

Written evidence submitted by the Diane Modahl Sports Foundation

Introduction

The Diane Modahl Sports Foundation (DMSF), a registered charity established in 2010 use sport as a catalyst to help young people find a sense of purpose through sport and beyond. The work of the charity brings people together, builds strong relationships in and across communities in order to enable more young people to fulfil their potential by working to address issues at the earliest possible stage.

Our work is driven by our values on creating opportunities, acting with integrity and instilling resilience in all.

In 2018-2019 alone we delivered 29,300 sessions across 27 programmes throughout Manchester to 687 young people each week with 1000 young people registered within our programmes. We provide weekly sport and life readiness courses in 3 high schools, across 14 sports and youth provisions each week with opportunities for young people to gain qualifications. During youth and holiday provision we provide healthy hot meals to help tackle holiday hunger. Our 5 main areas of development are sport, life readiness, neighbourhood empowerment, youth crime reduction and health. We have already reduced anti-social behaviour in one of our wards (Collyhurst) by 43% on nights that our youth sport provision is delivered. Over the last 3 years, we have upskilled 32 young people with qualifications (14-25) and supported 5 young adults into employment.

Immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector

The immediate impact of Covid-19 on the Youth Sector is extensive and for some may be irreparable.

Our immediate response to COVID-19 was to adapt to our programmes to the specific needs of all our young people. We work with broken, at-risk children who are coping with family breakdown, chaotic living environments and mental health problems which affects, for some, their ability to develop healthy relationships. Many are deeply affected by food poverty with over 90% of the young people we work weekly accessing free school meals.

Doing everything within our control to ensure the longevity and financial sustainability of the organisation, we made the very difficult decision to furlough 3 members of our core team and take advantage of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. We also suspended all 7 of our zero hours contracted coaching staff and directed them towards the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme.

Very quickly we were also able to identify the support required to those in the most critical need regarding their nutritional health. To this end we worked hard with our partners and the local community to coordinate our efforts and support. KIND, makers of nutritious snacks were able to deliver over 1,000 free bars to the young people on DMSF programmes, whilst Whitworths the UK's largest supplier of dried foods were able to personally deliver goods to 16 families, 13 of which were identified as most in need.

These actions have enabled the team, despite the challenges our young people are facing, to fight back in the best way we could.

Working with local partnerships including Young Manchester we identified the immediate impact of Covid-19:

1. Concern for the wellbeing and safety of children and young people
2. Those already disadvantaged and vulnerable will suffer most
3. The youth and play sectors will suffer catastrophic financial implications with 49% under threat of closer

Effectiveness of the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed:

The response from DCMS and HMRC via the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) has been extremely helpful. This financial reprieve enabled the two remaining DMSF employees and 2 staff to continue to meet the objectives of the charity although it was an extremely difficult to decision having to furlough key staff and all our zero-hour contractors.

The occasions when I did need to speak to HMRC I was met with patient, courteous and professional staff, this response was welcomed and appreciated.

The extension of the CJRS to June 2020 was roundly very welcomed and met with relief within the sector. However, this support does not quite address the immediate nor longer term implications.

There needs to be year-long government financial support as charities rely heavily on corporate donations in order to survive. Access to these donations will be almost impossible for the foreseeable future, whilst many businesses themselves are struggling to financially survive.

What will the likely long-term impact of Covid-9 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?

Long term impacts:

1. Increase levels of risk for young people, especially those most vulnerable to exploitation. Research conducted by Young Manchester, a dynamic children's charity working to create outstanding opportunities for children across Greater Manchester, concludes that two of the biggest drivers for exploitation and engaging in gangs are poverty and violence in the home, both of which are on the rise

2. Increase risk of serious medically diagnosed mental health conditions. Sustained lockdown and restrictions on movement negatively impact on the health and well-being of young people's ability to develop healthy relationships, social skills and engage with education
3. Increase in unemployment, as business inevitably struggles and potentially fold, there will be a large decrease in apprenticeship opportunities. In Manchester, 6% of 16-18-year olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET); this is one of the highest figures in Greater Manchester and above the overall north west average of 4.8%.

Immediate Solutions:

1. Investment in the youth and play sector – whilst some progress is being made, the sector is still the underdog and mainly reliant on itself to survive. Current funding levels do not meet the need required, and the sector often scraps for the crumbs because that's all we're ever offered.

On 8th April 2020 Rishi Sunak Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

“One of the greatest strengths as a country is our civil society. The local charities who provide so much compassion, care and community to the most vulnerable in our country. You have not been forgotten”.

The DCMS now need to build on this momentum with consistent funding to charities for at least 12 months following the pandemic.

2. Investment in infrastructure and capacity to enable existing organisations to rebuild the trust and relationships with young people, that take many months and often years to establish. This is in real danger and may now have to be built from scratch especially if charities have to close temporarily or are unable to maintain contact with young people.
3. Support to build back better – kick start a coordinated approach that enables a strategic sea change of partners, locally and nationally to design, develop and deliver initiatives that meet the needs of the community whilst not creating additional barriers for young people to thrive.

The long-term impact will be somewhat immeasurable for some time.

What lessons can be learnt from how DCMS, arms-length bodies and the sector have deal with Covid-19?

1. Gather knowledge quickly, share the correct information and communicated transparently.
2. A department or a team should be set up NOW that is not directly dealing with the immediate emergency of Covid-19 but instead tasked with looking **beyond the horizon** to identify, deal with and deliver a plan beyond Covid-19

3. The needs of young people began to present itself within days of the lockdown and so it is crucial that we now begin to ease away from the immediate crisis to focus some efforts towards the medium to longer term mental health recovery strategy

How might the sector evolve after Covid-19 and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

Invest in accessible and high-quality digital engagement and particularly for those growing up within the top 20% areas of deprivation where research confirms that disproportional inequity based on low socio-economic challenges as well as cultural barriers to learning exist.

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in the DCMS Select Committee Inquiry to the challenges presented by Covid-19.

Research taken from The State of the Youth and Play Sector in Manchester Risks and Challenges during Covid-19