

Active Communities Network – Written evidence (NPS0113)

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How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?

1. There are many issues with this currently and the direction of travel is positive currently. The value of sport in the community has long been undervalued, and we would advocate for an increased emphasis on understanding how sport is used in a social context. Top-down funding can work if the distribution is more even and can reach those groups who traditionally cannot reach communities who are not deep rooted into their community. The biggest challenge for sport on many levels is its breadth of delivery system. Over the years, naturally – NGBs have dominated, along with Active Partnerships. There is a groundswell of organisations who are not reached by this system – community groups, small, constituted groups, youth enterprises as examples are overseen. Active Communities Network build on this, bringing together over 200 groups operating in communities on a day-to-day basis – driven by lived experienced people who work for the community, rather than being career based. There is a need to invest in infrastructure groups who peer to peer deliver with groups – Active Communities Network are a prime example of an agile charity who can mobilise and build these groups to reach those most marginalised and disengaged with sport and physical activity.

How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

2. Good role models, strong lived experienced workers and coaches are (often without knowing it) the glue in the community, vulnerable young people with a positive person to aspire to, someone to talk to and aspire towards.
3. Outside of school, a wider youth based programme that uses sport as a wider instrument couched in a methodology developed over the last 15 years. This should focus on:
 - Outreach and engagement: we need to build trust with young people and have a presence in the community.
 - Positive Activity Programming: 50 weeks a year have an offer – not a short-term programme. Give young people an opportunity to be a decision maker in the delivery. We are committed to delivering with young people, this buys them in.
 - Informal Education: build a programme that is wider than sport – build a package that teaches lifeskills; using informal ways to build this.

- Volunteering: Promote volunteering and give young people opportunities to solve local issues and build an ongoing dialogue to build their skills and actively contribute.
- Skills development: we take a personal approach to building skills of young people, using sport as a pathway to enter employment, gain new experiences.

How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

4. We advocate the use of our model to build skills and promote inclusion. Sport needs to be targeted in its approach, empower, build a conversation and listen to these communities. The Breaking Barriers leaders programme – run by Active Communities Network is an approach which is vital. It invests in workers, understands them, builds trust, rapport and mobilises groups on a journey to improve their community – this is a driver for our work moving forwards and using a whole community approach is essential.

Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

5. The new strategy was announced this week. We would not yet be able to comment on it. These new priorities need further distilling.

Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

6. Our experience of Active Lives is a poor one. We are very keen to contribute to this agenda. We believe that there is a lack of emphasis on qualitative indicators which brings out the rich data to understand the change that occurs in communities. We would advocate building on this, using more innovative methods to understand the cultural issues that occur, and further to that we have developed a digital method of capturing experiences and behaviour change which enables us to understand challenging issues about 'why' and 'what happens' rather than 'what did happen'.

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