from BAME backgrounds is 11% and 3% respectively.

[72]de St. Croix, T. (2016) *Grassroots Youth Work: Policy, passion and resistance in practice*. Bristol: Policy Press

processes within youth work that is reflective of the softer outcomes that such work aims to achieve rather than the hard outputs that quantify the work without recognising where small steps in development are achieved. The Views system, for example, has adequate functionality for such monitoring regimes to be undertaken. However, it either still requires an increase in administrative burden on practitioners themselves or is engaged with at some disconnect between the practical work and the reporting of such work.

The ideal compromise is perhaps to identify a specific role that encompasses both youth work engagement with the sessions but with the primary purpose for collecting the stories that evidence youth work for what it is, i.e. building positive relationships in order to empower young people to make a difference in their own lives. Thus, the reporting of progress is the result of building the same sort of relationships with participants but the ultimate goal is to narrate the process of change rather than be a key operator in such change. That said, they must still be rooted in the youth work approach so whether it is a little victory that sees a participant moderating negative attitudes within the session or a long-term change that sees a young person overcoming addiction or becoming distanced from a negative peer group, the reporting is part of the interactions that are taking place. This could be achieved through a closer relationship between students studying youth work at university and the sessions or through creating a paid post with that as part of the job description. In this way the monitoring and evaluation becomes part of a continuous process more akin to Participatory Action Research approaches advocated by progressive educationalists[73].

Putting such needs into a language that the young people understand and engaging them with the processes of evaluation would also be more easily achieved if a role was created that had that as its focus.

[73]See for example, Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; Boal, A. (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reassess the PL Kicks offer in terms of number of sessions available at the Youth Zone and numbers of young people attending in order to develop stronger relationships with more of the participants and vary the offer available in order to increase the capacity of staff to affect actual change in different ways.

2. Consider the offer for young women and those from BAME backgrounds. The aims of PL Kicks are barely being met in terms of young women's participation. Furthermore, empowering them to take control of their future in positive and realistic ways should be more clearly expressed. Develop a strategy for diversifying the staff team in terms of ethnicity and explore the long-term retention of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

3. A more 'formal' approach to informal education. A way of showing progression and growth. Make a more identifiable connection between informal, non-formal and formal education without the need for formalising the engagement that the open youth work approach depends upon for success.

4. Through discussion between staff and with young people themselves, develop clear criteria for improving developmental aspects of the offer to young people without losing the informal nature of the sessions and relationships. This will help change the overriding culture from 'protective' to 'developmental'. Young people must be able to see that there is more to PL Kicks sessions than simply 'playing footie'. Whilst no participant should be forced, coerced or feel excluded for not being more engaged, a clear understanding of the possibilities open to them should be regularly reiterated. Choice is the foundation on which youth work settings should operate but developing the work to encourage young people to see that other options might have some value as well as the football offer is a necessity.

5. Each member of PL Kicks staff takes ownership of a particular issue. Having a 'champion' for each area that may concern young people and their development (e.g. LGBTQ+, racism, gender, social justice, CSE, healthy living, county lines exploitation, economic inequality, etc.) would build confidence in the staff team and show further commitment to supporting participants' development. Each champion could be paired with a member of university staff with academic expertise in that area for the mutual benefit of learning from one another. This would strengthen the partnership of EitC and Liverpool Hope University and provide specialist support and developmental opportunities for PL Kicks and Hope staff, improve community engagement and share good practice.

6. Raising the aspirations of young people could also be linked to the local universities by forging stronger bonds between the institutions. Informally encouraging young people to view further study as a possibility by breaking down the often self-imposed barriers to this pathway (through organised visits to campuses, 'Pre-Freshers' events etc. post Covid-19 restrictions) could open up new possibilities to the young people and help them realise that they can achieve more than they may believe, even simply by becoming familiar with the spaces. Similarly, develop a stronger working relationship with the employability side of EitC as an embedded aspect of the youth engagement work.

7. Use the NCS model to develop an approach for working with some of the young people that attend PL Kicks sessions for whom the former programme is not desirable. In other words, provide more opportunities to stretch the participants beyond their comfort zones. Expand trips to football tournaments to become wider learning experiences. Increase the opportunities for short residentials. Connect PL Kicks with the corporate charitable aims of the football club through planning and delivery of an annual social action project, e.g. an EFC Community Day, that will develop further young people's sense of belonging and ownership of the Everton PL Kicks identity.

8. Develop a more coordinated approach and way of monitoring young people's pathways into more formalised volunteering opportunities.

- The NCS programme is wide reaching and has the aim of activating young people's communality and potential to affect change. However, subsequent connection with wider EitC objectives is limited or unrecorded.

- PL Kicks can act very much as a gateway for those that begin to take on informal volunteering responsibilities. There is of course limited capacity to develop more formal volunteering within PL Kicks but there is enormous potential within the wider Everton family.

9. Design a pathway that leads to volunteering opportunities abroad. This could be through attaching an Everton in the Community element to pre-season tours whereby partnerships with youth organisations should be established in destination cities. Alternatively, partnerships with youth organisations working with similarly disenfranchised young people in other countries should be sought and cultural exchanges can take place with a small number of young people who have demonstrated their commitment to their volunteering 'careers'. This can be used as a carrot to encourage young people to volunteer in the first place as well as to maintain commitment. In this way they become ambassadors for the organisation that has helped develop them as well as gaining experiences that are likely to be unavailable to them otherwise.

10. The following should form the basis of evaluation:

- Dialogue – the foundation for learning outcomes in a youth work setting. Meaningful dialogue is not always immediately clear. But as soon as a particular issue is raised and becomes apparent an initial reflection should be recorded. This can then be updated as the conversation develops. It may be that this happens over a very short period of one particular session in which case the whole journey can be recorded simply in terms of the context, issue and resolution. However, it may be an on-going discussion amongst the young people, between participants and staff as well as amongst staff themselves.

- Storytelling workshops should be held in order to capture appropriate qualitative 'data'. External facilitators could be used to maintain standards of objectivity if so desired[74]. Facilitation could be taken on by staff members as such a format for evaluation becomes more established.

[74]See for example, In Defence of Youth Work (IDYW) https://story-tellinginyouthwork.com

- One means of maintaining and increasing informal education is through evidencing staff knowledge base. It is thus recommended that learning and training in relation to current and ongoing issues affecting young people is encouraged. When such learning is used in practice, which may not happen but does not mean it is not of value, this should be clearly shown. This should not be seen as the reason for undertaking such learning.
- A focus on key drivers for individual and collective change amongst local young people.
    - Self-awareness of their situation and how it can be changed
    - Forming and developing new connections within and beyond the sessions
    - Challenging pre-conceived ideas
    - Self-initiated social action projects (with a clear definition of what that means for local young people)
    - Evidence of self-reliance
    - Creating opportunities for developing the above (even if they fail to achieve those aims)

11. This report should be seen as the beginning of an ongoing process that encourages critical reflection on the part of the staff and begins the process of working with young people to develop the youth engagement strategies for those that need it to focus on extricating themselves from poverty, challenging deeply ingrained attitudes around their social worlds and seeing the possibilities of long-term commitment from a local institution such as Everton Football Club and Everton in the Community.

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