

Safe environments and opportunities for young people through community sport-based activities – building on the Derby Youth Engagement Service programme research

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This workshop will ...

- Introduce what community sport-based development is.
- Introduce the Youth Engagement Service (YES) research.
- Share an overview of the YES programme approach.
- Share key findings from the YES research study which have implications for youth safety.
- Offer opportunities for us all to consider how we can do more of what works well to enable safe environments and opportunities for young people.

What is community sport-based development?

- Engaging activities and development opportunities for young people within community settings.
- Often delivered by third sector organisations, usually reliant upon a range of short-term resources.
- Key features:
 - i) young people can usually take part at no cost.
 - ii) the activities tend to take place within public facilities and open spaces close to where young people live.
 - iii) young people have opportunities to shape the activities.
 - iv) the activities offer informal learning and other opportunities for young people beyond a focus on sport skills development. (Schailée et al., 2019).

Supports interaction and inclusion, potentially “lowering the boundaries [and] cultural capital” needed for open-access participation by young people (Spaaij & Schailée, 2021, p. 163).

What community sport-based development can offer

- Safe physical and expressive environments.
(Raw et al., 2022; Spaaij and Schultenkorf, 2014).
- Wide development opportunities with a focus singularly or on a combination of positive outcomes for participants including for example: education, livelihoods, health, and social cohesion.
(Schultenkorf et al., 2016; Svensson and Woods, 2017).
- A 'Primary Intervention' to prevent offending, promoting personal and community safety.
 - Universal provision for young people delivering diversionary activities within local areas with development opportunities (Mason et al., 2020).
 - Street Sport - “the evidence supports Street Sport as an example of primary level intervention, which achieves both community development and diversion for young people (mainly male) at risk of offending” (McCormack, 2000, p. 273).

YES Research Focus



Examined the enabling aspects of a community sport-based development programme which supported beneficial impacts for young people and their families (Hathaway, 2026).



Two main research questions ...

1. How does a third sector provider design and deliver a sport-based intervention programme to maximise intended impacts for intended beneficiaries in a challenging and fluid context?
2. How is impact through this sport-based development activity experienced by beneficiaries?

A PhD studentship and study jointly funded by the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences at Loughborough University and Sporting Communities Community Interest Company.

YES Research Approach



Ethnographic case study focused on the Sporting Communities four-year National Lottery funded Derby Youth Engagement Service programme, 2019-2023.



Fieldwork, 30 months, 2021-2023, during day-to-day YES delivery.



26 Sporting Communities staff members took part in the research, which included ...

- Observations and informal conversations – staff meetings (62), open-access Youth Activity Sessions (42), training sessions (4), events (3).
- Interviews with staff (9), a group discussion with staff (11 participants).
- Desk study of YES programme related information.



Interviews with five families* who shared their experiences of the YES.

* Four families, including young people and their parent/s, and the parent of the fifth family.

(Hathaway, 2026)

Research Findings – Sporting Communities' YES Programme

Theory of Change Summary



Target audience

- Young people aged 8-25.
- Those naturally 'hanging around'.
- Derby City – six areas.

Activities

- Range of five activities for young people and families.
- Range of three activities for young leaders.

Short-term Outcomes

Listed 14 outcomes for young participants including:

- Be safe and not socially isolated – give young people the opportunity to meet others and make new friends.
- Increase in confidence, motivation, resilience, self-awareness, communication, receptiveness, responsibility and personal reflection skills.

Listed five outcomes for young leaders.

Long-term Outcomes

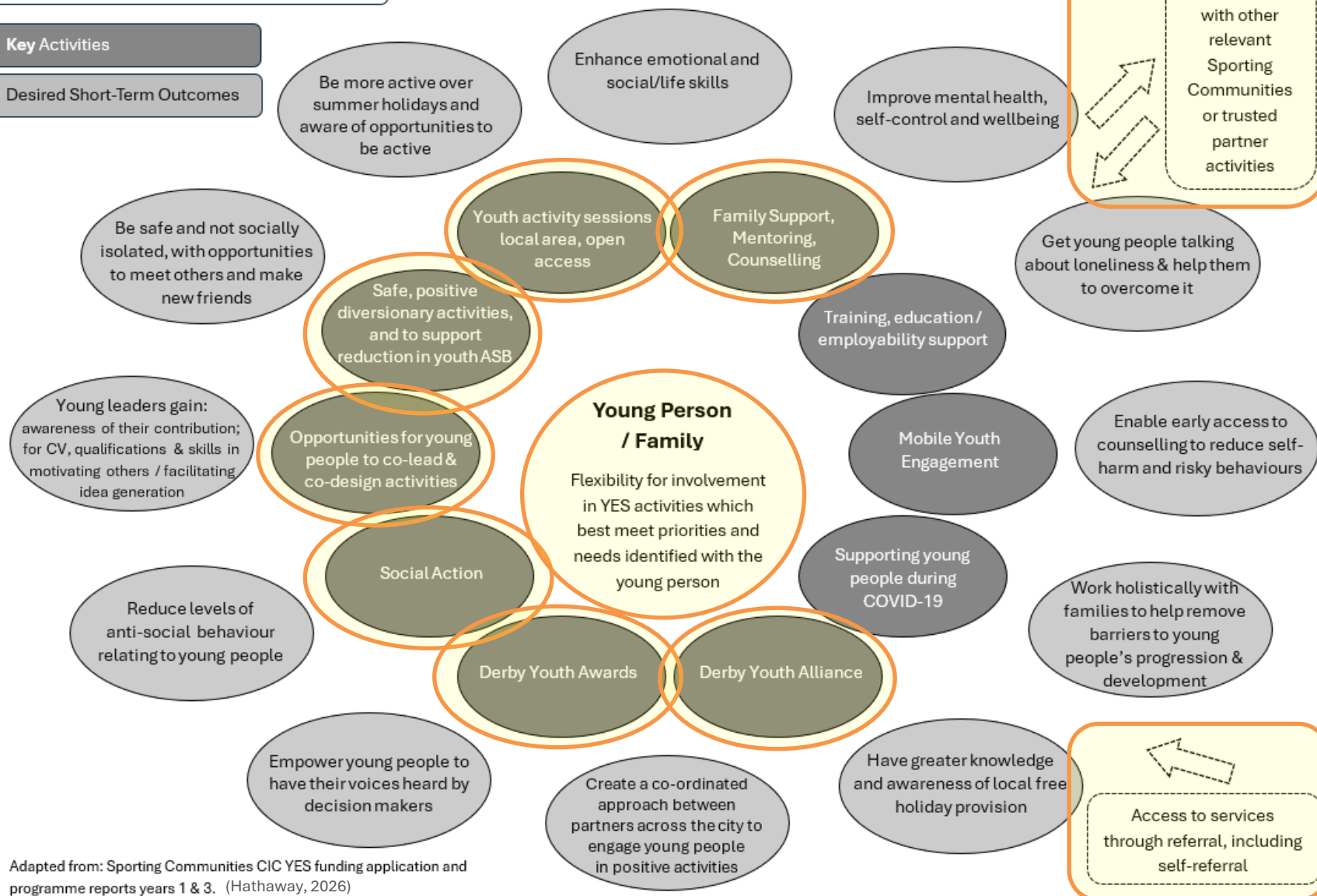
Young People and Volunteer Leaders will gain:

- Increased engagement in social development.
- Improved social network, reducing chances of isolation.
- Increased engagement in frequent physical activity.
- Reduced likelihood of committing ASB / crime.
- Improved wellbeing.
- Greater opportunities for deployment and employment.

Derby Youth Engagement Service Programme

Key Activities

Desired Short-Term Outcomes



Adapted from: Sporting Communities CIC YES funding application and programme reports years 1 & 3. (Hathaway, 2026)



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Workshop Activity 1

Exploring ways to enable safe, high-quality and responsive activities and opportunities for young people within community settings.

1. In your experience, what approaches to safe, high-quality and responsive opportunities for young people within community settings work best?
2. How can we enable more of these approaches?
3. What, if any, role can community sport-based approaches play in supporting this?

In groups, please discuss these questions and make a note of the key discussion points you would like to share.

Timing: 15 minutes – 8 minutes to discuss – 7 minutes to share feedback.

YES Research – Findings Summary

- Complex inter-related and inter-dependent enablers driving this activity.
- The key principle enabler identified was the staff resource, and their approach to the design and delivery of the YES provision:
 - Multi-disciplinary expertise and experience combined to develop and maintain the organisation as well as to deliver the programme.
 - Relationships built by staff - within the organisation, with young people and families, with external organisations, agencies and funders.
 - Engaging to identify, understand and respond to best serve the priorities of young people, families and local communities.
 - Commitment to the delivery of person-centred, holistic services – including and extending beyond sport – flexibly, and in tailored and structured ways with programme participants.

(Hathaway, 2026)

YES Research – Findings Summary

- Enabled staff and young people to engage within safe and fun co-development environments, connecting and building trusted relationships.
- Staff encouraged and maintained the agency of the young participants.
- Young participants and their family members interviewed were involved in a range of different YES and Sporting Communities activities over time – and to different extents. As characterised by the flexible, holistic programme design.
- Young participants and their family members interviewed described significant impacts experienced through the YES and Sporting Communities activities:
 - Varied, contextual, timely, often highly nuanced.
 - Beneficial impacts were experienced by young participants and wider family members – even where family members were not directly involved in the activities.

(Hathaway, 2026)

YES Research – Key Findings – Youth Safety

- Staff were aware of their visible presence and their responsibilities within community settings and when interacting and engaging with young people.
- These activities were enabled by the organisation's ethical ethos, resources, multi-disciplinary staff skills and expertise, governance processes, health and safety - dynamic risk assessments, safeguarding, first aid.
- Building trusted and consistent staff-participant development relationships, and connecting with others within safe community sport-based development settings is an important, dynamic, complex and skilled activity which takes time.
- The beneficial impacts experienced and described by young people and their family members took time to develop, often incrementally.

(Hathaway, 2026)

Workshop Activity 2

Exploring ways to enable consistent engagement with young people and safe, high-quality environments.

Trusted development relationships between YES participants and skilled practitioners were key – and took time to build.

1. Is this observation relatable within your area of practice or your experiences of participation?
2. How can we best enable this consistent, safe, high-quality engagement?
3. What, if any, role can community sport-based approaches play in supporting this?

In groups, please discuss these questions and make a note of the key discussion points you would like to share.

Timing: 15 minutes – 8 minutes to discuss – 7 minutes to share feedback.

Thank you for taking part!

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