***Executive Summary: Sportivate - best practice and support: An Active Sussex case study***



Broadly, this study sought to examine: i) how the Sportivate programme in Sussex has benefited from a range of initiatives developed by Active Sussex, ii) to identify good practice from the perspective of the project leads and their partners, and iii) to determine the *extent* to which the Coach Support Officer (CSO) scheme, one where a team of experienced coaches would mentor and give advice to projects and their coaches, ‘worked’. The study used a range of data accrued from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters of the Sportivate project for 2013-14 (April to March inclusive). The methods of data collection included surveys, the statistical data generated through various categories that the projects had to provide, case studies, and a collection of meeting notes, focus groups, and interviews from CSO workshops – which included information collected additional from project leads and their coaches.

In relation to the Sportivate projects and the possible implications for attending induction meetings, the findings outlined that when it came to project completion and even retention, it was unlikely that attendance at the meeting created any meaningful advantage. However, in terms of engagement (the number of participants), attendance at induction was associated with significantly higher engagement numbers. In regards to whether there were any variations between the types of deliverers and how successful projects were, there were no significant differences between the relative successes between them. And similarly, seeking to find contrasting findings between the different ‘types’ of sports led to few differences found.

In terms of what might be considered best practice from the project leads, a number of themes stood out, nine to be exact. The first theme, ‘Informal sessions, no frills, fun, friendly and no commitment’, suggested that fun-based engagement within the sessions and activities was key. The second theme ‘Graded challenges or competition’ outlined that, for the most part, adapted, easier to follow formats of sports and games were successfully received. Theme Three – ‘The appeal of new, novel or innovative activities’, highlighted how ‘novel’ (i.e. parkour), or ‘re-packaged’ traditional sports (e.g. Last Man Stands cricket), were greeted very favourably. The fourth theme, the ‘Use of Incentives’, demonstrated how projects that planned to use incentives oftentimes met with success in terms of retaining participants. Theme Five, ‘Working effectively with partners’ showed how partnership working was highly associated with successful projects, in particular in regards to how resources or specialist advice were accessed. The sixth theme, ‘Using inspirational or highly competent coaches’, emphasised that coaching competency, across a range of activities, settings and offers, was a key element of success. The seventh theme, ‘Incorporating a social element and promoting new friendships’ was an area that all projects felt impacted greatly on engagement and retention, and one that helped ease many into regular participation following the project. Theme Eight ‘Working with minority groups’, was one that illustrated how those projects focused on the delivery of activities to minority groups or hard-to-reach groups, require a range of skills to ensure success. And the last theme that emerged from the data, ‘Challenges’, outlined how planning was key in ensuring that disruption to projects from many areas, i.e. venues, timing, needed to be mitigated to promote success.

With reference to the CSO project and the impact that it had, the findings illustrated the way in which ‘mentorship’ and project completion were highly associated. Moreover, there is now a quite telling amount of evidence that demonstrates the impact that the CSO’s have had in terms of supporting projects. The support has been given through a wide range of areas, such as helping with planning, partnership working, best practice, and engagement and retention strategies. This support is evidenced through the personal testimonies and outstanding references given by, so far, all of the projects that have been supported with the scheme.

For the most part then there are a number of elements to consider within this document. Firstly, that support in planning and understanding the ethos and delivery of Sportivate projects helped projects, irrespective of what sport or activity they promoted or what kind of deliverer they were. Secondly, that there is now – presented in this document - what might be considered a substantial amount of agreement across projects in what helps make the projects successful, and what pitfalls they may encounter. And lastly, that after the first year the CSO project has delivered meaningful results in terms of helping projects achieve completion and, more particularly, in helping facilitate a number of wider impacts and help that has benefited the projects and their deliverers.

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