

Engaging

hard to reach

young

people

through

sport

Executive summary

Street Elite has been developed to offer young people living on the edge of gangs and crime a route back into employment, education and training. These young adults have complex and changing needs and this research offers practical insights into successful approaches to helping them change their lives.

It used a robust, evidence-based approach, led by independent experts from Oxford Brookes University working in collaboration with members of the Change Foundation and the Berkeley Foundation.

The key numerical findings from a five-year evaluation of the programme are as follows:

- Of the 222 Street Elite participants in years 1–4, 173 (or 78%) have re-engaged with education or the employment market and with their communities.
- Year 5 has seen the total of young people participating in Street Elite pass 300.
- Over 9,638 hours of delivery have taken place over 393 separate sessions, involving 18 different sports and activities.
- Participants have, on average, 38 hours of contact with their coach over a nine month period.
- Over 3,300 school pupils have taken part in 21 Street Elite festivals during years 1–4.
- There has been an increase in the reach of the programme and participation from 2 to 8 local authorities. During year 5, Street Elite was delivered with young people from estates in the London Boroughs of Ealing, Wandsworth, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, and Hammersmith and Fulham.
- Over two thirds of all participants were aged 19–25, highlighting the need for targeted NEET provision for young adults over the age of 18.
- Almost three quarters of all young people classified NEET are now not claiming Job Seekers Allowance and nearly 16.3% of young people aged 18 are classified by the state as ‘unknown’.

The report is set out in three clear chapters. *Part One* outlines the context within which programmes like Street Elite operate. *Part Two* outlines the operational infrastructure of Street Elite. *Part Three* deals with a review of key findings, presented and summarised under five headings. Key themes emerge worthy of serious consideration by policy makers, funders and practitioners trying to tackle youth unemployment and social exclusion, as follows:

Hard to reach young people

The lives of hard to reach young people are often dealt with in policy by reducing the complexity of their experiences to easily measurable outputs and outcomes. This analysis deals with the issue of unclassified and generally hard to reach young people. It details how and why they are hard to reach, especially when many of the young people involved are in fact unclassified, effectively living beyond NEET. Strategies of recruitment and retention are discussed as well as the complexity of pressures for these young people to remain *beyond* NEET (gang culture, lawlessness, drug cultures).

Multi-agency support

One of the key findings from this 5-year research project relates to the challenge of integrated working and putting young people at the centre of interventions. There is significant value in combining different kinds of support from multiple agencies: funding and jobs from the private sector, frontline youth work from the voluntary sector, and strategic enabling by the public sector. Street Elite also illustrates the importance of longevity and how much time it takes to turn around the lives of young adults. A particular strength of Street Elite is its ability to provide ongoing individual support to participants over a 9 month period and frequently well beyond this initial intervention.

Impact on communities

There is significant need to understand the communities within which these young men and women live. In particular, societal pressures of 'normal' and 'successful' employment or community integration are frequently invalid in these communities. The notion of being 'cool' drives an understanding of employment, social integration, stigma and community standing which is not commensurate with policy rhetoric

on employment, education and training. The need young people may feel to save face and exist safely in their community is discussed, along with the pressures to have employment without stigma. Community engagement and cultural change is discussed in terms of the impact Street Elite has on the communities where it operates.

The role of business

The space within which public, private and voluntary sector organisations operate is increasingly dynamic and demanding. Analysis is conducted of key stakeholders' roles and contributions in order to offer insight into the policy landscape for Sports-Based Interventions and the scope for business to play a progressive role in tackling social problems. There is no scalable or singular model for these types of interventions but key lessons can be learned from our evaluation; lessons that can usefully inform related policy discussions and the way that companies seek to make a social impact.

Sports-Based Interventions and mentoring

The report offers evidence that sport works as a hook with which to engage many young people. When offered alongside a structured and intensive mentoring programme, it can have a significant impact. The youth work undertaken as part of Street Elite is analysed and the impact of 'realisation' points on the journey taken by participants is detailed in order to better understand the way in which they can be attracted to and engaged for the long-term in a project like Street Elite.

Published by the Berkeley Foundation
June 2016

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The Berkeley Foundation is the working name of the The Berkeley Charitable Foundation, a registered charity in England and Wales (Charity Number 1152596), a company registered in England and Wales (Registration Number 8548 400).

Designed by Soapbox
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Acknowledgments

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The context

This five-year research project evaluating the impact and effectiveness of Street Elite was delivered against a backdrop of falling youth unemployment in the UK. At the end of the third quarter of 2015, 848,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 were not in education, employment or training in the UK.¹ This equates to 11.7% of the total in this age group. It represents a fall of approximately 242,000 since January 2013.²

However, in-depth analysis³ of the current NEET statistics suggests that the picture is not as simple as the headlines suggest. Research reveals that training and apprenticeship initiatives are successfully engaging many young people directly from school and impacting positively on NEET figures. But young people in the post 18 age group are continuing to experience difficulties with transitions beyond school age. There remains a significant NEET problem.

A recent report⁴ suggests that the complexity of transitioning from NEET to EET cannot be attributed simply to the growth of the economy, particularly given the changing culture of employment practice and young people's choices relevant to education and training. The Office for National Statistics (ONS)⁵ reports that as of June 2015 the number of people taking positions on zero-hours contracts as their main employment was 744,000. The same report goes on to detail how people on these contracts are most likely to be under 25 years old.

During the period in which Street Elite has been delivered so far (2011–16), there has been a significant drive through various government initiatives such as the Youth Contract and Traineeship programmes to place young people on educational programmes or

1. Delebarre, J. (2016). NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training. *Parliamentary Briefing Paper Number 06705*, March 2016.

2. Office for National Statistics. (2014). NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training.

3. Maguire, S. (2015). NEET: Unemployed, Inactive or Unknown – Why Does It Matter? *Educational research*, 57 (2), pp. 121–132.

4. Thompson, S. (2013). *States of Uncertainty: Youth Unemployment in Europe*. London: IPPR. November.

5. Office for National Statistics. (2015). *Contracts with No Guaranteed Hours: Employee Contracts That Do Not Guarantee a Minimum Number of Hours: 2015 Update*.

deliver high quality job offers within four months of becoming NEET, in order to deliver the Youth Guarantee. However, these opportunities rarely equate to a living wage or meet the relative financial needs of individuals.⁶

So falling NEET numbers do reflect the success of both public work-based training initiatives and private programmes aimed at providing employment skills and opportunities. But the real challenge now is to address the persistent problems faced by the most disaffected and disadvantaged young people in our society; and reaching them is particularly challenging because a number of financial and advisory support systems designed to encourage young people into education and training no longer exist.

Embedded in the social vulnerability of these young people is the progressive accumulation of negative experiences with their families, schools, the labour market, healthcare provision and the justice system. These experiences eventually lead to young people becoming socially disconnected, politically unengaged, and culturally stigmatised. The exclusion they experience, coupled with a lack of self-esteem, often results in long-term disengagement and discrimination.⁷

Sports-Based Interventions (SBI's), such as those offered by Street Elite and the Change Foundation, are designed as a way to alleviate these negative experiences and the outcomes of the resulting disengagement. The policy response to tackling youth employment in the shape of work-based initiatives alongside mounting pressure for the private sector to demonstrate social impact⁸ has brought the NEET agenda into sharp focus. This has in turn led to a comprehensive government review of all policy, funding and provisions for addressing youth unemployment.

6. Machin, S. (2015). *Real Wages and Living Standards* (No. 024). Centre for Economic Performance, LSE.

7. Haydenhouse, R., Theeboom, M., and Nols, Z. (2013). Sports-Based Interventions for Socially Vulnerable Youth: Towards Well-Defined Interventions with Easy to Follow Outcomes? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48 (1), pp. 471–484.

8. King, N. (2014). Local Authority Sport Services Under the UK Coalition Government: Retention, Revision or Curtailment? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 6 (3), pp. 349–369.

Significant cuts to public spending budgets as part of wider austerity measures, alongside the continued importance of youth unemployment, has made the private sector a critical partner.

Many private initiatives have turned to the perceived power of sport and SBI's to make a positive impact on the lives of young people. We have collated evidence in the last five years of Street Elite that demonstrates sport is indeed a useful tool with which to hook⁹ the interest of young, often marginalised, adolescents and young adults when trying to address issues that have led to their social exclusion and NEET status.

The strong political and societal interest in moving NEETs to EETs only increases the pressure on programmes such as Street Elite to focus on social exclusion.¹⁰ Sport can play a significant part in addressing the structural and personal issues that lead to disengagement such as mental health and emotional resilience, boredom, poverty, frustration, and lack of positive role models. Many of these factors impact on a person's likelihood of finding a job or going to college and can be seen as important indicators of both an individual's prospects of long-term employment and the future economic competitiveness of Britain.

It is important to note that Sport-Based Interventions carried out as a short-term measure or delivered in a reactionary and isolated way can serve to reinforce young people's experiences of rejection and disengagement from society. This in turn perpetuates and exaggerates the exclusion that a community perceives as present in their everyday lives.¹¹ At best, it will serve to distract the individual and occupy their time.¹²

By contrast, SBI's done well – offering intensive mentoring relationships with a developmental focus – can serve to promote social inclusion and social mobility for young people considered hard to reach and beyond NEET. They can be a powerful force for good.

9. Crabbe, T. (2009). Getting to Know You: Using Sport to Engage and Build Relationships with Socially Marginalised Young People. *Sport and International Development*. pp. 176–197.

10. Levitas, R. (2005). *The Inclusive Society: Social Exclusion and New Labour* (2nd Ed.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

11. Kelly, L. (2012). Sports-Based Interventions and The Local Governance of Youth Crime and Antisocial Behaviour. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 37 (3), pp. 261–283.

12. Kelly, L. (2011). Social Inclusion Through Sports-Based Interventions? *Critical Social Policy*, 31 (1), pp. 126–150.



Early days: a training session to build trust and teamwork skills



What is Street Elite?

Street Elite is a training for work initiative. It uses sport, mentoring and youth engagement to motivate young people who are currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). The programme offers intensive support to young women and men living on the edge of gangs and crime, helping them gain the confidence and skills to get a job or go on to further and higher education.

How does it work?

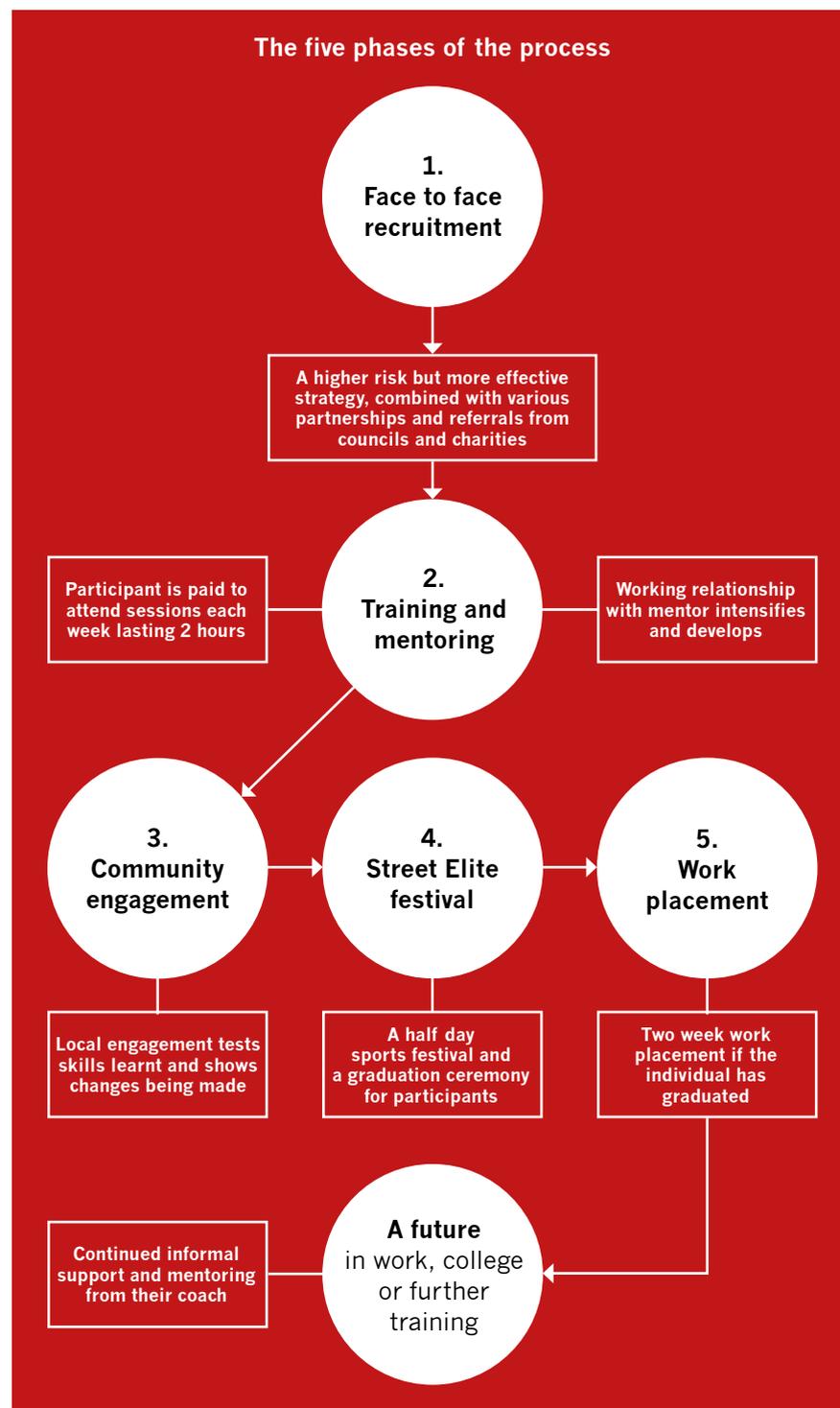
Street Elite is a nine-month programme. Initially, it involves a 12 week sports-based training and mentoring scheme. Young people gain the personal skills and motivation to get their lives back on track as well as a series of recognised accredited qualifications. Next, they test the skills they have learnt by volunteering in the community, often delivering sports sessions on local housing estates over a period of 6–8 weeks. Then, they help to organise a one day sports festival, involving dozens of local schools and hundreds of young people in a borough-wide event. Finally, they are offered a two-week work placement and support to enter education, employment or training.

Programme structure

The young women and men that Street Elite works with are overwhelmingly NEET, often hard to reach young adults living on the edge of gangs and crime. The programme is designed to identify and meet their needs, and facilitate the transition from being socially excluded members of society to being included, active and confident citizens.

Undertaking the programme involves completing a rigorous training to work scheme, followed by a prolonged period of applying the skills learnt in the community and on a work placement.

Street Elite engages these young people through a 'plus-sport' intervention model, using sport as a hook to engage young adults who often have a background in youth offending, violence, drugs, gang crime and theft. The programme lasts 9 months and offers the kind of intensive and long term mentoring that is rarely seen in Sport for Development (S4D) initiatives.



The programme follows a clear and detailed pathway:

- Local face to face recruitment on estates by the coaches, complemented by referrals and recommendations from local partners
- 12 weeks of sports based training focusing on coaching qualifications and key ‘soft skills’ relating to motivation and confidence
- A period of community engagement delivering sports sessions in youth clubs and local neighbourhoods
- Participation in a one day sports festival involving local schools, including a graduation ceremony for the Street Elite participants
- A two-week work placement with one of the partner organisations (such as the Berkeley Group or a participating council), guaranteed to each participant that successfully completes the first three phases of the programme
- Followed by transition to work, college or training, depending on the individual.

The programme

Street Elite is structured and delivered in five phases:

1. Recruitment

Between October and December, the Street Elite cohorts are identified and recruited. The programme operates in locations within individual boroughs which face serious deprivation. Coaches spend time over a two-month period doing estate walks, meeting local youth workers, and inviting young adults to take part. This face-to-face approach is not without risks but has consistently proved highly effective. It is combined with partnerships and referrals from councils, youth offending teams and youth charities.

2. Training and mentoring

Once recruited, the Street Elite participants begin a crucial phase of the programme. The training involves a commitment of two hours a week. Each participant is paid to attend. The formal hours are kept short so they can also maintain other commitments. It is also more practical than trying to engage them on a 9 to 5 basis. Outside of each session there is regular, often intense, contact with their coach, as each mentoring relationship develops.

3. Community engagement

After this 12–14 week training phase, each cohort begins volunteering in their local community. This might involve organising sports sessions on local estates or at the youth centre. It is designed to test their emerging skills and confidence and signal to their peers in the community that they are now starting to make different choices in their lives.

4. Graduation

The training culminates in a series of half day sports festivals. One takes place in each of the boroughs where the programme operates. Each festival involves 6–8 schools and about 200 pupils who try out a whole range of different sports – from cricket to boxing, and dance to rowing. The events celebrate what the participants have achieved so far. Each person helps deliver the activities, working alongside their coaches and staff from the Berkeley Group, and there is a short graduation ceremony attended by local politicians and sporting celebrities.

5. Employment

Every person who completes the training and attends a festival is guaranteed a two week work placement. They receive an allowance for travel and food, but no wages. Sometimes the placement leads to a job. 15 Street Elite graduates are currently employed by the Berkeley Group. For others, the next step may be college or training and each person is supported to make the transition successfully. In most cases, the relationship with their coach and mentor continues informally for some time.



A Street Elite Festival in Southwark, celebrating with local schools

3

The research findings

The research approach

This has been an independent research project designed to isolate key facts about the programme and the role that stakeholders played in its delivery. However, a significant portion of the time involved collecting qualitative data as part of an action research project which sought to inform development of the programme as well as to independently evaluate its impact.

A large number of in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out within the confines of the programme and beyond. This has been combined with data collected from wearable technology (88 separate sessions were recorded on Go-Pro cameras, providing over 17 hours of film), WhatsApp messages and ethnographic observations over a five-year period.

Interviews were conducted with members of the Change Foundation, Berkley Foundation, officers and councillors from local government, the Metropolitan Police, and most importantly with 56 participants on the Street Elite programme over five-years. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with transcripts subject to a detailed qualitative analytical process in order to identify key themes and responses.

Findings are presented as a combined summary of the research and accompanied by key data and presented under the following themes:

- Hard to Reach Young People
- Multi Agency Engagement
- Impacting on Communities
- The Role of Business
- Sports-Based Interventions and Mentoring

These five themes are discussed in detail below. Insights collected from the fifth year of Street Elite research are intertwined with data from the previous four years of research and direct quotations from participants and the coaches. This material is presented alongside in-depth analysis and recommendations for future developments of Sports-Based Interventions working with the most disaffected young people in society.

The fifth year of research (2016) largely concentrated on the graduates of the Street Elite project. All 226 participants were contacted or approached. Forty four participants completed short questionnaires on their experiences of the Street Elite programme with 20 taking part in in-depth interviews. A further 11 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from the Change Foundation and Berkley Group, local authorities and youth workers in the boroughs which have hosted Street Elite.

In addition, evidence from 88 sessions and 56 interviews from the 5-year research project were analysed to produce the key findings evidenced in Part III. Each of the themes are discussed in turn with the key learning clearly identified and quotations to illuminate the discussion.

Hard to reach young people

This research has shined a light on some of the complex issues regarding disaffected young people and in particular how and why they become hard to reach in the first place.

Recent research¹³ on young NEET people in the UK highlights an alarming number of what are now referred to as ‘unknowns’ – people whose status is classified by public agencies as simply ‘unknown’. Today, 16.3% of young people aged 18 are ‘unknown’.

Moreover, just over a quarter of NEETs are claiming Job Seekers Allowance, leaving almost three quarters out of the system and increasingly difficult for the state or anybody else to track and support.

This default positioning of a vast number of young people either being left outside of institutional structures or remaining unknown completely results in these young people becoming increasingly susceptible to social exclusion and ‘hard to reach’.

“They are not hard to reach if they show up 9 to 5 – we work with the hard core and they are not up at 9. They are up to no good.”

13. Maguire, S. (2015). NEET, Unemployed, Inactive or Unknown—Why Does it Matter? *Educational Research*, 57 (2), pp. 121–132.

1. Beyond NEET

Analysis of the data (both primary and secondary) clearly outlined that Sports-Based Interventions that seek to engage disaffected youths are in fact working with young people that are ‘beyond NEET’. We have found that the participants on the Street Elite programme are often severely disengaged and disaffected and whilst some of the young people on the programme have been NEET and to some extent have been in the system, most are not. Face-to-face and estate recruitment has been a key component of the project and if we are to develop meaningful Sports-Based Interventions for the population of truly hard to reach young people then this type of recruitment and engagement activity is essential.

“It’s very specific outreach work that they do.”

“The unique selling point is that they go out and recruit. Their main recruitment drive is actually being on the local estates and hanging around . . . whatever they have to do to meet these people in the first instance.”

2. Understanding young people’s ‘real’ lives

The lives of hard to reach young people are often dealt with in policy by reducing the complexity of their experiences to easily measurable outputs and outcomes. What has been apparent throughout the collection of young people’s stories and subsequent analysis of those stories is that there are often complex issues relating to families, housing, caring, disability, immigration, gang cultures and generational worklessness that cannot be solved by simply providing normal opportunities. Street Elite has been clear in its objectives to try and be different in its approach.

“Accreditation is an output, but what we’re really interested in is the outcomes, and that’s about the person’s self-esteem and confidence.”

3. Saving 'face'

One obvious issue within the data has been the culture of gangs and criminality that clearly impacts upon young people. Within the in-depth interviews young people often discussed the stigma of doing 9–5 jobs for a minimum wage and that a life on the edge of gangs and criminality was more appealing especially at a younger age in communities with a culture of crime and gangs.

“Most of these kids don't give two F's about school you know. They think I am going to go onto the streets and sell drugs or get involved in something stupid.”

A significant number of participants throughout the five year research project discussed issues such as 'saving face' or having and keeping a street reputation such that they felt safe and were able to maintain status within their own communities. Typical discourse in the media offers the notion that worklessness is a choice. In fact, the complexity of living on the edge of gangs and crime offers a reality that cannot be simplified in these terms and stigma related to saving face needs to be understood rather than rejected as invalid.

“I was in a really bad state you know, when I was coming back to my house I used to pray to not die basically.”

4. Recruitment and retention

Strategies of recruitment and retention have been key to the success of Street Elite. Given the 'hard to reach' nature of the participants it is important to understand the role that engaging with young people has played. Understanding the complexity of each individual's life has been key to helping 173 young adults graduate to EET status. Participants have talked of the youth workers 'always being there', 'on the end of the phone 24/7'. This is a key strength of the programme, given the backdrop of social exclusion and the mechanisms of disengagement and poverty which exert themselves on young people on the Street Elite programme.

5. Moments of realisation

Retention has been a difficult and complex process for the coaches. Youth work is a challenging and intensive role to carry out and each of the participants had a positive and supportive experience of the relationship with their youth worker. A key insight emerging from the data is that each individual must have a 'moment of realisation' in order to begin the process of changing their own life. For a number of the participants it was the loss of a loved one through gang related crime, or being sentenced to a custodial sentence. For others it was the care and responsibility associated with their own families.

“I don't want to go back to my son coming to visit me and him crying his eyes out when he has to leave and not knowing where I'm staying.”

Almost all the participants discussed moments like this. It appeared to be an essential part of changing their view of their lives and committing to a programme like Street Elite. Young adults involved with gangs and crime are often hard to reach precisely because many are in the process of experiencing their own moment of realisation about their life and those of other people in their own community.

“I was probably getting into petty fights in school, being excluded, antisocial behaviour... it escalated to things like robbery... I realised I was crossing a line and obviously the consequences [of what I was doing].”

Multi agency engagement

The evaluation of Street Elite in year three recommended an increased level of collaboration with other partners involved in the programme. The research in year four found a significant positive response to this recommendation. The data highlighted the creation of significant new or deeper relationships between multiple agencies in different sectors – including councils, schools, housing associations, youth organisations and private companies. These are now all enabling a more effective intervention into young people's lives.

The breadth of connections has not only increased the impact on individual participants but also given Street Elite the networks and infrastructure required to begin recruiting the most marginalised young people.

However, feedback from stakeholders in year five has emphasized the need for a greater emphasis on post-programme support strategies in future. One of the core strengths of Street Elite has been its ability to support young people beyond what is already a long term and intensive approach to Sports Based Intervention work. In future, a multi-agency approach to post-programme support, combining the expertise and reach of other institutions with the continued efforts of the coaches, offers the best chance of cementing the progress of the vast majority of Street Elite graduates.

6. Systems of exclusion

Most of the participants interviewed for the research talked about being ‘passed through’ various systems earlier in their lives. In stark contrast to the support systems provided to young people growing up in stable families and safe communities. Each of the participants described difficulty in accessing ‘normal’ welfare systems. Despite often performing well in one area of their lives (academic, sporting, creative or work) it was a series of events – often out of their control – that led to their disengagement from education, employment or training and which had dire consequences.

“I got excluded from school because my family situation meant I had to walk my brother to schools and I was always late getting back across town to my school.”

Many of the participants on Street Elite are gifted, articulate and hardworking but the consequences of being left to fend for themselves has contributed massively to their personal situation.

“Even though that’s the first time I’ve ever been arrested and I got convicted for it, I knew it would be hard to find a job now.”

This is not to say that young people on the edge of gangs and crime are all victims of a system. That is not the case. But the research has shown that often young people face multiple sources of social exclusion and often do not know where to turn for support and guidance.

“Yes, I did feel on the outside to be honest because as I said when I left school I was pushed towards college. I got a college place and ended up dropping out of it. As soon as I dropped out I was on my own. There were no teachers. There were no advisors. There was no one. It was like go and enrol yourself in another college on your own, get a job on your own... Having programmes like Street Elite is a lot better. If there were more like it, maybe a lot more people won’t feel like they’re on the outside. Maybe they’ll feel part of something.”

7. A joined-up approach

Street Elite addresses multi-agency work in a refreshing and open manner. The ability of youth workers from the Change Foundation to work so well with a FTSE 100 company like the Berkeley Group as well as various local authority agencies has been a key ingredient of the programme. It illustrates how much modern youth work now depends on a number of agencies supporting and surrounding young people in order to impact on their lives significantly.

Of particular note has been the ability of Street Elite to create relationships with young people on the programme by building trust and respect and then connecting those young people with opportunities, structures and contacts that they otherwise would not be able to find.

A joined-up, multi-agency approach with clear, strategic and allocated responsibilities which go beyond simple concerns with young people’s work status is clearly imperative. If a network of support agencies can also begin to build a post-programme strategy for Street Elite, this will surely impact even more powerfully on its long-term goal to re-engage young people.

Research¹⁴ has clearly evidenced that where there is continued engagement – post intervention – in community-based programmes where participants are given meaningful roles, as well as continued connection to support mechanisms, it has a significant positive impact on self-esteem, social inclusion and the likelihood of becoming involved in criminal activity.

For Street Elite, this will ensure that participants who have been engaged stay engaged and receive the support they need in all areas of social inclusion, not just employability.

Impacting on communities

An important element of the Street Elite programme is the community engagement phase. After a 12 to 14 week training period, participants have to volunteer in their own communities. They do this to develop the skills they have learnt during training and to demonstrate to their peers and to their community that they are changing. This element of the programme has previously been a major focus of research and emerged as a significant theme within this year's data collection – particularly in the reflections of the alumni.

Recent academic work¹⁵ on social exclusion highlights that the only enduring and impactful way to reduce the social marginalisation young people experience is to actively promote more engagement in their own communities. It requires better socialisation and a well-structured programme of community involvement to facilitate such engagement.

“I wouldn't come on this estate without leaving the car at first. They think you might be a rival [dealer]. But eventually you go on the estate with some of the lads from the programme and you build that trust.”

14. Nichols, G. (2007). *Sport and Crime Reduction: The Role of Sports in Tackling Youth*. London: Sage

15. Collins, M., and Kay, T., (2014). *Sport and Social Exclusion* (2nd Ed.). London: Routledge.

8. Understanding the community

There remains a significant need to understand the communities within which these young men and women live. In particular, the existence of significant societal pressures around what is considered 'normal' and 'successful' employment for young people from these communities, needs to be fully understood and accounted for.

Mainstream notions of successful and respectable employment are not always valid in these communities and the associated notion of being 'cool' drives an understanding of employment, social integration, stigma and community standing which is not commensurate with policy rhetoric on employment, education and training.

The young people interviewed as part of this year five research largely reported a need to save face and exist without drawing attention to 'uncool' employment opportunities presented by involvement in Street Elite or with other agencies. They also noted the pressure to have employment without stigma being a major influence over their perception of job opportunities.

“It was embarrassing wearing the uniform you know, and my mates were in cool stuff and driving nice cars and had money to throw around.”

That said, it is a misconception that young people do not want to work or that they relish being involved in activities related to gangs. In fact, many of the participants who have been labelled as being in gangs talked about having friends or communities that they were forced to defend against their will. Despite being very aware of the realities of a life embroiled in criminality and gang culture the stigmas attached to being 'uncool' or being 'too good' outweighed the potential of a path to social inclusion.

“What's the point of going through all that hassle to earn £500 and pay it [to the government in taxes] just so someone can say I'm at work. I can't save money, or have a life for my family, so I do [other] stuff.”



Joanita, Jacqueline and Natasha, Street Elite graduates, at the Wandsworth Festival

9. Community at the centre

One of the key findings of this research project relates to the absolute necessity of placing communities at the centre of intervention work. In particular, the data illuminated the need for continued efforts not only to focus on the individual but also to engage the communities these young people are from in a substantial and meaningful way. Only then can Sports-Based Interventions such as Street Elite bring about lasting impacts on the way individuals perceive their communities, and indeed the way they are perceived by their communities.

The evidence collated during year five suggests that some participants feel the current community engagement stage can sometimes be isolated and not meaningful enough to fully engage and include the community. One participant reported that they felt as though they were merely waiting for their work placement as opposed to doing a productive community engagement project.

If more can be done to replicate the festivals, for example, on a smaller scale within communities then there is some evidence across the programme of significant change in the sense of pride and opportunity locally. Moreover, community engagement also gives the participants increased support and opportunity to engage genuinely with their communities in a positive way outside of the programme.

“The community engagement took place on my estate where I already knew the kids. It enabled me to take control in an environment I was comfortable in and show leadership skills and qualities while giving back to the community.”

10. Beacons of change

What is evident from in-depth interviews with the alumni is the beginning of a culture of change within the communities Street Elite works in. As the programme becomes increasingly established and produces more graduates who are aspirational role models it is clear that the aspirations of the community are lifted and that the expectation within those communities changes.

“You know when we went on the estate and there’s these 12 year olds with a fag in their hands, and you know like the girls are half naked I was like nah man that’s my estate ya know, what’s going on?”

Moreover, as a result of stable employment, they now have opportunities to sort out their own housing, transport and education, and often support young family members. This in turn provides an alternative narrative to other young people involved with gangs or crime in those communities.

In summary, the community engagement phase of Street Elite is an exciting and integral part of the work. Although 173 young people have transitioned from beyond NEET and NEET to EET over the five years of Street Elite to date, the impact is actually far more wide reaching. Many hundreds more young people have been touched and influenced by these young men and women in the communities as a result of the programme.

The role of business

The economic landscape within which Sports-Based Interventions sit remains defined by deficit reduction. As a result, much of the responsibility to deliver these initiatives increasingly falls at the feet of the private sector. The climate of austerity, alongside the continued importance of youth unemployment to government policy, has made business a key provider of initiatives charged with delivering policy targets and decreasing NEET numbers.¹⁶

This year’s research has provided a wealth of data relating to the success of Berkley’s involvement in the Street Elite programme and their social impact. The close involvement of a major employer has proved to be a significant reason for the successful integration into society of the Street Elite participants.

16. King, N. (2014). Local Authority Sport Services under the UK Coalition Government: Retention, Revision or Curtailment?. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 6 (3), pp. 349–369.

“If I was to apply for this job without going through Street Elite, if I applied to work with Berkeley, I guarantee you I wouldn't have stood a chance”

11. Corporate responsibility

Much of the evaluative work in the first four years of this research took place against a backdrop of cuts and restructuring to many of the services which previously supported the young adults targeted by Street Elite. For this reason, the role of business has become increasingly important as a funder, employer and partner for work-based initiatives targeting young adults.

Since the financial crisis, the Berkeley Group has significantly increased the support it provides to vulnerable and disengaged young people in deprived communities. In 2011, this was formalised through the creation of the Berkeley Foundation which partners the Change Foundation and jointly delivers the Street Elite programme.

In this context, Street Elite is an interesting example of the progressive role now being taken by some companies to engage much more deeply at a community level. It illustrates a type of corporate involvement which looks beyond social responsibility and instead focuses on social impact and engaging with communities in a way that is essentially supportive and largely selfless.

This shift toward the private sector has brought with it increased stringency and financial accountability. Street Elite now appears to offer a financially viable and sustainable model. The unit cost per participant has reduced from over £4500 in Year 1 to £2515 in Year 4.¹⁷ A marked reduction of over 43%¹⁸ has been impressive given the growth of the programme. There are clearly further costs in the partnership that could be better understood and provide a real cost of delivery, but combining the financial rigour of a private company with the frontline skills of a youth charity has created value for money.

17. At the time of writing data on year 5 was not available.

18. Based on the reduced costs between years 1–4.

“It's the backbone of what changed my life...when I look back, I'm making real money now and I look back and I'm like, man that's so childish.”

12. Partnership model

Street Elite also offers a different model of partnership working. It is not characterised by a simple investor-provider relationship, with funding from a corporate partner and delivery by a social sector organisation. Instead, the programme is delivered through a single team, working in a matrix structure across the Berkeley Group and the Change Foundation. This brings to bear two different cultures and skill sets in a way that appears to benefit the programme considerably. The Berkeley team, for example, instinctively focus on project management, logistics, reporting and the policy interface with Government while the Change Foundation team excel at youth work, bring strong creative skills and understand much better the reality of working with this cohort of young adults.

The partnership with local authorities has also emerged strongly in years four and five of the programme. In particular, the London Boroughs of Ealing and Southwark have both committed resource to Street Elite and worked closely on delivery, knitting the programme into their youth and employment strategies. There has also been a high level of buy-in politically from all the host boroughs. Individual leaders and councillors have regularly attended Street Elite festivals and council officers have positively engaged, despite a multitude of competing pressures, offering advice and signposting the programme to local organisations who can provide practical support or referrals.

“I feel like someone from the outside has actually got in, like I've got a job, even little things like I had tattoos so I couldn't get a job. I wouldn't have had a look in.”

13. Aspirational employment

The financial and managerial backing of the Berkeley Group was not the only positive outcome of Berkeley's involvement. Many of the Alumni interviewed discussed the removal of the stigma attached to more

menial job opportunities – discussed in point 8 – by being presented with the opportunity to work at a FTSE 100 company. Whilst it was evident that there exists a constant awareness of the exacting standards within such a company and the potential juxtaposition between those standards and the realities of life outside of work, the stereotyping or stigmatisation of employment largely evaporated because of such prestigious employment. The opportunity to get a work placement and possibly a job with a FTSE 100 company should not be downplayed.

“Yeah, I learnt how employers want me to act and how to behave in the work place. It made me feel more confident in myself and my own abilities.”

Sports-Based Interventions and mentoring

Previous research conducted on the Street Elite programme has clearly identified that its fundamental strength is the quality of the coaches that work directly with the young people on the programme. Their ability and dedication to work intensively and to untiringly offer advice, support and employability training was evident during every year of research and remains so in the year five data collection.

Previous data collection highlighted three strategies that the Street Elite staff use to develop relationships with the participants: minimising relational distance through sensitive behavioural approaches and always making themselves available to the participants; their use of technology and social media; and active inclusion in a broad range of sporting activities, with participants paid £15 to attend each session. These strategies have been effectively sustained in year five.

Street Elite also typifies an approach based on open-ended youth work and mentoring. This continues to prove extremely effective in terms of creating real value for the participants within and outside of the sporting activities. The programme endeavours to enable in-depth, intensive and extensive social relationships and does so with considerable efficacy. A number of the participants interviewed in previous years commented on the fact that it was changing their experiences and perceptions of institutional and societal engagement because they “could rely on someone being there for them every week”.

It is clear that the open relationships formed between coaches and participants have underpinned the success of the programme, creating feelings of empowerment amongst the young people. This relational dynamic constitutes the cornerstone of Street Elite. It is not unique but what is striking about the programme is the time such relationships are given to develop.

“The way the system worked with the coaches. Outside of the timetabled hours, coaches were eager to contact me and this made me want to attend the sessions further. Coaches gave the impression that they cared about progression and weren't just doing their job in order to get paid.”

One early recommendation that emerged from previous research was to stay connected and sustain the mentoring relationships with the young people that remain NEET, fall out of the programme or venture into other employment positions outside of the Berkeley Group. The 2016 data collection verified that Street Elite now provides continued support for participants both who complete the intervention and who drop out.

“Their support was just amazing, they would motivate me and make me wanna come back each week.”

14. Sport as a hook

Much work has been undertaken to better understand the impact of Sports-Based Interventions such as Street Elite and to what extent sport itself prompted the development of a young person's greater social inclusion. Crabbe¹⁹ suggests sport is a useful tool with which to ‘hook’ the interest of young, often marginalised, people when trying to address issues that have facilitated their social exclusion and NEET status.

19. Crabbe, T. (2009). Getting to Know You: Using Sport to Engage and Build Relationships with Socially Marginalised Young People. *Sport and International Development*, pp. 176–197.

Previous years' data from the Street Elite research also offers further empirical evidence to support this view. However, the interview data collected this year from the alumni provided new and illuminating reasons as to why sport can act as the hook – but not the substance – of a successful intervention.

Alumni spoke of a structured and intensive mentoring programme and the way the focus on employment and societal inclusion facilitated 'realisation' points – discussed above – needed to shift their perceptions and perspectives of society and their own futures away from being defined by exclusion, criminality and often gang culture. Moreover, participants expressed the importance of being connected with key support agencies and importantly a stable and trustworthy mentor to work with.

15. Inspiration and motivation

The intensive and stable relationships Street Elite participants develop with their coaches has been detailed in a number of previous reports. However, what has emerged strongly from the data this year is the inspirational and motivational qualities employed by the Street Elite team when engaging with young people on the programme.

Participants have gained renewed belief in society, more positive perceptions of their position within it, and developed a new found confidence in their own future.

“I have changed my life around and I hope to get respect for turning my life around.”

“The team at Street Elite are the only ones that believe in [me].”

“[I] felt like [I] finally had a chance to do something worthwhile; [I was] being successful in something at last.”

As well as these findings, a significant number of alumni report that the relationships they have built up with the coaches have led many of them to be a positive influence on their own communities. It provided them with the foundations upon which to become a 'beacon of hope' within their communities.

16. Open-ended mentoring

The model of mentoring provided in Street Elite is relational and led by the needs of the individual. No topic, time or situation is off limits and that produces the mutual respect and motivation which are known to most effect the lives of NEET young adults.^{20,21} What has emerged from the most recent research is the increased use of implicit learning to further enhance the quality and impact of mentoring.

“They think they are having a general discussion about the transfer of a premiership football player but in fact it is an analogy about the consequences of dealing drugs. The team call these moments 'blind learning'.”

This level of sophistication instilled into the approach of the Street Elite team – who are becoming increasingly aware of their role as mentor first and coach second – is beginning to match the extremely high intensity and in-depth relationships already integral to the programme's success.

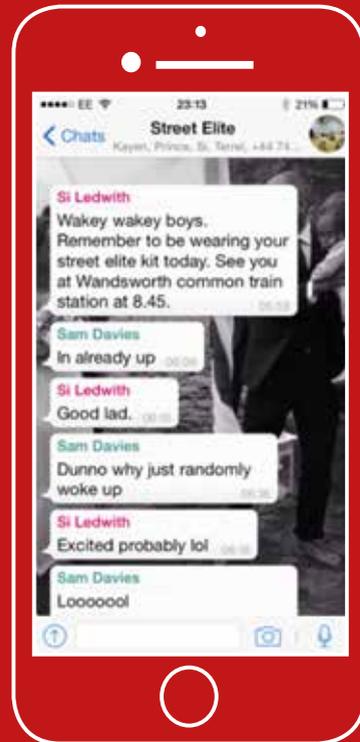
17. No singular model

The intimate and complex nature of mentoring in a programme working with disengaged, hard to reach young people means that any approach has to be individualised. A one-size fits all approach will not work. An acknowledgement of the power relations at play between mentor and mentee, and a thorough understanding of the existing social networks and world views of the mentee, is vital. A singular and scalable model reduced to a linear process of mentoring is unlikely to make an impact.

20. Coalter, F. (2012). 'There is Loads of Relationships Here': Developing a Programme Theory for Sport-for-Change Programmes. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48 (5); pp. 594–612.

21. Kelly, L. (2012). Sports-Based Interventions and the Local Governance of Youth Crime and Antisocial Behaviour. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 37 (3); pp. 261–283.

Waking them up!
The use of social media in youth work



However, this does not mean the operational structure of Street Elite could not be modelled effectively. One of the core ingredients is simply sufficient flexibility for each Street Elite coach to engage young people on an individual level. The data from year four and year five research suggests that one coach can directly lead one cohort of up to 15 young adults and, where they are experienced and skilled, support the coach leading another one cohort. Beyond this, the relationships will be diluted or staff will become unable to meet the demands of such a challenging group of young people.

The experience of Street Elite suggests that seeking to create a process that is directly replicable or set out definitive and prohibitive outcomes for effective mentoring is not productive. The highly complex and contextual nature of each participants' experiences of family, society and exclusion are so niche and so individualised that successful intervention for one young person might constitute a very unsuccessful intervention in the life of another.

In summary, it is evident then that Street Elite has continually evolved and developed over the previous five years and is clearly impacting on the young people and the communities with which it engages. Within the year five data collection, of the 44 participants that took part in the questionnaire relating to Street Elite, 100% noted that it had impacted on their lives positively.

In a group that are typically hard to reach, it was notable that 25% were willing to engage with feedback on the programme some nearly four years after graduating. Because of the nature of the intensive relationship built by the Street Elite team, these young people find themselves 'known' to someone and have built their lives to the point of being able to feel confident and proud of their achievements in a life now lived beyond the world of gangs and crime.

Conclusion

In 2011, Street Elite was conceived of as a five-year programme specifically aimed at young adults that were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The programme was designed to engage hard to reach young people and those unknown or unclassified individuals considered 'beyond NEET', via a Sports-Based Intervention. Street Elite was driven by a desire to develop young people's confidence and skills as they reintegrate into their communities and back into education, employment and training.

The most significant challenge has been engaging young people whose perception of society and government is centred around exclusion, disengagement and dissatisfaction. While sport has been a significant enabler in this relationship, it is in fact the intensive mentoring relationship between the youth workers and the participants which has provided the platform for success evidenced throughout this report.

The success rate seen to-date of 78% of young people on the programme being in employment, education or training nine months after they began on the programme is significant as a statistic but even more powerful when told through the stories of 173 young people's lives.

If young people are engaged, respected, understood and supported, it is clear they can change their own lives and the lives of people in their communities. It is clear that the more excluded from society young people become, the more difficult it is to re-engage them as they become unknown and *beyond* NEET.

At a time when some young people are more marginalised than ever, we must ensure that those on the outer edges of society have the opportunity to fulfil their very obvious potential. Street Elite shows how crucial the role of business has become in this. Employers are absolutely central to the task of re-engaging young people. Without them, we cannot change our communities.

In political and academic debate, there has long been a call to move the emphasis beyond placing young people in employment and instead seek to engage in supporting their development towards active citizenship. The work of engaging marginalised, disaffected young people must have grander aspirations than simply getting them into a job. Indeed, social inclusion is more nuanced and encompassing of all areas of young people's lives.

The young adults that participated in Street Elite over the past five years have often found the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood complex, difficult and literally dangerous. Street Elite has engaged with them to make this passage one of aspiration, confidence and success. It makes this a gold standard for Sports Based Intervention work with young people living on the edge of gangs and crime.



Victor, Irfan and Kian, Street Elite graduates in the world of work

The following organisations have taken part in the first five years of Street Elite:



STREET ELITE

Street Elite is a training for work initiative. It uses sport, mentoring and youth engagement to support young women and men living on the edge of gangs and crime, helping them gain the confidence and skills to get a job or find a place in college.

This report summarises a five-year research project evaluating the impact and effectiveness of the programme, led by independent experts from Oxford Brookes University.