

**A comprehensive evaluation of the Nottingham and  
Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Partnership  
Sports Diversion Programme**

**Evaluation Report**

**August 2024**

Dr Caron Walpole

Dr Carolynne Mason

Dr Alessio Norrito

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	4
1. Introduction .....	5
2. Evaluation Overview .....	7
2.1 Evaluation Objectives.....	7
2.2 Evaluation Methodology.....	7
3. Case Studies of the funded projects.....	10
3.1 Case Study 1: Switch-Up .....	12
3.1.1 Data Collection.....	12
3.1.2 Project Summary .....	12
3.1.3 Participant Demographics.....	13
3.1.4 Project Delivery.....	13
3.1.5 Delivery Approach.....	13
3.1.6 Project Outcomes .....	16
3.1.7 Project Challenges .....	18
3.1.8 Project Strengths.....	20
3.1.9 Project Overview.....	21
3.2 Case Study 2: Game Plan 3Pillars.....	23
3.2.1 Data Collection.....	23
3.2.2 Project Summary .....	23
3.2.3 Participant Demographics.....	23
3.2.4 Project Delivery.....	24
3.2.5 Delivery Approach.....	24
3.2.6 Project Outcomes .....	26
3.2.7 Project Challenges .....	28
3.2.8 Project Strengths.....	29
3.2.9 Project overview .....	29
3.3 Case Study 3: Support through Sport (STS) .....	31
3.3.1 Data Collection.....	31
3.3.2 Project Summary .....	31
3.3.3 Participant demographics .....	31
3.3.4 Project Delivery.....	32
3.3.5 Delivery Approach.....	32
3.3.6 Project Outcomes .....	34
3.3.7 Project Challenges .....	36
3.3.8 Project strengths.....	38
3.3.9 Project overview .....	38
3.4 Case Study 4: Trent Bridge .....	39

3.4.1 Data Collection.....	40
3.4.2 Project Summary .....	40
3.4.3 Participant demographics .....	40
3.4.4 Project Delivery.....	41
3.4.5 Delivery Approach.....	42
3.4.6 Project Outcomes .....	45
3.4.7 Project Challenges .....	47
3.4.8 Project Strengths.....	49
3.4.9 Project overview .....	51
5. Programme Level Findings – Realist Evaluation.....	53
5.1 Introduction .....	53
5.2 Context, Mechanisms and Outcomes .....	53
5.2.1 Context Conditions .....	54
5.2.2. Mechanisms .....	56
3.3.4. Outcomes .....	58
5. Potential Cost Savings .....	61
6. Conclusion and Recommendations .....	66
References.....	71
Appendix 1: Programme and Project Outcomes .....	72

## Executive Summary

Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Partnership (NNVRP) brings together specialists from Local Government, Health, Education, Policing and Criminal Justice to work with communities and the third sector to reduce serious violence and tackle its underlying causes. This report presents the findings from a comprehensive evaluation, undertaken by Loughborough University, of the Sports Diversion Programme in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire which supported four projects to deliver diversionary sport and mentoring interventions. The evaluation aligned with the second year of funding of the projects (April 2023 – March 2024).

The methodology adopted 'realist evaluation' principles (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) using multi-methods which recognises that the rationale, mechanisms and resources that underpin projects are instrumental in bringing about the stated outcomes. Data collection involved visits to sessions (n= 8), semi-structured interviews with project staff (n=15), stakeholders (n=2) and young people from the four projects (n=11). Surveys were completed by young people (n=29). Qualitative data was analysed thematically, and the quantitative data was summarised using descriptive statistics to identify what worked, for whom and under what circumstances in line with the realist approach. Potential cost reductions that arose through the programme were also explored.

Case studies of the four individual projects are presented which draw on documentary evidence, monitoring and evaluation data and external evaluation data. The case studies demonstrate the complexity of harnessing sport in attempts to prevent youth crime and violence. There was considerable variation between projects, but they all involved elements of a SportPlus (Coalter, 2007) approach which utilises purposefully designed sports activities plus other activities (e.g. volunteering, mentoring, advice, workshops, training/ qualifications) with targeted young people to promote engagement and positive pathways. The SportPlus approach is differentiated from a primary level intervention, which is typically open-access and universal, because it targets young people identified as experiencing multiple challenges and vulnerabilities and who may be engaged in behaviours associated with offending or be at risk of offending. The evaluation demonstrated that funded projects recruited young people who were vulnerable either through living in a deprived area or at risk of or involved in youth offending and who were able to benefit from involvement in a SportPlus intervention. The evaluation also highlighted that this type of intervention necessarily requires more formal support and staff expertise and therefore financial resource.

The evaluation indicated that, with support from the funder, projects overcame contextual challenges to deliver effective projects that were well received by young people. The funded projects contributed to preventing and reducing youth violence through impacting positively on participants' mental and physical wellbeing, their relationships with peers and with adults, supporting young people back into mainstream education, enhancing employability and reducing their offending risk. The evaluation also demonstrated the importance of being able to recruit and retain staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver a SportPlus project and the importance of connecting with other services to ensure that young people access appropriate support. Despite the greater cost of this type of delivery the evaluation indicates that the investment has the potential to deliver a range of cost savings.

## 1. Introduction

Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Partnership (NNVRP) brings together specialists from Local Government, Health, Education, Policing and Criminal Justice to work with communities and the third sector to reduce serious violence and tackle its underlying causes. The partnership adopts an evidence-based approach where possible and aims to contribute to the evidence base where this understanding is lacking.

A public health approach has been utilised to promote the reduction of violent crime, focusing on what will make a difference to whole populations, communities and groups. Interventions promote prevention through education and policy change to building community resilience. The Make Notts Safe Grant funded Youth Diversion and Hidden Harm evidence-based secondary level, preventive interventions for violence reduction as part of the Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County's vision for violence reduction. The funding has supported four projects to deliver diversionary sport and mentoring interventions which form the Sports Diversion Programme:

- Game Plan – delivered by 3 Pillars
- Support Through Sport (STS) – delivered by Support through Sport
- Switch Up – delivered by Switch Up
- Positive Futures – delivered by Trent Bridge Community Trust

Each of these projects utilised their own Theory of Change and Logic Model with defined intended outputs, outcomes and impacts supported by the VRP. The common monitoring data outcome areas across all four interventions were:

- I) Improved mental and physical well-being
- II) Improved relationships
- III) Access to education and employment
- IV) Reduction of offending risk

Loughborough University were appointed to undertake the comprehensive evaluation of the Sports Diversion Programme in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire using a Realist approach.

All the funded projects harnessed the power of sport to deliver a range of interventions which formed the Sports Diversion Programme. In achieving this aim, the projects adopted a range of approaches which can be classified as either Sport, SportPlus or PlusSport (Coalter, 2007) based on a public health approach. An explanation of these approaches can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Matching a public health approach with different types of sport interventions**

Public health approach		Type of sport intervention (Coalter, 2007)	Description
<b>Primary level</b>	Universal level, open to all young people with the aim of preventing offending. These young people are not showing signs of vulnerabilities or engaging in offending behaviours.	<b>Sport</b>	Focus on sports activities and playing sport, open access recruitment of young people, coaches might have ad hoc, informal conversations with young people, some opportunities for young people to help out/ volunteer at the sessions.
<b>Secondary level</b>	Targeted approach for young people who have been identified as experiencing multiple underlying factors and have vulnerabilities and/or are engaging in behaviours associated with offending or who are at risk of offending. This level of intervention requires more formal support and expertise	<b>SportPlus</b>	Focus on purposefully designed Sports activities Plus other activities to support young people including volunteering, mentoring, advice, workshops, training/ qualifications etc. Often a targeted recruitment of young people including referrals
<b>Tertiary level</b>	Targeted approach, usually focused on young people who have already offended and have multiple vulnerabilities. Interventions at this level require high levels of expertise and resource based on holistic support for the young person.	<b>PlusSport</b>	Focus on providing support for the young person first including 121 mentoring, holistic/ family support, workshops etc with sport used as a hook/reward/engagement tool. Almost always a targeted recruitment of young people based on referrals. Usually one to one or small group work.

Hennigan et al. (2015) maintain that an intervention for targeted young people at risk of or already involved in gangs should be developed on an individual basis, local, with the appropriate programme structure and content and with a focus on the most effective age range of 10-16 years. This suggests that projects will need to take different approaches to the design and delivery of their SportPlus interventions for this programme but that the reasons for these different approaches should be clear. An overview of the approach used by each project can be found in the last section of each project case study.

## 2. Evaluation Overview

### 2.1 Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation aligned with the second year of funding of the projects (April 2023 – March 2024). The projects have an additional year of funding beyond this year and will therefore be completed in March 2025.

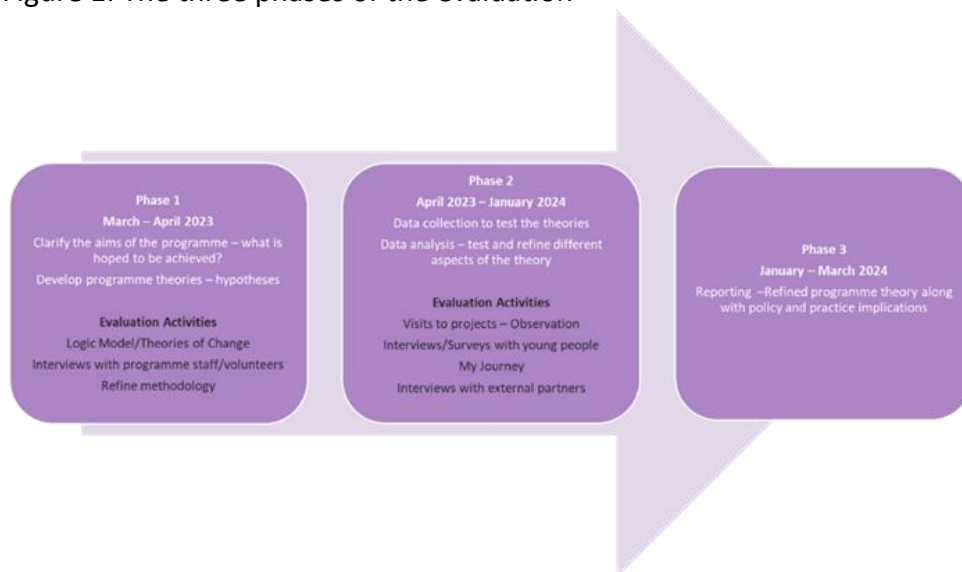
The evaluation objectives were to:

- a) Assess the outcomes, impact and effectiveness of the Sports Diversion Programme overall and for each intervention
- b) Calculate and compare the cost-benefit for each Sports Diversion Programme intervention
- c) Understand the acceptability, reach and integrity of the Sports Diversion Programme interventions for the target population(s)
- d) Understand whether and how the interventions complement each other in the Programme, and as part of a wider public health approach to violence reduction
- e) Apply findings to make recommendations for local commissioners and decision makers, on the future model, design, and delivery of diversionary violence reduction interventions

### 2.2 Evaluation Methodology

The methodology for the evaluation was based on 'realist evaluation' principles (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) using multi-methods which recognises that the rationale, mechanisms and resources that underpin projects are instrumental in bringing about the stated outcomes. This requires a focus on both the views of stakeholders to provide insight and evidence into the programme, its context and any changes as well as the views of children and young people (participants) to explore their relationship with programme mechanisms, the context and for identifying how this is contributing to positive changes (outcomes). The evaluation was carried out over three phases, summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The three phases of the evaluation



The first phase of the evaluation took place between March 2023 and April 2023. The evaluation team developed an understanding of each of the four projects through desk studies of available project documents and online interviews with key project staff as stakeholders. This phase clarified the aims of each programme and their programme theory.

The second stage of the evaluation was planned to collect and analyse project data between April 2023 and January 2024 to evaluate the programme theories. This included a minimum of two in-person visits to each programme to collect data. The research team planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in each project (overall total: n=10-16) and with external stakeholders (overall total: n=10-15) to gain their insight about the work of the projects and their contributions.

It was also intended to recruit a sample of young participants (n=20-25) to participate in semi-structured interviews to explore their reflections on their experiences. Qualitative data was to be supplemented by age-appropriate young person surveys for a wider range of children and young people. It was also intended to recruit a small sample of young people (n=6-10) to use a new visual tool 'Sport: My Journey, My Future, My Choice'. Individual case studies (n=8) would be developed based on young people's journeys and project data. Ethical approval was gained for the study from Loughborough University's Ethics Committee. The evaluation team also used the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) data provided to the NNVRP by each of the four projects.

The attempt to initiate evaluation activities revealed that there were several challenges to collecting data at the start of this period. This included:

- The unexpected ending of regular weekly sessions at three projects before the summer school holidays began in July 2023. Two projects ran daytime summer holiday



activity programmes instead but these attracted a new, younger cohort of young people

- The recruitment of very vulnerable young people at one project where they were still in the process of establishing a trusted relationship with the member of staff
- Workforce turnover which meant that two projects no longer had key delivery staff in place

The second phase of the data collection process therefore started in September 2023 and was extended until April 2024 so that the evaluation team could work at the pace required by the projects restarting their delivery activities with young people. The evaluation team visited each project at least once and one project three times. It conducted interviews with internal stakeholders as planned but it was challenging to involve external stakeholders with sufficient time available or knowledge of the project activities. The evaluation team conducted interviews with young people at all four projects. However, it was challenging to achieve the numbers of interviews originally planned due to firstly, needing to meet the criteria for the minimum age and length of involvement of young people at some projects since their sessions had restarted after the summer holidays and, secondly, requiring signed parental ethical consent forms. It has also been planned to use an innovative research tool - *Sport: My Journey, My Future, My Choice* but this had not been possible for a number of reasons including meeting the criteria required, the length of time available to work with young people and the type of facilities. The young people interviews were, therefore, supplemented by more in-depth session visits to observe the nature of the sports provision and the experiences of the young people. Projects were also given the opportunity to provide additional case studies of the young people that they had been working with.

The data collected for the evaluation was as follows:

- Visits to sessions = 8
- Interviews with project staff: total number = 15
- Interviews with stakeholders: total number = 2
- Interviews with young people from the four projects: total number = 11
- Young people surveys completed = 29
- Additional project generated young people case studies = 4

Qualitative data was analysed thematically and the quantitative data was summarised using descriptive statistics to identify what worked for whom and under what circumstances in line with the realist approach.

The third phase of the evaluation produced the final evaluation report and presented the findings and recommendations. Potential cost reductions that arose through the programme were explored.

The section that follows provides case studies of the four funded projects.

### 3. Case Studies of the funded projects

The case studies were based on the findings from the analysis of session visits, interviews with project staff, partners and young people, the projects' M&E returns and the young people case studies. As the young people surveys had a low response rate, the findings were not included in the case studies but are presented below as context.

The young people surveys were completed by 29 participants and 73% of respondents were male. 2 (7%) were aged 10-12, 18 (62%) were aged 13-15 and 9 (31%) were aged 16-18.

The surveys were predominantly completed by participants at 3 Pillars (n=20). The other 9 surveys were completed by 5 participants at Support through Sport, 3 at Trent Bridge Community Trust and 1 by a participant at Switch Up. Given the small numbers of responses the participant survey findings are presented for the programme rather than being included in the case studies as was the original intention. These findings provide useful context for the case studies and therefore have been included in this section.

Participants were asked about their motivations for attending the sessions. The factors that were most commonly mentioned were 'To have fun' (72%), 'My friends do' (66%), 'Because I like sport' (62%).

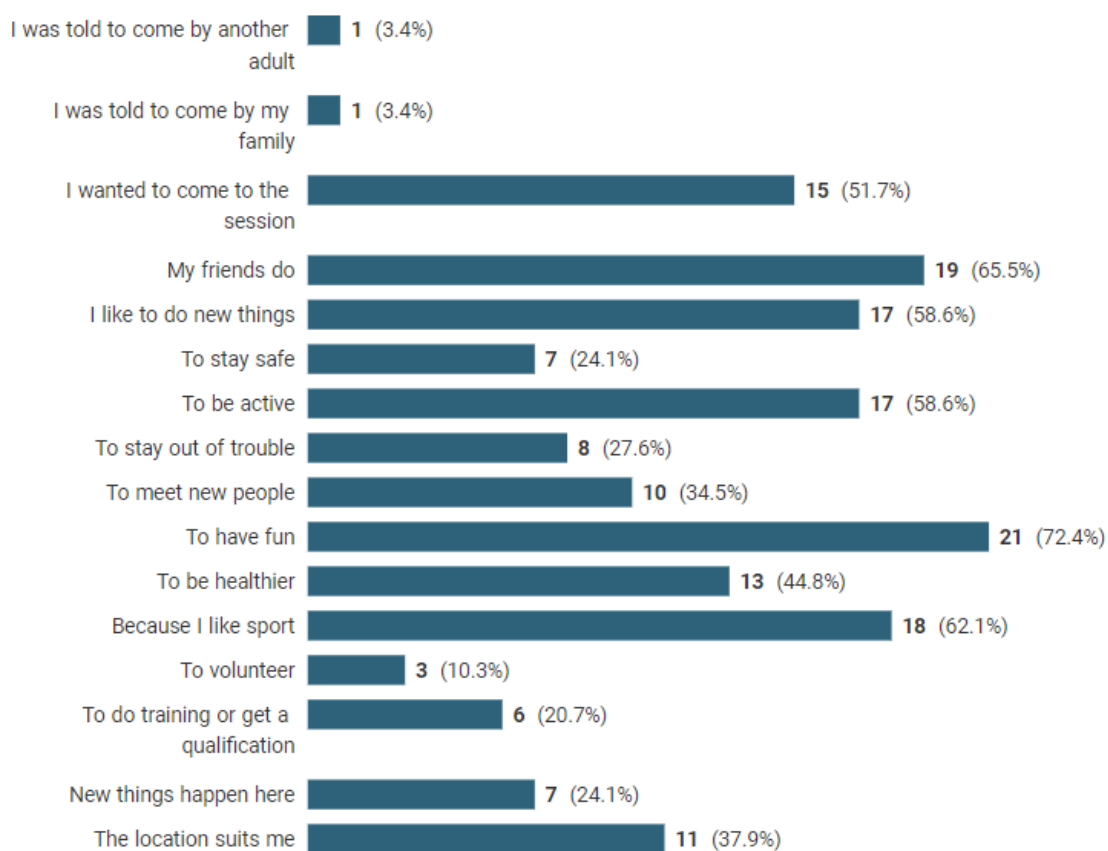


Figure 2: Participants' motivations for attending projects  
Participants were asked what they had done within the funded sessions.

- 100% of respondents agreed they had played sport within their project
- 74% agreed (31% agreed 'a lot') that they had helped out or volunteered at the session
- 47% agreed (29% agreed 'a lot') that they had a mentor

Participants were asked whether attending the sessions had made them feel more positive.

- 61% (n=17) agreed they were more positive about volunteering
- 71% (n=20) agreed they were more positive about going to school/College
- 64% (n=18) agreed they were more positive about relationships at home
- 89% (n=25) agreed they were more positive about relationships with friends


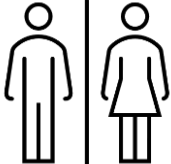

The participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements.

- 100% agreed (72% agreed a lot) 'I enjoy playing sport at this session'
- 90% agreed (66% agreed a lot) 'I feel safe at this session' whilst 3 respondents disagreed with this statement.
- 100% agreed (45% agreed a lot) 'The coaches are firm but fair'
- 100% agreed (43% agreed a lot) 'The coach gets who I am'
- 90% agreed (40% agreed a lot) 'I can talk about things that bother me' whilst 3 respondents disagreed with this statement.
- 97% agreed (55% agreed a lot) 'I am treated with respect here'
- 97% agreed (59% agreed a lot) 'I feel part of something in this session'
- 97% agreed (43% agreed a lot) 'I have learnt new things here'
- 100% agreed (35% agreed a lot) 'I have met new people here'
- 65% (21% agreed a lot) 'I am getting better at school because of this session'
- 100% agreed (69% agreed a lot) 'I would recommend this session to a friend'

### 3.1 Case Study 1: Switch-Up

#### 3.1.1 Data Collection

The following data were collected and analysed by the evaluation team to support the development of the case study.

		
Session Observations (n= 1)	Project staff Interviews (n= 3) Partner interviews (n=1) Young People Interviews (n= 1) Young people case studies (n=3)	Young People Surveys (n=2)

This was supplemented by the analysis of the project's bid documents and the quarterly monitoring and Evaluation data provided to the NNVRP.

#### 3.1.2 Project Summary

Switch-Up is an established project based in St Annes, the fifth most deprived community in Nottingham City. It was set up by Dr Marcellus Baz BEM in 2013 to prevent and reduce youth crime by working with young people affected by crime through its 5-pillar model of mentoring, counselling, education, employability and physical activity. As part of this model, Switch-Up offers sports activities through its sister organisation, the Nottingham School of Boxing which is on the same site. The sport-based mentoring element of the project supports young people referred from a wide range of agencies and typically involves young people living in areas of deprivation, who are very vulnerable and who are already involved in youth offending and violence. Mentoring is provided on a regular basis, using an established framework, where achievable goals are agreed together in response to the challenges participants face. The mentor provides holistic support to the young person with access to an onward referral system so young people with additional needs can be referred to other agencies. The project complements mentoring with opportunities for the young person to take part in sports such as boxing or football.

The intended outcomes for the project were:

- Improved mental & emotional well-being (Warwick-Edinburgh wellness scale)
- Participants develop new skills & coping mechanisms to deal with challenging situations (Outset Placing yourself and impact assessment)
- Sustain weekly involvement in physical fitness and/or other positive activities during the programme (pathway engagement)
- No new involvement in the criminal justice system during the programme (self-reported)

### 3.1.3 Participant Demographics

13 young people, all male, were engaged in the project. The ethnicity of the participants was described as follows: 3 were white, 1 was black and 2 were mixed with the remainder being other or not specified (n=7). The participants were aged 11 – 14 (n=6) and 15 - 17 (n=7). 7 participants were known to have SEND/learning disabilities and 2 were known to be looked after children.

The profile of the participants aligned with the aims of the funded project as they had typically experienced more than one of the following vulnerabilities: living in poverty, being bullied, being a carer for a parent, having Special Educational Needs (SEN), poor mental health, being excluded from school, NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training), multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), not living in the family home, broken relationship with parent(s), families in crisis, using substances to deal with trauma, involved in gangs, being exploited, had been arrested once or multiple times. Most participants had been involved in offending behaviour, often multiple times. including being arrested several times. As illustrated in one of the case studies, one young person had been excluded from school for taking in a large knife and was then subsequently arrested on a drugs charge and was suspected by the police of being a victim of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).

### 3.1.4 Project Delivery

This project adopted a plus sport model. The sessions provided 1-2-1 sport-based mentoring plus other forms of support. A small number of young people aged 10-18 years, affected by or involved in crime and violence, accessed mentoring, sport and personal development opportunities. The target group was a non-exclusive focus on boys aged 10-18 and those from BAME backgrounds in Nottingham City. Several hours of intensive one to one targeted mentoring was provided per week, alongside targeted workshops, opportunities for physical activity (including boxing), and counselling.

### 3.1.5 Delivery Approach

The ethos of Switch-Up is closely aligned to the lived experience and personal commitment of Dr Marcellus Baz BEM, the founder, who has embedded clear values and principles in how staff at Switch-Up work with young people. The aim of the project is to help young people to get 'over the bridge' and 'out of the dark into the light':

*'We have a terminology that we call over the bridge and what getting a young person over the bridge means is that they will start on that dark path where they might be using substances to cope with their trauma. They might be affected by adverse childhood experiences. They might, you know, be bullied, be involved in gangs, be being exploited, whatever is going on with that young person. We create a bespoke intervention plan of certain things that they need.'* (Project staff).

This ethos informed the design of the mentoring plan and the activities, the role and experience of the mentors, the mentoring relationship with the young person and the

organisation's commitment to not giving up on a young person. This ethos was also important for building the trust of referral partners. One partner described how they visited Switch-Up several times, observed the sessions, listened and spoke to young people, families and residents about the project before they started to make referrals. They confirmed that they had been keen to make referrals as the project was based on positive, professional relationships between the staff and the young people, voluntary engagement, positive messages and that the project used sport to change lives and that it was not just offering an opportunity to play sport as a diversion.

Vulnerable young people who were at risk of or involved in crime were recruited through a referral mechanism used by statutory and voluntary agencies including youth offending teams, the police, probation services and schools. Switch-Up's referral manager supported this process and gathered relevant information about the referred young people from a range of agencies to pass to the mentor to ensure that they had access to relevant information to support their work with the young person. This meant that they were working with the right cohort of young people for this NNVRP funded project. This was confirmed by a partner who had responsibility for referrals including to Switch-Up.

*'We would look to engage with Switch-Up around different initiatives that we could offer to the young people in the city and to try and obviously steer them away from antisocial behaviour, criminal activity and also to work with those that maybe haven't been given opportunities and that would benefit from sort of positive role models in the community' (Partner)*

The partner explained that they recognised that they couldn't do their own role by themselves and needed organisations like Switch-Up to put interventions in place so that they could 'reduce the amount of resources and time that that we're going out and constantly fire-fighting'.

Switch-Up has a team of mentors from a range of diverse backgrounds which had the advantage of making it easier to match the referred young person to a mentor. This included mentors with lived experience of being involved in gangs and crime but who had turned their lives around, mentors who had grown up in deprived communities and who had witnessed criminality, mentors with a passion for working with young people, with a passion for sport, qualified as a sport coach, mentors who were sensitive to the needs of young people, those who could be a 'father figure'.

*'We don't want all staff members [mentors] to be the same cause if we've all got lived experience or have been involved in criminality, that might not appeal to a certain young person. So, because we've got different people with different attributes, it means we can find the best match to work with young people.'* (Project staff)

Mentors received training from Switch-Up about the ethos of the organisation which underpinned their work, the mentoring approach and processes.

*'We recruit them [the mentors] and then, our CEO, Marcellus Baz, he's got a really interesting story of how he set Switch-Up up and his background. So, he's able to give us that lived experience, feedback and training so that when we're working with young people, we know exactly what the issues are, how to engage them and, you know,*

*Baz's own story is really beneficial and sort of embedded in what we do and why we do it.' (Project staff)*

The mentors followed a clear mentoring process based on identifying and meeting the needs of the young person. The project staff confirmed that they started by looking at the information from the referral agencies to think about how to approach their work with the young person and to make sure that they were complementing interventions being provided by other agencies. They would then look at the basic needs of the young person (i.e. Maslow's hierarchy of need) and would often involve the young person's family and provide them support at the same time as illustrated below:

*'Helping them [the parent or guardian] get that form, helping them by signposting in the right way and you know, one of the young people who is on our VRP funding at the moment, Mum's got, you know, a lot of mental health issues to the point that he's a young carer, so mum is struggling just as much as he is and so it's about like, how do we get them on board.'* (Project staff)

They then progressed to considering the young person's physical and mental well-being including mental health, loneliness, physical health and fitness, lifestyle and routines. They then focused on what needed to be put into place to reduce involvement in offending behaviour. This helped to ensure a consistent but bespoke intervention plan for the mentoring journey for the referred young person.

*'Have they got food? Have they got shelter, have they got clothes. What's life like at home? And then we start to build on that and think, right, if they've got those essentials, what do we do next?..... We look at the mental and the physical health. We look at seeing a reduction in criminality.'* (Project staff)

The mentors met the referred young people on a regular basis, often more than once a week. Although they planned each session with learning outcomes, the mentor needed to be flexible and adaptable to what was happening in the young person's life. The ethos of not giving up on the young person was often evident at the beginning of their work where if a young person didn't turn up, they would ring them, go to their house, talk to them and take them to the project themselves. This approach was significant for young people not in education or employment who might not have a routine to follow as it ensured that they continued to engage whilst demonstrating to them that they were cared for, supporting the trusted relationship.

*'When a lot of youngsters are ... excluded from school, some of them tend to just stop in the house, they're on the Xboxes, and ... if I pick 'em up in the morning, say what time did you get to bed and it'll be anything from one till four o'clock [during the night] because they'll be on fortnite'.* (Project staff)

The mentoring process drew on a range of resources including sport, targeted workshops and one to one discussion for creating safe spaces for significant conversations that they would not typically have in other settings.

*'It could be a one-to-one discussion, it could be a targeted workshop, it could be ... whilst they're boxing in the boxing ring and they're talking about it. What's going on at home? Why didn't you like your teacher? ... It could be you're going for a walk by the embankment with them and you getting some fresh air and something that's good for their mental health. And then we're looking at right how can we get them back at school college, you know, in training, in a job.'* (Project staff)

The mentors had access to a range of sports opportunities at Switch-Up including boxing, gym and fitness, football and basketball. This included the opportunity to have sporting spaces such as the boxing ring to themselves so that the mentor and the young person could build the mentoring relationship and have safe and confidential places to have meaningful conversations. Sport was valuable for creating opportunities for the mentoring process, being used as an engagement tool and as a 'metaphor' for supporting critical thinking and reflection, making use of teachable moments and developing lifeskills, drawing on the mentor's own experiences where appropriate. This was illustrated by a project mentor describing how they had conversations with a young person after a few weeks of taking part in sport.

*'If they start saying, well, I am feeling fitter, that's a start. Why are you feeling fitter? Because I'm doing this. So, you got a platform to build upon and you can think, I'm feeling fitter because I'm doing this and then you can say, what benefits are you getting from this? Well, I'm being able to sleep better at night, you know. So, you start building up a fire and start building up a platform. Then once you've done that, what I call the foundation work, then you start bringing the branches off, you can take it into a different direction.'* (Project staff)

Although Switch-Up's approach to mentoring proved to be an effective tool for working with young people, the work with some of the young people was paused for several months during Autumn 2023 as several mentors secured better paid jobs in response to the cost-of-living crisis. As the role required specific competencies, Switch-Up had to make sure that they were recruiting the right mentors, applying for enhanced DBS checks which took longer for applicants with previous lived experience and then provide induction training which took until January 2024 to complete. However, as Switch-Up had a range of services in place, the young people affected by this were still engaged either in alternative education provision or at the sport sessions such as the Nottingham School of Boxing which offered sessions seven days a week.

### 3.1.6 Project Outcomes

The Monitoring and Evaluation data indicated that the project had worked with 9 young people in Year 1 (22/23) and 13 young people during Year 2 (23/24) and of these 10 were still engaged in the project. 2 young people had been recruited as ambassadors and volunteers, 7 young people were participating in physical activity and 9 young people were supported into employment, education or training.

The data also indicated that additional support had been sought for some participants through referrals made to other organisations. There were 3 safeguarding referrals made to MASH, 1 to Change Grow Live (a substance misuse support service), 1 to social care and 1 to CAMHS.



Although the main goal for this project was to get a young person 'over the bridge' and to prevent and reduce their involvement in offending, they recognised that as a PlusSport intervention, each young person would have different needs and therefore different outcomes. They collected evidence about a young person's outcomes in different ways including using validated tools. These tools were appropriate for the individual holistic PlusSport interventions that they delivered and were more likely to be used by the social welfare sector rather than by the community sport sector. Each mentor used the organisation's own M&E reporting system which originated from the social care sector to record the outcome of every meeting or point of contact with the young person. This was based on the mentor's own observations and reflections as well as the young person. They also engaged with the young person's parent to ask for feedback about progress as demonstrated below:

*'And I'll ask her [mum], how is xxx? How are the changes? Are there any benefits to you that you see in him and she will let me know, which is great because, like I said, the parents are the ones that have to deal with it. The bottom line, not me.'* (Project staff)

As the project worked with a small number of young people on an individual basis, project staff and the policing partner were able to provide information about the specific outcomes for young people. Many of these outcomes exceeded what had been planned and were often incremental and multiple – starting from small but significant steps. Outcomes from the project included:

### **Improved mental & physical well-being**

This included opportunities for regular participation in sport and physical activity such as boxing, football and basketball and improved sport playing skills. This had also led to improved physical fitness and emotional well-being, being aware of and feeling the benefits, able to regulate emotions including anger more effectively and feeling happier.

### **Improved relationships**

Young people experienced improved relationships at home – getting on well with their parent, experiencing less or no conflict at home. In one case this included a young person who had been able to return to live at home after the parent had previously been forced to ask their child to leave because of safety issues.

### **Education and employment**

Young people benefited from their involvement at the project by getting into a regular routine which created the foundation for returning to education or employment – going to bed and getting up early, getting used to coming to Switch-Up.

Young people succeeded in getting back into education with support from the project. This included taking part in alternative education provision at the project itself or at another provider, returning to mainstream school full-time or on a phased basis and preparing to take GCSE exams:

*'Two of them have now gone back into alternative provision. So, they've moved on. So, we're sort of just providing some of that maintenance support when we've got a young person, when we get the outcome, we don't pull away straight away, we help make sure that that plan is sustainable and that we've got an exit strategy to support them, such as maybe they're volunteering at our boxing gym so that they can keep in touch with familiar adults.'* (Project staff)

Young people who had been participants at the project were now volunteering as a coach at the Nottingham School of Boxing, helping to build their CV and providing work experience. Some young people were planning to go to college to study construction and bricklaying. Some young people were preparing for employment which involved taking part in work experience and short placements with local companies, getting interview practice and preparing for job applications and apprenticeships.

Employment gained by young people included a part-time job in a café whilst at college, having a part-time or full-time role as a sports coach or mentor at Switch-Up. Young people's aspirations for future employment included wanting to be a professional boxer, wanting to be a movie producer, wanting to get an apprenticeship.

*'Suddenly they're now thinking, right? If I can get through year 11, I can get into an apprenticeship. You know, they're looking at their perceptions of the world, the people that they were hanging around with, actually their associates have done them no good. And they can see that and they can withdraw and be in positive environments.'* (Project staff)

### **Reduction in offending risk**

Young people taking part in the project showed reduced or no involvement in ASB or crime including gangs and knife crime. This included less or reduced involvement with criminal and youth justice statutory agencies – one young person had finished working with the YOT as they were no longer being arrested, less involvement from the police and social care, not being seen by the police on the streets getting into trouble and being arrested.

Young people were demonstrating pro-social values and behaviours which included no longer associating with negative peers or 'risk' adults, understanding the consequences of criminality and wanting a different future,

### **3.1.7 Project Challenges**

The main challenge was the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the retention of the mentoring workforce. This meant that although several key mentors had taken on a second paid job, some had had to leave the programme for better paid jobs in the care sector as an example even though they loved their role as a mentor. This had affected the number of young people that the project could work with during this period. As the project staff member reflected, many of these mentors came from the same deprived communities as the young people that they worked which meant that they did not have money or a safety net behind them.

*'It's really hard to compete with other wages. I see many jobs that are, you know, 2000 pounds more than what we're able to pay..... You know, our mentors aren't from blue chip areas where they've got, you know, wonderful backgrounds and they've probably had a house bought for them and they've had many things provided. They've come through that struggle, which is why they do the work that they do, which means that they're probably still living in those communities. They're probably still coming from a background of struggle.'* (Project staff)

Although Switch-Up had managed to recruit new mentors in October, they had not been able to start working with their mentees until January 2024. This had been caused by the delays in receiving enhanced DBS checks often because of the mentors' lived experience, providing training and induction for the new mentors about their role and the systems and processes in place. Switch-Up recognised that they couldn't compete with higher salaries but had decided to focus on creating manageable workloads and being flexible with their mentors' own personal situations.

A second key challenge was the cost-of-living crisis impacting on the families of participants. This meant that it was hard for some young people to see the consequences for themselves of becoming involved in negative experiences for bringing additional money into the household through involvement in criminality when their own family was struggling to pay for the basics.

Reduction in support services for young people to access was challenging. The external services that young people had been referred to for specialist support have long waiting lists. Examples included waiting for help with substance misuse or waiting for a SEN diagnosis that would help them to get additional support in school. This made it more difficult for the mentors to help some of the young people with their next steps, including a return to mainstream school.

The last factor was a concern about the impact of cuts from Nottingham City Council which was shared by both the project staff and the policing partner.

*'When obviously the Council announced the mess that they were in, my worry was that groups such as Switch Up will be massively affected .... like we have to find a way to make them continue to be able to deliver what they're delivering at such a high level at such a quality level.'* (Partner)

The project was still waiting to receive confirmation for continuation funding of an additional sport outreach programme being delivered in Nottingham and were concerned about the impact of cuts on the wider project, including continued funding for their alternative provision. Staff were concerned about the impact of potentially reduced funding on young people, and their own jobs with a potential impact on workforce retention. It could also mean that applying for smaller pots of funding would become more competitive between voluntary organisations which was not seen as a positive development.

*'This is a toll on everybody's well-being ....all the front staff then worry and then, you know, linking back to talking about wages if now we're all going to go for funding*

*pots, you know the need for them increases because if we were getting some from lots of pots and now actually the Council's gone ... The competition's going to get so much higher, so much harder.'* (Project staff)

### 3.1.8 Project Strengths

As an established project Switch-Up has a professional organisational structure in place including their recruitment process, staff induction and training, commitment to staff development including sport and youth worker qualifications, a referral manager, a commitment to providing full-time jobs and an appropriate M&E system. This structure provided a foundation for the work that was carried out and helped the mentoring staff to focus on their work with young people. Having organisational governance and structures in place also helped to provide confidence for the partners and funders that were working with the projects.

Organisational ethos was a key factor for the project's effectiveness as it was embedded in their approach to mentoring young people. This provided a clear and consistent focus for the mentoring process and contributed to providing a holistic approach to working with very vulnerable young people who had challenging lives and their families. This ethos supported the commitment of the mentors to persevere with young people even when they were struggling to engage and to continue working with them for as long as needed rather than limiting engagement to a pre-set number of weeks. This approach supported the outcomes experienced by the young people including preventing re-offending.

The holistic offer for young people was significant in ensuring its effectiveness. The flexibility of the project was valuable in meeting the changing needs of participants. This included access to playing sport for seven days a week at Nottingham School of Boxing, opportunities for volunteering and becoming a qualified sports coach as well as potential access to their alternative education provision. These additional opportunities proved to be valuable for young people who were waiting for a mentor as well as for participants already being mentored. This enabled new young people to start their engagement whilst waiting for a mentor to become available. Existing participants whose mentor had left could continue to access support from other services and remain engaged in the wider engagement to provide continuity. Participants whose mentoring journey was complete could still stay involved in the organisation, enabling staff to stay in contact to check that everything was still going well. This wider package was also able to provide some young people with onward pathways to stay within the organisation as volunteers, sports coaches and, in some cases, as mentors.

The mentoring workforce was the project's main asset which was founded on the organisation's understanding of the type of sport-based mentoring experience that would benefit referred young people. There was a clear rationale for the choice and diversity of mentors. This included the importance of mentors having similar 'shared, lived experiences' as their mentees. Switch-Up recognised that mentors and coaches needed to be supported to deal with their own trauma and triggers and offered mandatory ACEs training for all staff as well as access to counselling services. Although the process of supporting a mentor or coach to deal with their own trauma before they could support young people who had experienced trauma could take years, it was acknowledged that it was powerful to have a




staff member who had 'lived in their shoes'. The strength of the workforce was also highlighted by the mentors' personal commitment to working with young people. This was based not only on their own motivations for this work, but it was also underpinned by an informed understanding of how to work holistically with young people and their families and how to use sport effectively within the mentoring context.

*'You know, he [the mentee] really has come such a long way and I'm so proud of him as I am with many of the others. It is something that's really personal to me and I'm so passionate about and you know., my heart really goes into all of my work.'* (Project staff)

### 3.1.9 Project Overview


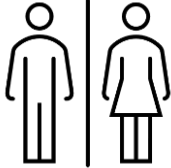

As shown in Table 2, Switch-Up was a PlusSport project which was at the lower tertiary level, overlapping with SportPlus, at the higher secondary level working with young people already involved with or at high risk of involvement in Serious Youth Violence. As the table shows, although young people initially engaged in the project through the Plus Sport approach, they were also able to get involved in other activities at the project based on the SportPlus and Sport approach, including at their sister project, the Nottingham School of Boxing, which helped to provide complementary activities including acting as a holding opportunity for young people on the waiting list, providing the appropriate level of opportunities as their level of vulnerability reduced and maintaining contact with young people. Continuation of contact with the project was important for helping young people to avoid the challenges around the ending of the mentoring process which had the potential to be a negative experience otherwise (Zilberstein & Spence, 2017).

Table 2: Overview of Switch-Up

Public health approach		Type of sport intervention	Description	Switch-Up
<b>Primary level</b>	Universal level, open to all young people with the aim of preventing offending.	<b>Sport</b>	Focus on playing sport, open access recruitment of young people, coaches might have ad hoc, informal conversations with young people, some opportunities for young people to help out/ volunteer at the sessions.	Additional regular sports opportunities available seven days a week whilst being mentored. Opportunity to improve sport playing skills. Helps to maintain contact with young person after mentoring has finished and provide additional support for difficult, unexpected situations. 
<b>Secondary level</b>	Targeted approach for young people experiencing multiple vulnerabilities and/or are engaging in behaviours associated with offending or who are at risk of offending.	<b>SportPlus</b>	Focus on purposefully designed Sports activities Plus other activities to support young people including volunteering, mentoring, advice, workshops, training/ qualifications etc.	Nottingham School of Boxing as a 'holding' point for referred young people on their waiting list. Providing a pathway into sport volunteering and formal sports coaching roles at the Nottingham School of Boxing. Helps to maintain contact with young person after mentoring has finished. 
<b>Tertiary level</b>	Targeted approach, usually focused on young people who have already offended and have multiple vulnerabilities.	<b>PlusSport</b>	Focus on providing support for the young person first including 121 mentoring, holistic/ family support, workshops etc with sport used as a hook/reward/engagement tool.	Switch-Up works with referred young people involved in or at risk of offending on a one to one basis, providing holistic support including family support, getting back into education or employment. Use of sport as a hook, engagement tool, positive activity, 

## 3.2 Case Study 2: Game Plan 3Pillars

### 3.2.1 Data Collection

		
Session Observations (n= 2)	Adult Interviews (n= 4) Stakeholder interviews (n=1) Young People Interviews (n= 3) Young people case studies (n=1)	Young People Surveys (n=20)

In addition to the primary data bid documents, Monitoring and Evaluation data and case studies provided by the project were also utilised within the evaluation.

### 3.2.2 Project Summary

Game Plan was a newly established project which drew on the experiences gained by the delivery charity 3 Pillars in their work in London which provides sport-based mentoring to young men in the criminal justice system; those vulnerable to engaging in crime, in custody, and recently released from prison. This project was new to Nottingham and the initial plans for the project changed over the duration of the evaluation. Other partners included the local police officer, the Ending youth violence network and the local Resident Development Officer.

The project was based in Sneinton which is a disadvantaged area. Here young people can experience challenges including issues at home (e.g. parental mental health concerns, multiple children in the house, chaotic household) and pressures to become involved in crime (e.g. young people carrying knives, supplying drugs).

Intended outcomes for the project participants were:

- Improve the mental health and wellbeing of participants
- Support improved relationships with family and peers
- Promote positive behaviours that reduce the likelihood of being involved in crime
- Gain a sports qualification (CSLA or Level 1 Gym Instructor)

### 3.2.3 Participant Demographics

82 young people were engaged in the project and of these 59% were male. The ethnicity of the participants was 37% black (n=30), 20% Asian (n=16), 11% (n=9) white, 1% (n=7) mixed with the remainder being other or not specified (n=20). Most participants were aged 11 – 14

(51%) 15 - 17 (48%) whilst one participant was aged 18-25. 3 participants were known to have with SEND/learning disabilities and 3 were known to have physical disabilities.

Project staff noted that the targeted young people were challenging to engage but their experiences in the local area were ensuring that they were learning about what worked best in this area.

*“These are some of the hardest to reach young kids as well, so it might be challenging, but we'll use obviously what we've learned in this experience and take it into that one”.*  
(Project Staff)

### 3.2.4 Project Delivery

Initially the 3 Pillars sport sessions were based outdoors in a school setting. The school identified and informally referred young people who they believed would benefit from sport-based mentoring youth work due to being vulnerable to becoming involved, or already known, within the criminal justice system. The young people were released from lessons in school and participated in multi-sport sessions delivered by a coach from Nottingham Rugby Club and staff from 3 Pillars. The sessions provided the opportunity for delivery staff to build relationships with participants, to capitalise on teachable moments and for participants to engage in mentoring conversations with members of staff. The school sessions ceased in July 2023.

In September 2023 a new session started located in the nearby Wildcats Stadium. This session was delivered between 3.15 and 4.30 on a Wednesday afternoon using a similar approach to the previous school session. The sports delivered include basketball, rugby, football and boxing. Snacks and drinks were also provided. A second coach was recruited in the latter stages of the project. The young people attending this session joined because of outreach activity and word of mouth.

### 3.2.5 Delivery Approach

This project is a Sport-Plus session where sport is used as the hook and as a medium to build relationships and rapport between the coach, mentors and participants that builds a foundation for them to give advice and guidance and be a stable positive role model. Through these actions it was intended that there would be a positive impact on the behaviour of the young person in and beyond education.

The sport-plus approach was evident during the evaluation visits in the numerous ways in which staff capitalised on opportunities to engage with participants which were possible because of their engagement in sport.

*“The place where these kids can sort of come and not feel, I don't know, judged, or because I know I've sort of been in positions where, you know, I've come to somewhere and it's sort of hard for me to fit in. Just because of who I am, I guess. And where I come from. So just, trying to just relate to them on their level for me is probably one of*



*my key things that I need to focus on so that they can have the confidence in talking about whatever they need to talk about if they wanna talk about it. But they don't have to talk about anything at end of the day, if they're just showing up, that's enough for us and then hopefully down the line, we can sort of build that relationship to then have the conversation if it needs to be had" (Project Staff)*

The offer is trauma-informed and participant-centred and responds to their individual needs and aspirations:

*"Each kid's got a different story, I guess, and we're just trying to learn each other trying to figure out what makes each other tick and sort of just be a support system for them." (Project Staff)*

The ethos of the project was intentionally created through the skills and enthusiasm of the staff. The sessions were deliberately fast paced and varied to keep young people engaged. Incentives were also built to keep them involved such as competitions and playing football at the end of the session because of its popularity with participants. There was a very strong ethos of fun and vibrancy at the sessions as recognition that this was vital to keep participants engaged:

*"I always thought if I rock up to these sessions and, sort of, I'm down, then the kids will be down. So, my approach was just basically be one of them. I'm a kid at heart anyway, so just be on their level, show my energy and then hopefully they can feed off that and I feel like it's working very, very well. But yeah, we can get into the sort of nitty gritty of coaching and stuff like technical stuff. But for this, for this type of session, like it's just about having fun trying to get everybody engaged." (Project Staff)*

Having several staff at the session ensured that conversations could happen with participants both within the context of the game or with those who were on the periphery.

*"They are there to come and play and it's down to us to pick up on things like, for example, the younger woman that I spoke about, who wasn't joining in and yeah. And so I'd go and sit with her and find out why and things like that." (Project staff)*

The project also aimed to be inclusive as there was recognition that not all young people were able to join in the sport session as easily as the majority of participants for a variety of reasons. The coaches adapted the session to facilitate the inclusion of participants who were on the periphery of the session.

*"We have a couple of kids that sit out sometimes and we try to figure out what's going on there and then try to adapt a position to sort of include them as well, because obviously everyone's got something going on. But if we can, we try and sort of help. Yeah, and get them involved. It's just a massive bonus for us." (Project Staff)*

Staff were very proactive in ensuring that sessions were influenced by young people which was achieved through listening to young people and hearing about their lives rather than making assumptions.

*“I've learned that you have to listen to the young people. It's not about what we plan or what we think, it's about what we know and we only know from what they tell us. So, we just keep our ears open and take on board what the young people are telling us. So, we can make a change in their life.” (Project Staff)*

The staff undertook mentoring training to develop their skills in supporting young people further in order to ensure that they capitalised on the opportunities to support young people who attend primarily because of the sports offer.

### 3.2.6 Project Outcomes

The monitoring and valuation data for the year 2023-24 indicated that the project had achieved many of the intended outcomes:

- 100% of participants demonstrated an improvement in mental health and wellbeing (California Healthy Kids Survey)
- 50% reported improved relationships at Home 50% whilst 80% had made new friends in sessions
- 80% of participants were believed to have sustained positive behaviours that reduce the likelihood of being involved in crime

#### **Improved mental & physical well-being**

The value of engaging regularly in sport and physical activity was recognised by participants, not just for giving them something to do but also because it made them feel happier as they enjoyed the activities:

*“So, the place where I live is kind of a bit rubbish. It's not very active, everybody's always inside. But I like to go out because there's nothing really very much to do. That's why I like to do [sports] clubs.” (Participant)*

*“I really like the project and I think the things that I like most is playing the actual sports.” (Participant)*

The participants engaged in new games and sports that they were less familiar with to provide new and varied experiences. As an example, a new sport that aligned with the expertise of the coaches would take place at the beginning of the session, but they would then finish by playing the sport that was the most popular amongst participants (often football). This strategy blended the expertise of the coaches with the preferences of the participants.

*“I was really searching for something to motivate me because I was really lazy and I didn't like to do anything back then. But then my friend kept saying, oh, come on. It's good to do more activities even if you don't know any sports. If you come and do the sport you do a lot of different stuff so you can choose which sports will make you more happier.” (Participant)*

Delivery staff were aware of the importance of regular attendance at sessions for participants to feel a sense of belonging which was considered important in terms of promoting positive behaviour change:

*“I suppose just maybe soft attitudes in just in terms of like turning up every week and being a part of something ... feeling a part of something ... maybe changing ... behaviors” (Project Staff)*

*“They can maybe find something, something else. So just exposing them to new things, learning new skills, and just trying to develop their relationships with sports. I guess because it can be such a key factor for a child growing up like it was mine.” (Project Staff)*

Other positive outcomes from engagement in physical activity and sport which was valued by participants included feeling more motivated, being more active, feeling more confident and communicating more effectively:

*“It has made a difference for me because now I feel more motivated to do stuff rather than just sit and not do anything because I know that it will help me a lot.” (Participant)*

Positive encouragement and feedback for the participants was used deliberately to build participants’ confidence and motivation. This was considered important because the participants typically did not get a lot of encouragement in school where they were often struggling with attainment and with behaviour.

### **Improved relationships**

Participants had developed positive relationships with the project staff built on trust and caring:

*“I love the staff because they are so nice and they make me feel really safe around them. And I also like my friends, that also makes me feel safe around them.” (Participant)*

*“The session I like how the staff treats us and then they give us food without telling us. They don't make us pay and then they treat us very well and they make sure that we are always OK.” (Participant)*

The project staff were viewed as role models who were able to provide positive advice and support and to also demonstrate different ways of dealing with difficult situations that young people might face. This was observed during a session visit when a group of young people entered the gym looking for a friend, knowing that they would be there. They then got together to discuss what had happened at school during the day. A member of staff was involved in the conversation, and one participant mentioned a fight at school that day and they were concerned that they might have got into trouble. The member of staff was able to

provide support to the participant about how to manage this issue and then later they went on to join the sport session.

*“I think they teach you very well instead of judging you, they help you out. They teach you how to do it. And they tell you what is good for you and what is bad for you to do ... I think it goes beyond the sport because they make sure that you know how to communicate with people without arguing ... and then you know how to talk with people ... without shouting.” (Participant)*

Participants were also able to develop new friendships and strengthen existing friendships at the session

*“I decided to do it because I want to do more activities after school and be more involved with people and socialise.” (Participant)*

### **Education and employment**

The aspiration for participants to gain a sports qualification (CSLA or Level 1 Gym Instructor) was proving challenging due to the paperwork element of the qualification which participants were reluctant to do within the existing sports session. This remains an aspiration for the final year of delivery.

### **Reduction in offending risk**

The project targeted its session at vulnerable young people who were struggling at school and who would benefit from positive experiences. The project was able to demonstrate strong levels of engagement, the development of trusted adult relationships and positive values and behaviours which are known to be contributing factors to reducing the risk of youth involvement in crime.

#### **3.2.7 Project Challenges**

The project manager suggested that deviating from the original plans for the project had been a challenge, but it was necessary to make changes based on the early experiences of the project in order to ensure the success of the project. This was identified as an important lesson for the organisation and their willingness to adapt their plans including providing continuity of sessions throughout the school holidays was considered vital in establishing this new project.

A key challenge to the delivery of the sessions was the need to balance planning the sessions and responding to the needs of the participants as this could be unpredictable:

*“The challenging thing is just, yeah, trying to trying to plan and I guess trying to be more aware of things that may go wrong. It's just how we adapt to it, and just sort of go off the feeling of how the kids are feeling because at the end of the day if they're in*

*a bit of a mood then it's going to be quite tough. So how can we bring them back into sort of in a safe space where we can have some fun and keep them engaged.”* (Project Staff)

The intention to complete sports leader awards had not yet been realised but this remained an aspiration for the project because it was believed that this would be attractive to participants who wished to gain an award and could be used to support them in the future in terms of potential employment.

*“I just think it gives them something, so kids that might not be necessarily as academic, it might just give them an opportunity to get some kind of award through sport so that they might enjoy it and it will be their choice to do it. You know, so hopefully that'll just be a bit of a commitment from them that they're gonna do it and we'll make it fun.”* (Project Staff)

A primary consideration for the project was sustaining delivery in order to ensure that young people were not let down by the organisation. This was an important consideration for the organisation who were aware that young people in the community often experience being let down as services come and go due to resource constraints.

### 3.2.8 Project Strengths


The coaches and project staff were clearly role models for the young people involved in the sessions. There was an element of 'stardom', as one of the coaches was a professional rugby player who volunteered at the project. As he was from New Zealand and had lived in other countries, his persona and approach were very positively received by young people. The move to the Wildcats stadium had also helped to create a spatial identity for the project. This had helped to make the gym hall a safe space where young people could drop in, whether they were there for sport, the social aspect, or for some advice or reassurance from the staff members.

The project benefited from a strong support structure, with coaches supporting each other by recognising each other's skills, complementing each other's contribution and working in synergy with each other. The coaches were keen to note the importance of the work done by the 3 Pillars staff outside of the sports activity itself which they saw as being instrumental to the success within sessions. This combined approach had helped them to deliver a successful sport plus mechanism.

### 3.2.9 Project overview

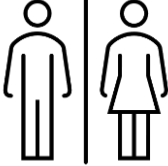

As shown in Table 3 below, the 3Pillars project adopted a SportPlus approach, working with vulnerable young people based on referrals, outreach and word of mouth in the local community. The project ran weekly multisport sessions based on a youthwork approach with opportunities for personal development, support and planned leadership courses in the future.

Table 3: Overview of 3Pillars

Public health approach		Type of sport intervention	Description	3Pillars
<b>Primary level</b>	Universal level, open to all young people with the aim of preventing offending.	<b>Sport</b>	Focus on playing sport, open access recruitment of young people, coaches might have ad hoc, informal conversations with young people, some opportunities for young people to help out/ volunteer at the sessions.	
<b>Secondary level</b>	Targeted approach for young people experiencing multiple vulnerabilities and/or are engaging in behaviours associated with offending/ at risk of offending.	<b>SportPlus</b>	Focus on purposefully designed Sports activities Plus other activities to support young people including volunteering, mentoring, advice, workshops, training/ qualifications etc.	Regular, purposefully designed and run youthwork sports sessions at the Nottingham Wildcats Basketball arena with meaningful conversations, role models, teachable moments. Targeted at both school-based referrals and local young people through outreach and word of mouth. Opportunities for helping out and volunteering. Future sports leadership course for training, qualifications and formal volunteering roles. 
<b>Tertiary level</b>	Targeted approach, usually focused on young people who have already offended and have multiple vulnerabilities.	<b>PlusSport</b>	Focus on providing support for the young person first including 121 mentoring, holistic/ family support, workshops etc with sport used as a hook/reward/engagement tool.	

### 3.3 Case Study 3: Support through Sport (STS)

#### 3.3.1 Data Collection

		
Session Observations (n= 3)	Adult Interviews (n= 4) Young People Interviews (n= 3)	Young People Surveys (n=5)

In addition to the primary data bid documents, Monitoring and Evaluation data and case studies provided by the project were also utilised within the evaluation.

#### 3.3.2 Project Summary

Support Through Sport, established in 2021, currently works in the city of Nottingham and across Nottinghamshire. The NNVRP funding was used to provide a range of sport sessions to young people specifically in deprived areas of Nottinghamshire which had been identified in partnership with other agencies such as the police so that they could target 'hot spot' crime areas. Project staff reported that they had developed a mentoring framework with the intention to provide additional support to young people in these areas.

The intended outcomes for the project were:

- Improved mental & physical well-being
- Sustained improved relationships, family life and established support network (self-reported)
- Sustained positive behaviour change and will receive support that reduces their likelihood of involvement in crime (self-reported)
- Sustained positive engagement with education/work (Vocational qualifications, peer support etc)

#### 3.3.3 Participant demographics

172 young people were engaged in the project and of these 82 % were male (n=141), 29 were female and 2 were trans or non-binary or other. The ethnicity of the participants was 31% (n=53) white, 1 participant was black and 1 was mixed with the remainder (67%) being other or not specified (n=116). 26 participants were aged under 11 (15%), 68 were aged 11 – 14 (40%) and 24 were aged 15 - 17 (14%). The age of 54 participants was not known. It was not known whether any participants had SEND/learning disabilities or physical disabilities.

### 3.3.4 Project Delivery

The six NNVRP funded sports sessions provided a range of football, boxing or multi-sport activities including dodgeball, basketball, archery and tennis. As an example, the Sutton Lawn session provided an all-year round football playing session on the floodlit astro-turf pitch on a Monday evening. This consisted of a one-hour playing session for the younger age group (8-13 years) which was supervised by two Nottingham Forest sport coaches and then at the same time a separate one-hour football playing session for the older age group on the adjacent pitch run by the Support Through Sport community sport coaches. A one-off series of workshops had been held earlier in the year for the older age group in a nearby centre:

*'So, at Sutton lawn, we had a series of workshops around like hate crime, knife crime. Anti-social behaviour, drugs and alcohol and we did a session on vaping as well. So, there were there were five different workshops delivered to the older cohort. That's the role of the progressions team is to do the stuff that's beyond the sport and it's more sort of educational and outcomes based.'* (Project staff)

The project staff reported that there were opportunities for young people at the sessions to receive additional support through mentoring.

### 3.3.5 Delivery Approach

The project management team was committed to using sport to prevent youth offending. The sessions were in a number of deprived areas of Nottinghamshire which were characterised as lacking services and infrastructure, households living in poverty and incidents of knife crime, gang violence, anti-social behaviour and youth offending.

*'There's not a lot of money around here. So, to go in there [the local leisure centre], you'd have to have a subscription or something, it's quite pricey.'* (Participant)

*'If I'm being honest, it's not great, it's like, there's a lot of drug related stuff going on and all that and quite recently over the past like two years been quite a few stabbings around here and genuinely, I feel like a reason for that is there's nothing to do.'* (Participant)

Young people were recruited to the sports sessions through outreach work and through working with schools and youth centres. As three out of the six sessions were based at young people's centres managed by Nottinghamshire County Council's youth service, the project staff were able to work with the young people already attending the youth centre. The project staff reported that a formal referral system was in place for young people being referred to the project's targeted mentoring programme.

Young people attending the sports sessions lived locally and were aged between 8 and 18 years old. It was reported that some of the older young people struggled at school and had behavioural and well-being issues including emotional regulation. The older cohort of young people interviewed were aware of the risks of getting involved in crime in their local areas.



*'And when there's nothing to do, then we get involved in things, which is what I was getting involved in. To be honest, I was going down that a bad path getting involved in things that I shouldn't.'* (Participant)

Evaluation visits were made to three different sessions. At one visit, participants confirmed that there were very few activities locally. They enjoyed the session that they attended (Sutton Lawn) as they loved playing football, they valued being able to use the Astro-turf pitch, meeting up with their friends and that this was their motivation for attending. This sport playing session demonstrated the value of an effective sports diversion activity for local young people.

The sports session held at the Sutton Young People's Centre was also visited. This session was designed to use sport to work with the young people attending the youth work sessions, facilitating the recruitment of young people. Some informal sports activities took place including pool and table tennis as well as boxing, the latter specifically with two young people visiting the session to take part in the evaluation interviews. Although young people at the session were familiar with the Community Sport Manager and the Chief Executive, most young people remained involved in the youth activities demonstrating the challenges around engaging young people through sport in this setting.

It had been planned to visit a session at the Quarrydale Young People's centre, however, the facility had been forced to temporarily close in January 2024. However, the evaluation interviews confirmed that this session had been very popular and included both indoors activities such as boxing and outdoor activities such as football and basketball. The session had been run by the Chief Executive and a sports community sport coach who were both described by young people as inspirational, caring, kind and very good boxing coaches. Their expertise in engaging and supporting individual young people is reflected in the outcomes identified later in this case study.

Project staff reported that they had recently developed a progressions mentor role to provide the 'plus' element at the six sports sessions. It also had a formal targeted mentoring programme in place for the City and Nottinghamshire based on Support Through Sport's Adversity to Achievement framework.

*'If we have any young people that need that extra bit of support we offer targeted youth mentoring. So that's the very high risk young people we work with that and do need that positive role model'* (Project staff)

Partnerships were important for the provision of facilities for all six sessions. In some cases, this had helped to facilitate the recruitment of young people as well as helping to reduce the project costs as the facilities were provided free of charge. This did, however, leave the project vulnerable to changes in partners' own circumstances. Examples of this was the unplanned closure of Quarrydale Young people's Centre in January 2024 as a result of firstly, staff illness and then secondly, essential building maintenance. The impact of the cost of living crisis on the running costs of Ashfield school of Boxing had meant that the club was no longer able to provide the boxing facilities free of charge.

The project continued to deliver its sports provision taking place at Sutton Lawn, Sutton Academy, Sutton Young people's centre and Stapleford Young People's centre and the project staff hoped that the Quarrydale session would be able to restart in the future.

Support Through Sport had two teams of community sport coaches to run their programmes across Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire who were managed by the part-time post of the Community Sport Manager. The project aimed to use a framework of two community sport coaches and a progressions mentor at each of the six sports sessions. The role of the Community Sport Manager included managing the staffing rotas, covering sessions when necessary themselves, running team meetings and being responsible for ensuring high standards at the sessions.

*'My role is...going around to each session and observing and seeing what's going on, where, what needs improvement, working with partners, if there's anything they want us to be doing more so like the sport plus side. If partners want us to do more of that, we start to implement more of that....I helped to raise standards within the team as well. So, I do a lot with the community sport coaches themselves.'* (Project staff)

Some of the community sport coaches were local, some had lived experience whereas some community sport coaches had been recruited from universities and colleges or through social media such as LinkedIn. Two members of staff had followed the pathway from being participants:

*'A key success would be two of our members of staff, now one of them is now being paid that he started off as a participant, came through our programme, started volunteering and he's now a paid member of staff, continuing to work with us. He also runs the Youth Advisory Board that we have in place.'* (Project staff)

The staff all received regular training in areas such as managing behaviour, safeguarding and organisational procedures. Staff recruitment was identified as a challenge as it was recognised that finding staff with both sport and youthwork skills was difficult. To ensure that newly recruited community sport coaches had the right skills, they usually required them to volunteer for a set number of hours in advance. Retaining staff was also challenging. Although the project tried to provide community sport coaches with the hours that they wanted, it was not always possible to match their availability with the sessions that needed to be staffed. As the community sport coaches were on zero hours contracts, the project made sure that every community sport coach had a minimum number of hours per week.

### 3.3.6 Project Outcomes

The monitoring and evaluation data provides the following data which is referenced to an Annual Impact report for organisation the period December 2022 to December 2023.

- 100% of participants who report an improvement in mental & physical well being
- 93.2% of participants who sustain improved relationships, family life and established support network.
- 94% of participants who sustain positive behaviour change and will receive support that reduces their likelihood of involvement in crime
- 67.9% Outcome 4 % of participants who sustain positive engagement with education/work. (Vocational qualifications, peer support etc)

It is not clear to what extent these figures are indicative of this project specifically as this includes work carried out across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire for other funders.

### **Improved mental & physical well-being**

Support Through Sport engaged high numbers of young people at some of its sports sessions from both younger and older cohorts, for example at Sutton Lawn, helping to contribute to high levels of engagement in physical activity.

Project staff reported that they had seen improved mental well-being for some young people at the Stapleford session in terms of emotional regulation and that more positive behaviours were now evident including fewer outbursts of swearing during sessions. One young person was described as initially having had anger outbursts, lacking in confidence and was unwilling to engage. However, over time, this young person's behaviours and attitudes had started to improve, there was less swearing, they were starting to develop as a positive role model to other young people and the project staff were talking to them about job applications, apprenticeships and college and the potential to volunteer in the future if they continued to progress. Two of the young people from the Quarrydale session confirmed that attending the sessions had provided a release from everyday stress and had improved their confidence.

### **Improved relationships**

At the Quarrydale session, the staff had been working with two young people at risk of school exclusion and involved in anti-social behaviour and reported that they were now doing well and considering volunteering with Support Through Sport. These two young people reported that they had been working with a member of staff who was now no longer involved in frontline delivery at the project in Nottinghamshire due to a promotion and relocation but who they described as helping them to see beyond their behaviour at the time to possibilities in the future including taking up amateur boxing more seriously. They both agreed that taking part in the Quarrydale sessions had helped them to develop and strengthen friendships.

### **Education/employment**

At the Quarrydale session, two young people reported that it had provided them with positive role models and helped them to develop aspirations.

*'I feel like boxing is a really good thing to have. More confidence. Yeah. If you can look after yourself, you're gonna have more confidence. You're not going to be as anxious when you go out and stuff like that. So, I think it's a massive thing to do, get into involved with.'* (Participant)

They had progressed in boxing and were intending to compete for their local boxing club but were also focused on doing well with their GCSEs and going to college to pursue a vocational trade.

*'I want a trade behind me just in case [he doesn't become a professional boxer]. I've applied for an electrical course at West Nottingham College.'* (Participant)

### **Reduction in offending risk**

The evaluation identified two young people who agreed that taking part in the Quarrydale sessions that had been running earlier in the year had helped them to avoid getting into trouble. The session that they had attended had acted as a form of prevention and for one

young person, as a form of early intervention, as it provided them with positive activities, positive role models, a relationship with a trusted adult and a safe place to go to which was important as there was little to do in the area where they lived and they felt that it was easy to get into trouble.

### 3.3.7 Project Challenges

The complexity of delivering six sessions in different locations with different cohorts of vulnerable young people as part of a larger programme was not straightforward. This required a continuous focus on operational management including staffing, resources and safeguarding at all sessions even when unexpected situations arose. As an example, there had been a disagreement between a small group of young people at the Stapleford session in Autumn 2023 which had resulted in a serious incident taking place outside the session. Although the project staff followed their safeguarding procedures and agreed a plan to support the session, the numbers of participants had reduced and was only increasing slowly as some were meeting up in the local park instead. This was recognised by the project staff as demonstrated below:

*'We're working in some of the worst affected areas in terms of crime and deprivation, and we are going to see some of those challenges come through and present in our sessions and young people.... I think we've got to sort of be able to adapt to certain situations. So, you know, Stapleford, for example, that's had a bit of a safeguarding issue and we've had sort of conflict between young people. So then addressing some of that conflict has been really important to sort of gradually pick up the numbers and pick up the engagement again. So, I guess it's about, you know, focusing on the problem and then looking at how we can solve that problem and working with partners to make sure it's a sort of holistic approach. I mean, we've had similar in Mansfield as well where we've had issues between young people and what you find it's just like, it's conflict that then has an impact on everyone else within that. So yeah, there's been lots of work around, I guess, sort of resolving some of those problems.'* (Project staff)

This level of complexity had also made it challenging to introduce the 'plus' element' into the sports activities at all six sessions. Although the role of progressions mentor was in place to provide the 'plus' elements, the effects of this were not visible as an 'add-on' to the six sports sessions. The role of the progressions mentor's role was to engage young people at the six sports sessions which usually ran for an hour each week, but this was challenging as it required additional time and resource to get to know individual young people, to build the relationship effectively and to start to offer support.

*'I would say ... there's never enough time ... Obviously for the hour they have a safe space to talk, whereas if at home they may not have that chance. But an hour is not ideal I would say because obviously you don't get the interaction with the young person. There's about 100 plus young people. So it's... getting round to all the young people....speak to them. Sometimes you don't get the same responses every single time and it could change from week to week as well as it could take months for them to open up to you so. In that aspect, I would say an hour sometimes is enough, sometimes it isn't. All depends on the young people, I guess.'* (Project staff).

Matching the level of NNVRP funding with the resource required to run the six sessions was also challenging as although it funded sessions, there was little additional funding to cover increased costs such as travel to sessions or to pay for replacement facilities for running sessions such as the Ashfield School of Boxing or Quarrydale session. Having additional resources to provide variety to the sessions such as trips would have been beneficial as one young person involved in the Sutton Lawn sessions, described how much they had enjoyed being involved in the Notts Forest competition day playing against similar teams from other major clubs in the Region.

Long term sustainability of the programme was a key concern as they wanted to engage young people and develop the trusted adult relationship on a long-term basis. It was recognised that this was difficult to achieve if sessions were not in place on a long-term basis to provide continuity and consistency.

*'And then just looking at ways where we might be able to sustain some of those programmes, obviously a lot of our work is based on those relationships with young people, so. It's about, you know, maintaining those relationships and continuing that engagement... I do think it'll be a constant challenge... But yeah, I think even from a commissioning perspective like a lot of funders and commissioners are like, overcommitted, like they've got so many different requests, they're oversubscribed. So yeah, it's even challenging for them at times, I guess.'* (Project staff)

The need to present evidence about the impact of the programme on reducing youth crime was also required to make the case for long term funding. Although Support Through Sport had recently invested in a robust M&E system (Upshot), it had not been possible to obtain local policing recorded data about the communities where the sessions ran to provide evidence for positive change.

The interviews with young people indicated that the model which had originally been in place at the Quarrydale sports session had been effective as this had relied on two members of staff, namely the chief executive and an experienced community sport coach (the latter was now no longer involved in frontline delivery at the project in Nottinghamshire due to promotion and relocation), as inspirational role models with both community sport coaching and youth work skills working with young people every week through sport and informal conversations and support. However, workforce recruitment challenges meant that it was very difficult to replicate this and appoint staff with that combination of competencies. This had resulted in the core workforce running the sports activities having mainly a community sport coaching profile which was appropriate for running sports diversion programmes.

The cost-of-living crisis had also affected the workforce and although they had given pay rises to the staff, they needed to balance this with programme delivery in the context of limited resources. The staff were committed to working with young people and making a difference but it was recognised that everyone was 'feeling stretched'. Support Through Sport was intending to put a Development Pathway into place including access to community sport coaching and youthwork qualifications, training and work experience as a means to recruit and retain staff in the future.

### 3.3.8 Project strengths

The project was located in a number of very deprived communities in Nottinghamshire which otherwise had few positive opportunities for young people, and it used sport to attract young people to its programmes. Support Through Sport as an organisation was led by a Chief Executive who was passionate, inspiring and had a clear vision for the sessions. This passion was shared by staff who were committed to their work with examples of where individuals had gone beyond their roles and had been inspirational for the young people that they worked with. Working in partnership helped to recruit young people and to provide facilities free of charge so that resources could be used to provide a greater number of sessions in different areas.

*'I think our partnerships in terms of the project have been really key. So, you know, without some of those partnerships in terms of venues being sort of like given to us in kind, in terms of capacity and people it's provided extra staff, I think that's been really, really positive. And I think if we weren't to have that, you know, the cost to deliver some of those programmes would be tripled.'* (Project staff)

As the NNVRP funding covered a three-year period, the project staff reported that it had allowed them to develop a framework to support the 'plus' element of their sports activities which, they considered, had a strong theoretical underpinning.

*'I think we've managed to get into a really good place in terms of the model of how we're delivering and also the theory of change. So, I think that that's been a real benefit and I think we wouldn't have got there without the experiences across the sessions out in the county definitely. So yeah, so I think it's the funding, it's probably allowed us a bit of time to focus on doing some of that work as well because creating the methodologies and doing all the thinking behind it takes so much time and so much effort.'* (Project staff)

### 3.3.9 Project overview


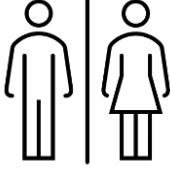

As shown in Table 4 below, the Support Through Sport sports sessions were geographically targeted in areas of deprivation and crime 'hot spot' areas, providing positive, regular sports activities to local young people as a form of diversion operating at a primary level, 'Sport' intervention. The project also offered opportunities for some targeted young people to have additional support through the progressions mentors.

Table 4: Overview of Support Through Sport

Public health approach		Type of sport intervention	Description	Support Through Sport
<b>Primary level</b>	Universal level, open to all young people with the aim of preventing offending.	<b>Sport</b>	Focus on playing sport, open access recruitment of young people, community sport community sport coaches might have ad hoc, informal conversations with young people, some opportunities for young people to help out/ volunteer at the sessions.	Six regular weekly sports playing sessions, opportunities to help out and informal conversations. Geographically targeted programme based in deprived areas for addressing hot spots and acting as diversion. 
<b>Secondary level</b>	Targeted approach for young people experiencing multiple vulnerabilities and/or are engaging in behaviours associated with offending or who are at risk of offending.	<b>SportPlus</b>	Focus on purposefully designed Sports activities Plus other activities to support young people including volunteering, mentoring, advice, workshops, training/ qualifications etc.	Opportunity for targeted young people to have formal support from progressions mentors and to access additional support including workshops.
<b>Tertiary level</b>	Targeted approach, usually focused on young people who have already offended and have multiple vulnerabilities.	<b>PlusSport</b>	Focus on providing support for the young person first including 121 mentoring, holistic/ family support, workshops etc with sport used as a hook/reward/engagement tool.	

### 3.4 Case Study 4: Trent Bridge

### 3.4.1 Data Collection

		
Session Observations (n= 2)	Adult Interviews (n= 4) Young People Interviews (n= 4)	Young People Surveys (n=3)

In addition to the primary data bid documents, Monitoring and Evaluation data and case studies provided by the project were also utilised within the evaluation.

### 3.4.2 Project Summary

The project built on the existing work of Trent Bridge Community Trust (TBCT) and aimed to provide a package of school-based behavioural workshops, one to one mentoring and regular sporting opportunities to young people aged 10-18 living in Area 3 of Nottingham and, in particular Aspley, Bilborough and Leen Valley, at risk of involvement with gangs, crime or being socially excluded. This was an early intervention model to prevent involvement in crime underpinned by a youthwork approach. The project was delivered by a project officer, a sports coach and supported by a project manager. As a result of workforce retention issues, three project officers had been in post.

The intended outcomes for the project for participants were:

- Improved mental and physical well-being
- Sustained improved relationships, family life and established support network.
- Sustained positive behaviour change and will receive support that reduces their likelihood of being sent or returning to prison
- Number of participants who sustain positive engagement with education/work.

### 3.4.3 Participant demographics

25 young people were engaged in the project during 23/24 and of these 23 (92%) were male. The ethnicity of the participants was 12% black (n=3), 0.04% Asian (n=1), 56% (n=14) white, 28% (n=7) mixed. 14 of the participants were aged 11 – 14 (56%) and 11 were aged 15 - 17 (44%). 5 participants were known to have SEND/learning disabilities.

Whilst 25 new young people had been engaged during the year 23/24 the project had been engaging with a total of 50 young people at the end of the year.



### 3.4.4 Project Delivery

The ethos of the project was rooted in a youthwork approach embedded into the use of sport. The project manager and project workers were experienced youth workers, at least two of them had a JNC qualification in youth work. This meant that they were able to underpin the project design, management and delivery with a theoretical youthwork framework. This resulted in a strong focus on supporting and meeting the needs of young people and was reflected in their use of sport as a tool.

*'I think unless you have that that youth work approach at heart, you probably won't achieve the results you want to achieve. Sports will bring people in, but I think you need additional skills to kind of keep the relationship.'* (Project staff)

*'So, I kind of like to employ the values of youth work, of empowering young people, helping them find their voice.'* (Project staff)

Young people were recruited in different ways depending on the individual aspect of the project. The schools referred the young people directly to the project for the school-based behaviour workshops and for the sports leadership course. This was usually done by individual teachers or the Head of Behaviour in a school. The project agreed the criteria for the referrals with the schools in advance to make sure that they were working with the right young people, which was being on the cusp of getting involved in crime or being excluded. The young people were keen to be involved as it was seen as a privilege, supported by the positive brand of TBCT. The recruitment of young people for the one-to-one mentoring programme was based on referrals from the school-based behaviour workshops by either the teaching staff or the project officer as well as based on formal referrals from agencies, supported by data sharing so that they could provide the appropriate level of support. However, as observed by project staff, this was not always straightforward as sometimes young people were already working with multiple agencies and the appropriate level of data-sharing was not always in place:

*'Quite often, you know, you've got information on a referral form, information from a young person and they quite often don't match.'* (Project staff)

The recruitment of young people to the sports activity sessions at Harvey Haddon Sports Centre was based on a combined approach; promotion of the sessions by a project volunteer who was a Year 11 student at the school, encouragement by the project officer whilst informally meeting young people at school, signposting from the behaviour workshops, sports leadership course and the mentoring programmes and finally through outreach work at the session itself with young people hanging around Harvey Haddon Sports Centre.

*'In Year 11, in my school, [Name of volunteer] - and I think that he worked for like the project told us about it... Because [Name of volunteer] obviously told us about it. So we thought, let's play football. OK. Like me and my mate. We like to play football. So yeah, we came down here.'* (Participant)

The majority of the young people attending the project lived in the local area or came from other similar nearby areas. They were all aware of similar problems in their own communities that they needed to stay away from. This included crime, gangs, violence, drug dealing and bad influences.

*'There's a lot of drug dealers. A lot of violence and gangs, stuff like that. Easy to be part of getting involved in that when it's around you.'* (Participant)

This was confirmed by the project staff who stated that there were high crime rates in the areas as well as a high level of unreported crimes as a result of the lack of trust in the police by the community. They reflected that it was a poor area, with households living in poverty, young people hanging around the shops as there were few opportunities available and where drug running could be seen as a source of income.

*'I used to work in the area three years ago as a youth worker, so I know it's a challenging area with lots of deprivation and lots of statistics that show that it needs lots of support.'* (Project staff)

The young people involved in the project were either presenting with behavioural issues at school, at risk of or had already been excluded and who were on the cusp of getting involved in crime, including having siblings involved in crime. Many of the young people involved in the school-based behaviour workshops had ADHD or dyslexia and were struggling at school. This met the aims of the project which was to intervene at an early stage and prevent young people's involvement in serious youth violence.

#### 3.4.5 Delivery Approach

The school-based activity involved behaviour workshops structured around a six-week programme during term-time that aimed to support the referred young people to return to the classroom and to have a more positive learning experience. At the first session, the project officer and the young people got to know each other and then engaged with different topics such as respect using a bespoke worksheet to prompt self-reflection and discussion. The workshops included a SWOT analysis to help young people to recognise their own strengths and to set goals so that they could consider how to overcome their struggles at school, for example.

*'What it's ultimately about is kind of helping the young people realise for themselves, actually, they've got a lot more going for themselves than they give themselves credit for. And we know school can be kind of a sort of place for some young people where they can struggle.'* (Project staff)

The project officer kept a weekly record of each young person's progress to provide feedback to the school and to identify if the young person would benefit from additional support including one-to-one mentoring. The one-to-one mentoring programme was based on developing a longer-term relationship with the young person. It was underpinned using Maslow's hierarchy of needs, taking a more holistic approach to the work and then using goal setting with regular reviews.

The (second in post) project officer had run a sports coaching and officiating leadership course in one of the secondary schools with Year 10 students who would benefit from a positive experience but who were not gifted at playing sport. They received an ASDAN qualification certificate and put their new skills into practice by helping to run an afterschool football team for the younger age group at school. This project officer described how one young person had progressed and had been helping them in the summer holidays.

*'In fact, some of them, one in particular, has worked with me over this summer holiday, and he's been amazing. So yeah, we took him on like as a young leader and he's really shined, so hopefully he might want to do something like this when he leaves school himself, but he's really enjoyed it.'* (Project staff)

The (third in post) project officer confirmed that the same young person was still involved and supporting the sports sessions at Harvey Haddon. The sports activity at the Harvey Haddon Sports Centre took place at the Astro Kings football facility and focused mainly on playing football. This session played a pivotal role as it was the exit route for the project's other delivery programmes and enabled young people to benefit from participation in physical activity, to continue to engage with the project officer and to have a consistent longer term trusted adult relationship which supported the wider project's outcomes.

Over the project period, the sports session had changed from taking place on a Friday evening during term-time to Friday afternoon during the 2023 summer holidays as part of the HAF programme. This, along with the decision to use an indoor facility during the summer holidays, had changed the profile of the young people attending during this period as it tended to attract younger players with a significant drop-off in the older young people although the project officer did keep in contact with the older young people and provided them with the opportunity to get involved in a holiday football tournament.

As the (second in post) project officer had left the project in early September 2023, there was a hiatus in activity whilst a replacement project officer was recruited. The first session visit in September 2023 took place when the football session was restarting on Wednesdays after school and although there were low numbers, the coaches were trying to recruit an older cohort of young people hanging around the centre. At the second follow-up session visit in January 2024, when the (third in post) project officer had been in place for a few weeks, there was evidence of good attendance by a core group of young people, some of whom had been attending the school-based mentoring workshops. The project officer was already establishing a trusted relationship with the young people. This was complemented by using a youthwork approach to delivering the football sessions.

*'It's more about engaging when you are running those sessions, not just kind of standing about with your hands in your pockets, more about trying to get involved. And I think it's all about kind of building that sort of relationship with them over time. So, kind of keep them coming back. And having the professional side and not being their friend, but also they can see you as someone that they can learn from or someone that can help them in in different ways in developing themselves.'* (Project staff)

This youthwork approach included the use of humour and positive banter, embedding playing skills and tactics into the session and having informal conversations about school, lifestyle and aspirations which still making sure that it was a fun football session.

*'So, at the start [of the football session], like we'll be chatting about stuff and they'll talk to us like, oh, we did this at school and you'll say what, like, you can obviously sometimes challenge that. I wouldn't say it's to the point of doing a workshop but it's where you're encouraging all the other healthy activity and the healthy lifestyle type stuff.'* (Project staff)

*'Yeah, like when we're playing like [Name of project officer] is normally in goal, like he tells me to do stuff, so, I move around, and get the ball and shoot. So, like it, it helps me like progress. To be on the pitch. So, like, little hints. Yeah. Tips. Yeah. But it's not like proper coaching.'* (Young Person)

*'[The project officer] makes it feel very interactive and makes sure that everyone's involved....like people who are more nervous.... They make sure that they encourage them to play. He gives everyone a good mindset. So, when we all get here, we'll say hello and have a little conversation with them and then everyone will just start doing what they want with the balls and then we'll just play a match for the rest of the session. Yeah, quite a lot of fun. We've got an injured person right now, so well, we have banter about the way that he runs.....'You scored a goal and then you started running!', so it was quite funny how he's running....The banter, they'll make sure that it doesn't go to the extent of where people are uncomfortable with the situation, make sure that everyone still enjoying themselves.'* (Participant)

The project officer also provided the older players, some of whom had returned to this session, with opportunities to step up and help out by helping to get the younger players involved and choosing teams as a first step towards taking responsibility and leadership.

The young people attending the sessions had also been able to take advantage of the additional activities outside the NNVRP funded project offered by Trent Bridge Community Trust over the school holidays. This had included additional holiday activities such as a food van, a trip to the ski slope at Swadlincote and an overnight residential trip to a local outdoor adventure centre for the older young people. These additional activities had helped to develop the trusted adult relationship between the young people and the project staff as well as providing the young people with new, exciting and challenging opportunities which took them out of their comfort zone.

*'It's challenging, you've got young people who are probably not the easiest to manage, but you know, I genuinely believe it's where you form your best relationships. You take young people out of their own environment you give them responsibilities. You put a bit of trust in them. You know, you get them to help plan some of the activities. You know, you put them in testing environments. And I think sometimes you can get the best and you know, I always feel coming away from a residential, although you're really tired, you get to know our young people better and they get to know you. They see you*

*differently. They see you as not just someone who comes in and mentors in school. But I think it's vital for our work.'* (Project staff)

### 3.4.6 Project Outcomes

The monitoring and evaluation data indicated that:

- 76% of participants reported an improvement in mental & physical wellbeing (Rickter Scale Tool)
- 100% of participants who sustained relationships, family life and established support network
- 47% participants who sustain positive behaviour change
- 100% being supported in ways that set out to reduce the likelihood of school exclusion and being involved in crime
- 66.6% of participants who are sustaining positive engagement with their education.

At the end of March 2024 there were 50 participants currently engaged with the project. Of these 8 were being mentored, 12 were engaged in Group Work and 30 were attending sports sessions.

The project was able to demonstrate success at achieving its outputs even though this was often challenging considering the workforce turnover over the project period. The use of referrals for the recruitment of young people for the school-based behaviour workshops, coaching and officiating course and the one-to-one mentoring meant that the project worked with the intended cohort of young people to achieve its outputs and helped young people to start to achieve positive changes as outcomes. Moreover, the combined use of exit routes from the workshops, course and mentoring programmes into the Harvey Haddon sports session as an additional opportunity meant that the project officer was able to continue to support the young people and use the sports sessions to build on their prior learning and continue to support the young people's positive changes and outcomes.

Examples of the positive changes and outcomes are as follows:

#### **Improved physical and mental well-being:**

Young people attending the sports sessions were more physically active on a regular basis. They also improved their playing skills which helped to motivate them to attend regularly as well as providing fun and enjoyment. This also helped to improve their mental health by reducing stress:

*'When I have a lot going on, I can play football and that's what I focus on'* (Participant)

*'Makes me feel, like, awesome.'* (Participant)

*'It helps your mental health as well because it's keeping all the kids from being destructive and keeping your mind healthy instead of just all bad things.'* (Participant)

Young people attending the school-based behaviour workshops and sports sessions developed healthier routines for sleeping, eating and managed to reduce their smoking.

*'I was sitting at home playing on my PS3 and so I thought, well, come down and give it a try and then yeah. It's fun, so yeah, it benefits me, it just stops me slouching around and then I'll come here and actually do something good.'* (Participant)

This also included improved emotional regulation as they were able to deal better with emotions including anger:

*'Like, I can express myself like, see if I got any anger, I could take it out on the ball, they obviously helps me take that anger out on the ball.'* (Participant)

Some young people demonstrated that they had improved critical reflection skills by building on the skills developed through the school-based behaviour workshops whilst at the sports sessions:

*'Yeah, it makes me feel awesome [playing football], like I think about people at school. I say sorry to people who like I've been wrong to.'* (Participant)

### **Improved relationships**

Young people developed new friendships including with young people from different schools and strengthened existing friendships. This helped to make them feel less isolated. Young people had also developed a trusted adult relationship with the project officer which meant that they were able to talk to them, express their feelings, tell them what was going on and ask for help.

Some young people felt that it had changed how their family members saw them as there was a sense of achievement and pride from other adults:

*'Yeah, they're [mum and dad] been really proud of it. Yeah. Yeah. They've been really proud of me. They see it changing me as well now. Yeah.'* (Participant)

### **Education and employment**

Young people confirmed that they were benefiting from Improved learning at school with fewer behaviour points and detentions after attending the school-based behaviour workshops and the sports sessions at Harvey Haddon. This included improved behaviour in the classroom, being more focused in class and improved learning:

*'Before [the project officer] came, I was really naughty. I was like, getting a lot of red flags. That means like detentions. But now I'm only getting like one per week if, like, yeah. So I'm, it's getting really better. So, I feel like when [the project officer] talks to me, it gets me like unstressed and it makes me feel way much better.'* (Participant)

*'Yes, it keeps us out of trouble, like in school'* (Participant).

*'When I [the project officer] first came in, he was giggly, excitable, distracted. And he's kind of reigned in some of his more silly behaviour now because he started to learn actually.'* (Project staff)

Seven out of ten young people completed the ASDAN award, received certificates and gained practical experience of running sports sessions and one had become a regular volunteer at the session. The older young people at the sports sessions also gained experience and a sense of responsibility by helping out at the session through including the younger participants in the game, keeping score and selecting teams.

Young people had developed aspirations for future employment plans both within and outside sport. They were considering apprenticeships, going to college and sport as a career including being a footballer, boxer or sports coach:

*'[The project officer] is going to try and help me get like an apprenticeship because they know a few people in the subject that I want to be doing. When I leave [school], so [the project officer] is helping, going to help me try and find an apprenticeship. I want to be a brickie...Try to help me get that job. I'd like to be in a comfortable position, money wise. Yeah, and I'd hopefully like to be at the point where I can make my own business, I'd like to have my own bricklaying business and hopefully become successful.'* (Participant)

*'Two quite different things, mind you. Electrician, you get paid loads of loads of money, and then my dad says if you've got, you've got loads of power on your hands so you can do, you know, boxing.'* (Participant)

*'And you know, we've got young people, some gems still working in the area, they want to volunteer and they want to kind of, you know, support our delivery as well. So, you know it's given us a question, can we raise some funding to put them on as casual coaches.'* (Project staff)

### **Reduction in offending risk**

Young people confirmed that as well as doing better at school with a reduced risk of exclusion, attending the sports sessions, the school-based behaviour workshops and the trusted adult relationship with the project staff were helping to keep them out of trouble:

*'There's a lot of drug dealers, a lot of violence and gangs, stuff like that, easy to be part of getting involved in that when it's around you. You have to keep yourself in that mindset of, they try to push me into it, but you know what you should be doing and what it should be.... [the project officer] used to talk to me, making sure that I'm keeping a good mindset because I've got my GCSEs and [the project officer] don't want me getting involved in anything like that.'* (Participant)

### **3.4.7 Project Challenges**

The most significant challenge for this project was the turnover of project officers which resulted in three postholders over a relatively short period of time. The first project officer was described as building the foundations, whilst the second project officer got the project running and the third project officer was building on this foundation to take the project forward. The second project officer indicated that, despite enjoying the role, they had secured

a similar role in another local organisation for an increase in salary which was significant in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.

The priority for the recruitment of a project officer was to ensure that they shared the same ethos for the project based on a youth work approach. This was often challenging as job adverts for Trent Bridge Community Trust often attracted sports enthusiasts who they needed to filter to make sure that they had the right aptitude for and experience of working with young people in this context. Retaining staff on the available level of pay was challenging given the experience and expertise required as well as the lower pay rates compared to similar roles in other major sports clubs and the private sector. The project manager had a strong commitment to investment in their staff and addressed this by offering opportunities for training, personal development, flexibility and autonomy. This included supporting their current postholder to undertake a youthwork qualification. Funder expectations and lack of recognition for the role were also challenges.

*'I'm very experienced and been doing this work for a long, long time. But you know if I go to a 'child in need' meeting, quite often I've got probably one of the best relationships with the young person and I work with the different partners, but I can sit in a meeting, but because I'm in sports clothes, people can often not take you that seriously and just think you're a coach...it's a very professional praxis, what we do, but it's not always taken seriously and because we're not a statutory organisation, there's so many different misconceptions around us.'* (Project staff)

The consequences of this workforce turnover had resulted in small gaps in the project delivery during the recruitment phase (although the Harvey Haddon sports session did continue during this gap). Delays resulted from the timescales for the DBS check and an induction period. By the second evaluation visit to the project in January 2024, numbers of participants had increased and some of the older participants had returned. This was due in part to the additional effort and time from the third project officer to recruit new participants and to build the trusted relationships.

Retaining young people was also challenging. When the previous project officer left to work for another organisation in the area providing similar opportunities, some of the young people had followed them to their sessions, demonstrating the strength of the previous project officer's trusted relationship with participants. The changes in the delivery days and times for the Harvey Haddon sport session had also been challenging. Initially the session was on a Friday evening which attracted the older cohort of young people but this had moved indoors to an earlier time on a Friday afternoon as part of the HAF summer programme resulting in the older cohort no longer attending the sessions during the summer.

Another challenge experienced by the project was the lack of co-ordinated services and partnership working in the local area which meant that a young person could be supported by several projects at the same time.

*'One of the young people that was going to be referred, did already have a social worker working with him and did also have three different mentors from three different organisations working with him, which was an interesting approach....And obviously*



*there's three different mentors from three different organisations, so they're not all going with the same approach, so he must be quite conflicted because one's got one approach and another's probably got a different approach.' (Project staff)*

It was suggested by interviewees that if organisations worked more closely together then they could share resources and avoid competing with each which was seen as a potential threat in the near future with the proposed local authority cuts in spending.

The lack of a youth centre with indoor and outdoor facilities was problematic for the wider engagement of young people which could have resulted in additional benefits for participants. Although the community session at the Harvey Haddon Sports Centre took place on a floodlit 5-a-side area which could be used all year round, it offered no opportunities for an indoor space to support the youth engagement work and to work with similar partners which limited what was achievable:

*'[Indoors] You can do your workshops, your mentoring, your sports activity, participation, your hot food all in one place. So, actually the work, that makes youth workers' and project officers' and organisations' lives easier, but also for the kids. It gives them more options, more availability.'* (Project staff)

The final challenge was the anticipated difficulty in finding funding to continue the project after the three years of NNVRP funding had finished. Although the project manager was hopeful as this project was viewed as being effective, this was not guaranteed in the light of the local authority funding cuts which meant that there was a risk that the project might need to be paused whilst funding was secured.

#### 3.4.8 Project Strengths

The workforce team were a key strength for this project. It consisted of firstly, the management support of the TBCT Project manager to oversee the project, secondly, a Project Officer with responsibility for project delivery and thirdly, local sports coaches to support the Harvey Haddon sport session. Although there had been three different project officers in post since the beginning of the project, their workforce competencies were underpinned by a commitment to the use of sport complemented by youthwork skills demonstrated by the project manager as an experienced, trained youth worker and the current project officer completing their JNC youthwork certificate whilst undertaking this role as part of their placement work. All the project staff were experienced at working with young people and were passionate about using this project to improve young people's lives. They recognised that sport by itself was not sufficient and that staff needed additional skills to build relationships, avoid drop-out, to deal with issues facing young people at school, in the community or at home and to create aspirations. Other characteristics included living in the same communities as the young people themselves and understanding what was happening in their communities.

*'I've been brought up that in that area as well ... Some of these kids get let out in the morning at 8:00 o'clock and they're not let back in until ten or eleven o'clock at night and in that time when there's not really much to do, and that's what you kind of have*

*to be worried about.... And there's always like, like gangs of people that are looking to recruit other people.' (Project staff)*

All the project staff cared about their young people, which often went beyond their professional roles. As an example, the second and third project officers reflected how they would try to protect some of their young people.

*'Where I live, facing a park, they exchange drugs, that's like a drop up point...So, if I see any of my kids or anything like that that I know, I'll make sure I'll go across to the park, have a little walk, say like what you doing?' (Project staff)*

*'I usually stick around after the football for a bit, near the bus and near the park to check that everyone is going home to where they should be ... which is not really my job past 6:30, but I kind of see it as my job to make sure that they've got on the bus, they've walked through the park and they are on their way home rather than hanging about.' (Project staff)*

TBCT provided training and development opportunities to their staff which was welcomed including providing the project officer with the autonomy to individualise their work with young people based on their changing needs.

*'When I came into the job, I was given resources to help me with kind of everything. [Name of project manager] also gives us autonomy and a lot of trust, so to use the skills that we have ....kind of get the best out of young people because ultimately that is what it's all about. It's about the young people.' (Project staff)*

The use of referrals for the recruitment of young people for the school-based behaviour workshops, coaching and officiating course and the one-to-one mentoring meant that the project worked with the intended cohort of young people to achieve its outputs and helped young people to start to achieve positive changes as outcomes.

The strength of the project results from being rooted in an organisation run by staff with a strong youthwork ethos and passion for the young people that they worked with. This ensured that the project was designed and delivered based on a holistic approach to working with young people so that it provided access to more than one intervention with the opportunity for longer term engagement using sport as a positive activity whilst also providing young people with the continuity of the trusted relationship with the project officer and access to additional support such as pathways into training or employment. Although the project faced challenges around workforce retention, the clear delivery model with its focus on the engagement of young people together with the vision of the project manager, enabled newly appointed project officers to restart delivery and continue to build trusted relationships and deliver outcomes.

An additional strength was that the project was part of a larger organisation with a high profile and trusted reputation providing similar opportunities in other geographical areas that the young people were able to benefit from. This included access to holiday activities, trips, food and attending residential trips outside Nottinghamshire. This helped to create a rewarding and


varied offer for the young people supporting retention, whilst also providing opportunities to have new experiences, to challenge themselves and benefit from gaining personal development skills.

Finally, being funded by the Notts VRP was seen as a strength by the project staff as this enabled access to valuable staff training and networking events including conferences and workshops on a regular basis with other local organisations.

#### 3.4.9 Project overview

As shown in Table 5 below, the Trent Bridge Community Trust project adopted a SportPlus approach, working with mainly referred young people but also through an outreach approach. The project offered a range of SportPlus activities which were complementary and provided young people with a package of sports interventions to take part in. Although the regular weekly sports session at the Harvey Haddon Sports Centre was an intervention by itself, it also provided an exit route for young people involved in the school-based behaviour workshops and the one-to-one mentoring and helped to continue their engagement with the project, including opportunities for volunteering and continuing the trusted adult relationship with the project staff.

Table 5: Overview of Trent Bridge Community Trust

Public health approach		Type of sport intervention	Description	Trent Bridge Community Trust
<b>Primary level</b>	Universal level, open to all young people with the aim of preventing offending.	<b>Sport</b>	Focus on playing sport, open access recruitment of young people, coaches might have ad hoc, informal conversations with young people, some opportunities for young people to help out/ volunteer at the sessions.	
<b>Secondary level</b>	Targeted approach for young people experiencing multiple vulnerabilities and/or are engaging in behaviours associated with offending or who are at risk of offending.	<b>SportPlus</b>	Focus on purposefully designed Sports activities Plus other activities to support young people including volunteering, mentoring, advice, workshops, training/ qualifications etc.	<p>Young people referred to school-based behaviour workshops and then signposted to regular sports sessions at Harvey Haddon. School-based sports leadership training with experience and pathway to volunteering at sports sessions at Harvey Haddon.</p> <p>Regular, purposefully designed and run youthwork sports sessions at Harvey Haddon Sports centre targeted at both referred young people and local young people through outreach. Opportunities for helping out and volunteering</p> <p>Young people referred by agencies or from the school-based behaviour workshops to one-to-one mentoring for holistic support</p> 
<b>Tertiary level</b>	Targeted approach, usually focused on young people who have already offended and have multiple vulnerabilities.	<b>PlusSport</b>	Focus on providing support for the young person first including 121 mentoring, holistic/ family support, workshops etc with sport used as a hook/reward/engagement tool.	

## 5. Programme Level Findings – Realist Evaluation

### 5.1 Introduction

The evaluation of the Sport Diversion programme approach was based on ‘realist evaluation’ principles (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) using multi-methods which recognises that the rationale, mechanisms and resources that underpin projects are instrumental in bringing about the stated outcomes. Realist approaches are intended to identify what works, for whom and under what circumstances by considering the relationships between the Context, Mechanisms and Outcomes:

- Context: These are conditions in which the programme takes place which support or prevent mechanisms being used effectively
- Mechanisms: Are the key factors within a programme or intervention that facilitate outcomes being achieved.
- Outcomes: These include both the intended and unintended consequences of programmes/interventions that result from the activation of mechanisms within the context.

It is important to note that within this framework the causes of outcomes are not simple or deterministic (Wong et al. 2012) so the mechanisms do not cause the outcomes but instead they increase the likelihood of the outcomes being achieved within the given context.

Drawing on the data collated through observations, interviews and surveys this evaluation took account of both adult and young people’s views on the relationship between the context and mechanisms and how these contributed to positive changes (outcomes).

### 5.2 Context, Mechanisms and Outcomes

This section outlines the context, mechanisms and outcomes that have been identified as being relevant through the evaluation. Figure 3 below provides a diagrammatic representation of the Context-Mechanism-Outcome configuration for the programme based on the intended outcomes for the projects.

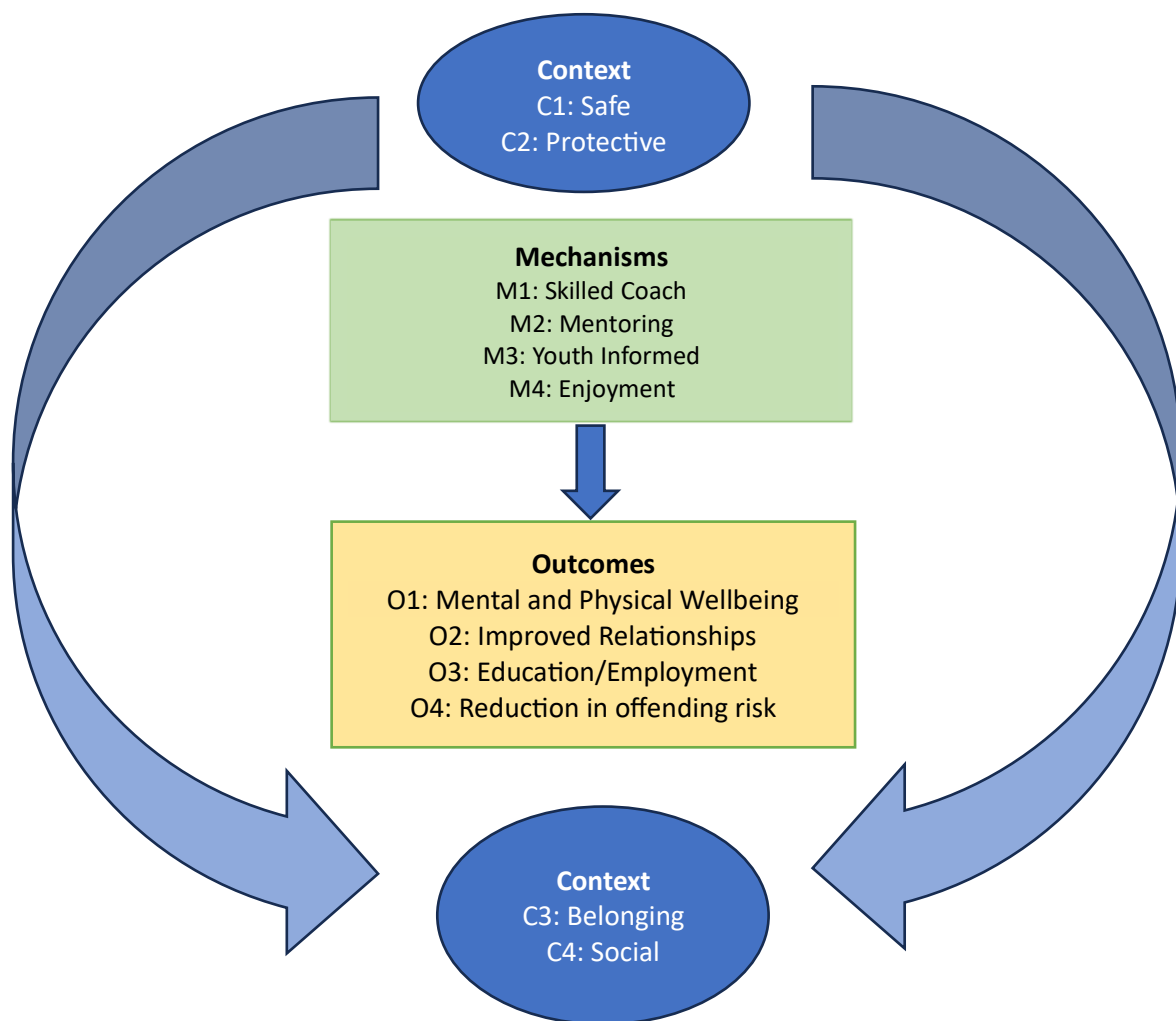


Figure 3: Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configuration for the NNVRP Sports Diversion Programme

### 5.2.1 Context Conditions

The context conditions are the factors which support or inhibit a mechanism being effective. Drawing on the data from project staff and participants five inter-related contextual factors were identified within the evaluation: Place, Safe, Protective, Belonging and Social.

#### **C1: Safe**

Location is a key element of any intervention, and this is particularly the case when the intervention is aimed at young people to ensure they are able to access the venue

independently. Identifying a safe location in an area identified as experiencing high levels of disadvantage and crime which can expose young people to being 'at risk' is an important contextual consideration. Another consideration which underpins effective practice is basing an intervention within a local context that is meaningful to the young person in terms of their experiences and life context (Stephenson et al., 2011).

In this programme three projects used local venues such as a community, youth or sports centre or school. The fourth project (Switch-Up) engaged participants from a wider geographical area who were referred with more challenging and complex needs at their own venue in Nottingham City.

The concept of 'safe' space was identified as being important for the projects. In addition to physical safety the setting needed to be a place where young people could safely be themselves and where they could be expressive within in a non-judgmental environment. The safe space therefore referred to both the location and the atmosphere that participants experienced within the space.

*"So how can we bring them back into sort of in a safe space where we can have some fun and keep them engaged ... where they can sort of express themselves." (Project Staff)*

*"I love the staff because they are so nice and they make me feel really safe around them. And I also like my friends that also make me feel safe around them." (Participant)*

## **C2: Protective**

Whilst being safe is an essential contextual consideration the evaluation data indicated that the interventions were also designed to be protective of participants both within and beyond the sessions. Being involved in the projects was considered to be protective of participants because it helped prevent them from becoming involved in negative behaviours:

*"I think it definitely does cause as the community sessions after school, it keeps them off the streets, it keeps them from getting involved in stuff that they don't need to be getting involved in." (Project Staff)*

Another way of being protective was through providing holistic support for participants who may be experiencing challenges in other aspects of their lives. For some participants school was a very challenging context and therefore staff aimed to create protective context within the project sometimes through providing access to other services or through joined up actions:

*'One of the young people, [they] really, really struggle with education and, you know, [they're] not particularly in the right setting. So at the moment we've not really found that cure because the trigger is school and we keep trying to get [them] back into school. So at the moment, it's how can we support school with [their] behavior? How can we support Mum with [their]behavior?' (Project Staff)*

### **C3: Belonging**

An important aspiration for projects was to create a context where participants felt they were welcome, belonged and were valued. This was considered important for both recruiting and retaining young people which are both necessary conditions for projects to achieve their aims. Young people need to attend for project staff to be able to support young people:

*“It's just a chance for them to come and share whatever's on their chest. Come down, hang, have a hang out. Play sports at the log. It's kind of a get away from all the school and what's going on at home because some of them are quite affordable. So it's just their time to do whatever they want to do. Yeah.”* (Adult, Coach)

*“The session I like how the staff treats us and then they give us food without telling us ... They don't make us pay and then they treat us very well and they make sure that we always OK.”* (Participant)

### **C4: Social**

The final contextual factor identified as being important in facilitating positive outcomes was the opportunity to be social. Engagement in sport was a primary way in which this contextual factor was realised which also provided participants with opportunities to be active and to have fun with their peers. The social element of projects was something highly valued by participants and this was often the main reason why young people initially choose to engage with projects.

*“I decided to do it because I want to do more activities after school and be more involved with people and socialise.”* (Participant)

## **5.2.2. Mechanisms**

Mechanisms are the key factors within a programme that can facilitate and increase the likelihood of outcomes being achieved but they do not guarantee outcomes.

### **M1: Skilled Coach**

Previous research has indicated that the role of the practitioner and their relationship with the young person is central to the success of any youth intervention programme (Weaver, 2011). Within sport-based interventions it has been suggested that a SportsPlus coaching role is preferable to rather a traditional sports coach role because the intended outcomes are not solely sport skills (Coalter, 2007; Nichols, 2007). Within sport-based interventions delivery staff require a high level of skill to facilitate positive sport experiences alongside other developmental experiences.



The evaluation activities demonstrated that delivery staff provide the sports activities and are typically also the primary mechanism for offering holistic support which reflects the needs of the young participants. The importance of responding to the needs of individual participants was also recognised:

*“Not one-size-fits-all, but finding somebody who's got the passion and the will to learn all the different skills and you know all of our mentors have got different backgrounds, some of them, one of them, you know, is worked in mental health and, you know, he's got really personal, you know, reason for wanting to do that, which makes him very sensitive and great with the others. And then we've got others that have been involved in, you know, their own criminal background activities. And so they can come in and say, I've been to prison or have been here and I can relate. And then we've got other staff members that are, you know, into sports and they love it and they realize that through sports you can help people. So our team is very diverse.”* (Project Staff)

The recruitment and retention of staff with the right skills and competencies for working with young people with challenging and complex lives was recognised by interviewees but recruitment and retention of staff has been challenging for some projects.

*“The session I like how the staff treats us and then they give us food without telling us. [...] hey don't make us pay and then they treat us very well and they make sure that we always OK.”* (YP)

## **M2: Mentoring**

The role of mentors has taken on an increasingly important role in many sport-based programmes over the last few years, often providing holistic or personal development support to the young person. However, understanding the role of the mentor can vary significantly between projects (Mason et al., 2020). Mentoring can also result in ‘negative effects’ or ‘no effect’ if elements of a mentoring programme are not put into place and delivered effectively (Blechman et al., 2000).

The four projects varied in the extent to which the mentoring was formalised. As a plus sport project Switch-up provided 1-2-1 sport-based mentoring plus other forms of support and was therefore the project with the most formalised mentoring in place. In other projects informal mentoring was evident within sport sessions and additional support was provided for some participants beyond the sport session.

## **M3: Youth Informed**

The variety of sports offered by the sessions, and the way they match with the desires of young people is a key successful feature of the programs. The aspect of choice is not just about the number of sports (and other games or activities) that are presented to young people, but also what types of sport and with what rationale. Involving young people in decision-making is an important mechanism in generating outcomes.

*“I've learned that you have to listen to the young people. It's not about also what we plan or what we think it's about what we know and we only know from what they tell us. So we just keep our ears open and take on board what the young people are telling us. So we can do and make a change in their life.” (Project staff)*

#### **M4: Enjoyment**

For the projects that prioritise sport in the delivery, young people having an enjoyable experience is a key mechanism through which outcomes can be achieved. Having fun is instrumental in creating the foundation for relationships between staff and participants and in maintaining the engagement of participants. Enjoyment is also important as a mechanism through which staff can deliver outcomes.

*“Yeah, it's, it's entertain my life in a way that it wasn't before. So just give me more time to have fun and find what I like to do, like the different types of sports I would think about doing when I get older, all that kind of stuff.” (Participant)*

#### **3.3.4. Outcomes**

There were four outcomes that were intended for the Sports Diversion Programme.

##### **O1: Improved mental & physical well-being**

Being physically active and engaging in sport was considered by interviewees as an outcome associated with achieving improved mental and physical wellbeing. Motivation to be active was something that some participants struggled with.

*“I was doing basketball, but then I stopped because I didn't have any more motivation until a friend of mine motivated me more to come into this session. [...] I was really searching for something to motivate me because I was I was really lazy and I didn't like to do anything back then. But then my friend kept saying, oh, come on. It's it's good to do more activities even if you don't know any sport.” (YP)*

*“My benefits is that I'm becoming more healthier because I do kind of have like a problem with my heart. It's not severe, but it's just there and. I think it's actually helping a lot since I'm. Like running more and pushing myself a little more so I can do more stuff.” (YP)*

*“Thanks very much. I think yeah, it has made a difference for me because now I feel more motivated to do stuff rather than just sit and not do anything because I know that there's it will help me a lot.” (YP)*

## **O2: Improved relationships**

Supporting the development of improved relationships with family, peers and other adults was identified as an outcome for the programme as this was believed to support participants achieve positive outcomes in other aspects of their lives particularly within school. Supporting participants to develop their relationship skills within the projects was believed to improve their experiences of relating to others beyond the project.

*“There'd been some trouble in the school and the young lads had come to. Speak to us about it. So get off the chest. They have advice.” (Project Staff)*

For the target age range for this programme peers are a significant influence on young people. Being able to attend sessions with friends is an important element of why young people attend the projects. Maintaining existing friendships and forming new ones is again an important medium through which young people learn skills that will protect them from the risks of being involved in crime.

## **O3: Education/employment**

Supporting participants in education or into employment was also an intended outcome for the programme. As noted above supporting participants with their relationships in school was one way in which this aim was achieved. Supporting participants to gain experience which developed transferable skills and achieving other qualifications was another way of supporting positive educational outcomes:

*“In fact, some of them, one in particular, has worked with me over in the half over this summer holidays, and so he he's been amazing. So yeah, we took him on like as a young leader and he's really shining, so hopefully he might want to do something like this when he leaves school himself, but he's really enjoyed it, I mean.” (Project staff)*

## **O4: Reduction in offending risk**

The case studies indicate that the project aimed to achieve a reduction in offending risk through supporting participants to reduce negative behaviours and through promoting positive behaviours. Examples of this included staying out of trouble in school, being engaged in positive activities and contributing to the projects they were part of. Strong levels of engagement, the development of trusted adult relationships and positive values and behaviours which are known to be contributing factors to reducing the risk of youth involvement in crime.

Envisaging a positive future and being aspirational were considered by interviewees to be valuable indicators of reduced offending risk:

*“But be able to help people and help people like my mom and my stepdad and my little sister and my other little brother. [...] I think I should be able to do it if I just stay true to myself. I'm follow what I want to.” (Participant)*

*“In five years’ time, I would like to be someone who can motivate people and tell them that it's good for them to try out stuff like a therapist. Like kind of therapist. Yeah. Being able to tell people that it's OK to try out and nobody. Will judge you.” (Participant)*

*“Look, this is what sports could do for you, you know, if you're really keen to just give it a go. And yeah, it's just such a good vehicle to see the world. The new experiences, cause that's what life's about to me. Like experiencing new experiences and, you know, just trying to meet as many people as you can and sort of learn from each other.” (Project staff)*

## 5. Potential Cost Savings

### Introduction

Despite the number of children involved in being at a historical low, having decreased by 81% since 2010, youth crime nonetheless costs £1.5 billion annually. In addition to the financial costs there are also social and personal costs for those who offend, their families and their communities. Investing in interventions which are effective in preventing offending can therefore result in cost savings.

Undertaking a simple cost-benefit analysis is a process which aims to identify whether the benefits of an investment decision outweigh the costs of that decision. There are four stages within a simple cost benefit analysis which are:

1. **Quantify the costs of the project:** Identify all the costs associated with the project and assign a monetary value to these
2. **Quantify the benefits of the project:** Identify all potential benefits (both tangible and intangible) and assign a monetary value to each benefit.
3. **Total the monetary costs and benefits**
4. **Calculate net benefits** by subtracting the total costs from the total benefits.

### Quantifying the costs of the Sport Diversion Project

Table 6 provides an overview of the funding for the four projects but it is also important to note that the projects have an additional year of funding in which to achieve these outcomes.

Organisation	Total Funding	Year 1 (22 - 23)	Year 2 (23 - 24)	Years 1 & 2
Switch Up	£38,637	£12,500.00	£11,729.25	£24,229.25
3 Pillars - Game Plan	£67,500	£22,500	£22,500	£45,000.00
Support through Sport CIC	£35,880	£7,536.00	£14,172.00	£21,708.00
Trent Bridge Community Trust	£64,245	£9,660.00	£27,292.50	£36,952.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>£206,262</b>	<b>£52,196.00</b>	<b>£75,693.75</b>	<b>£127,889.75</b>

Table 6: Sport Diversion Programme Funding

Based on the budgeted spend, the total cost of the Sport Diversion Programme for Year 2 was £75,694. There is considerable variation in the cost per beneficiary for the four projects which is indicative of the variation in the approaches that were adopted by the four projects and the challenges they face which impacted on participant numbers in some cases (e.g. changing locations, staff recruitment and retention).

The indicative cost per beneficiary for each project in Year 2 (23-24) was as follows:

- Switch Up = £902 (£11,729/ 13 participants)
- 3 Pillars – Game Plan = £274 (£22,500/82 participants)
- Support through Sport = £82 (£14,172/172 participants)
- Trent Bridge Community Trust = £559 (£27,973/50 participants)

The cost per beneficiary varies between projects and this is indicative of the variation in approaches adopted within the projects. The higher cost per beneficiary for Switch Up is reflective of the project working intensively with a smaller number of participants for what is typically a longer time duration. At Trent Bridge Community Trust it is likely that the cost per beneficiary as some participants only attend sport sessions (n=30) whilst others receive higher levels of support through accessing mentoring (n=8) and group work (n=12). The lower cost per beneficiary at Support Through Sport indicate that the project is providing sport for a large number of participants with limited access to additional levels of support.

### **Quantifying the benefits of the Sports Diversion Programme**

Quantifying the benefits of the Sports Diversion Programme is complex for a number of reasons. Firstly, the extent of the benefits on the identified outcomes that arise will vary between individuals and between projects. For example, assessing improvements in mental and physical health over a sustained period is reliant on reliable measures being utilised both at the start and the end of the assessment period to demonstrate a quantifiable improvement. This was not the case within this programme. A second challenge in any cost-benefit analysis is the challenge of attributing any demonstrable changes to the project specifically.

A response to these challenges is to identify potential cost-savings that arise through the programme but this too is complex. An example which indicates the complexity of attempting to assess cost savings is an analytical tool known as Sportworks. This was developed by the organisation Substance to assess the impact and value of the sport for development sector across a range of social policy outcomes. The tool was developed based on the experiences of 3,888 projects from 198 agencies over a six-month period up to 31st March 2012. The Sportworks tool can be used to estimate the positive impact of sport for development projects against seven outcomes which all have relevance to the Sport Diversion Programme:

- Reduced crime and anti-social behaviour
- Improved educational attainment
- Improved educational attendance
- Reduced substance misuse
- Increased wellbeing
- Improved fitness
- Reduced levels of young people who are NEET

The approach utilises demographic data to examine participants' risk based on the outcomes of 'similar' people alongside knowledge about risk protection strategies implicit in interventions to conduct an assessment of impact in monetary terms. Participant risk is calculated utilising criteria including age, gender, ethnicity, income, disability, referral route and lifestyle. Contextual data is also considered including levels of crime and deprivation in

the locality. The intervention characteristics are utilised to ascertain the risk protection offered by a project. These characteristics include activity, delivery slot and duration, number and type of partners and venue. Context is also considered in determining the risk protection offered. The tool enables the calculation of the risk reduction offered by a project which is then multiplied by the identified cost of a negative outcome to calculate a potential cost saving for that project.

Table 7: Risk Reduction and Cost Savings Profile (SportsWorks)

Policy area	Risk	Impact	Risk Reduction	Cost of negative outcome*	Cost savings*
Crime & ASB	52.50%	30.11%	15.81%	£4,585	£724.89
Educational attainment	54.90%	23.22%	12.75%	£1,000	£127.50
Educational attendance	31.03%	14.52%	4.51%	£4,000	£180.40
Substance misuse	58.48%	32.84%	19.20%	£11,800	£2,265.60
Wellbeing	62.58%	22.92%	14.34%	£3,000	£430.20
Fitness & obesity	46.03%	15.81%	7.28%	£2,715	£197.65
NEET	45.09%	15.06%	6.79%	£3,651	£247.90

\*Per participant per annum

Where a project impacts on multiple outcomes the cost savings can be added together resulting in a total cost potential saving arising from a project per participant. In 2012 it was estimated that involvement in a sport for development project could result in total societal cost saving of £4174.12 per participant per annum.

Another approach which demonstrates the potential benefits that arise through the Sport Diversion Programme is one developed by The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Research Team (formerly New Economy) who pioneered a cost benefit analysis (CBA) methodology with the aim of identifying the fiscal, economic and social value of interventions. These costs were updated in 2022 to reflect inflation since the figures were first calculated in 2012. Table 8 summarises examples of fiscal costs which are useful in exploring the potential investment in the Sports Diversion Programme.

Table 8: Potential cost savings relevant to the Sports Diversion Programme (Source: Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA))

<b>Cost/saving - Education</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Fiscal Costs</b>
Persistent truancy - total fiscal cost of persistent truancy (missing at least five weeks of school per year), per individual per effective year	Per person per year	£ 2,166
Permanent exclusion from school - fiscal and economic cost of permanent exclusion from school, per individual per effective year	Per person per year	£ 13,230
School-based emotional learning programme - cost of delivery, per child per year	Per child per year	£ 171
Marginal lifetime benefit of a one-grade improvement in GCSE results (average)	Lifetime	£ 8,566
Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) Average cost per 18-24 year old NEET	Per year	£ 5,428
Troubled Families Programme - Troubled Families Employment Adviser (TFEA), Executive Officer (EO) grade - average staffing cost (national average)	Per FTE	£ 37,527
<b>Cost/Saving - Crime</b>		
Anti-social behaviour further action necessary (cost of dealing with incident)	Per incident	£ 780
Youth offender, average cost of a first time entrant (under 18) to the Criminal Justice System in the first year following the offence	Per year	£ 4,151
Unit cost of court event: Violence against a person (over 18) (per person per court event)	Per Event	£ 16,745
Criminal proceedings: <u>Arrest</u> - detained	Per incident	£ 826
Crime - average cost per incident of crime, across all types of crime (fiscal, economic and social values)	Per incident	£ 1,132

An example of using these potential cost savings based on a single participant follows. This is provided for illustration purposes only.



## Illustrative Example of potential cost savings based on Participant A – Switch-Up

### Switch-Up – Participant A Case study

Participant A was referred to Switch-Up to benefit from taking part in positive activities such as boxing and mentoring because of concerns about child criminal exploitation. Earlier in the year he had been excluded from school after being found with a large knife on the premises and was subsequently arrested for a drugs offence. He had also been involved with social care during this period. He engaged well with Switch-Up, regularly enjoying taking part in boxing. He developed a trusted relationship with his mentor who supported learning around grooming, gangs, substance misuse, county lines, positive peers and positive relationships. He worked closely with his mentor to move forward in key areas of his life.

As a result of his involvement with Switch-Up, he returned to education to complete a bricklaying course at college, was working extremely hard and had removed himself from negative influences. Switch-Up arranged three weeks of paid work at a local company where he surpassed all targets and earned a bonus every week. He was intending to sign up for Switch-Up's new employability program and in the meantime Switch-Up were aiming to involve him as a volunteer boxing coach at the project.

This unique case study can be used to illustrate the cost savings that are relevant when young people are supported to achieve positive outcomes and avoid negative outcomes. Table 9 below shows some of the potential cost savings that were achieved because of Participant A being supported on a positive pathway by Switch Up. These total £10,332.

Given the incident with Participant A being in possession of a knife another potential cost saving is the Unit cost of court event: Violence against a person (over 18) (per person per court event) which equates to £16,745.

Table 9: Potential Incident Avoided for Participant A – Switch Up

	Unit	Cost Saving
Persistent truancy - total fiscal cost of persistent truancy (missing at least five weeks of school per year), per individual per effective year	Per person per year	£ 2,166
Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) Average cost per 18-24 year old NEET	Per year	£ 5,428
Anti-social behaviour further action necessary (cost of dealing with incident)	Per incident	£ 780
Criminal proceedings: <u>Arrest</u> - detained	Per incident	£ 826
Crime - average cost per incident of crime, across all types of crime (fiscal, economic and social values)	Per incident	£ 1,132

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 1. Embedding shared expectations around the delivery of SportPlus projects from the outset

The findings demonstrated that multiple factors are required to support the planning and delivery of SportPlus programmes in terms of responding to the context and establishing mechanisms for change. Whilst the funded projects had all developed theories of change at an early stage these did not necessarily robustly inform the delivery of the projects particularly in terms of responding to the context and in ensuring the delivery mechanisms were in place. In adopting a SportPlus approach, it is important to have a clear vision around which activities support which outcomes, but this was sometimes absent. A theory of change can be valuable in ensuring that all delivery staff have the same vision for the project and a good understanding of the mechanism and outcomes and are therefore able to implement the activities with consistency.

It is important that funded projects can demonstrate their ability to both design and implement a SportPlus project with a clear articulation of how the requested resources will be utilised to achieve the specific intended outcomes for the project. Including a session plan which articulates the ways in which the activities are linked to the intended outputs and outcomes at the bid stage is recommended.

The theory of change should outline features such as the use of purposefully designed sport with the potential for personal development through volunteering and mentoring if appropriate, locations and venues, the cohort of young people and recruitment strategies, days and times for activities, the nature and role of the workforce, partnerships, the potential for varied and challenging experiences and support for the young person outside the session including back to education and employment as well as onward referrals to support services.

Visits to sessions would also enable funders to see the project delivery and ensure that there is synergy between the plans and the execution of these.

Breaks in delivery and changes in staffing and venues can impact negatively on engagement and retention of young people. Rebuilding the sessions can be resource intensive and negatively impact on the effectiveness of projects.

#### ***Recommendations:***

It is recommended that at the bid stage commissioners should:

- Provide a description of a SportPlus session that funding is sought for
- Consider providing a programme level theory which projects can utilise to articulate the links between the intended activities, outputs and outcomes for the project along with a consideration of the context and mechanisms that will support this.
- Require projects to clearly state which outcomes they will aim for and how these outcomes will be evidenced specifically (e.g. levels of engagement, school attendance,

reduction in behaviour concerns, accessing training, completing qualifications, volunteering hours)

- Require a risk assessment for projects to consider their response based on known risks (e.g. breaks in delivery, staff turnover, change of venue) and other risks related specifically to the proposed project

## **2. Recognition of the complexity of SportPlus projects being delivered in dynamic contexts**

As the findings demonstrated, there is no single model for delivering a SportPlus project and, similar to programmes in the criminal justice sector, implementation can be complex (Minkes, 2005). Even though projects shared similar features, each project adopted a different approach to their delivery. Moreover, three out of the four projects were delivering programmes in new geographical areas which had practical implications for the recruitment of young people, partnerships and the choice of sports and facilities as the programmes progressed.

All projects experienced challenges such as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, difficulties in recruiting and retaining the workforce, recruiting young people, and accessing facilities. Projects benefited from the commissioners being supportive in adapting the project delivery plans in response to these challenges.

The need for flexibility can also be expected in the context of working with vulnerable young people with complex lives who live in deprived communities which are typically lacking in supportive infrastructure. Project staff used their local knowledge, networks and experience to respond and overcome these challenges.

### ***Recommendations:***

It is recommended that during the delivery commissioners should:

- Expect projects to be flexible in their delivery and be supportive in this process
- Embed processes that require projects to communicate any changes and the implications of these changes for meeting the project aims

## **3. Recognition of the skills and experiences necessary for the SportPlus workforce**

The findings identified that the role of the SportPlus workforce was central for the design and running of the programme activities and contributed to the programme's outcomes through being responsible for the purposeful and intentional use of sport as a positive activity, for building the trusted adult relationship with the young person, for identifying and responding to the needs of the young person and for providing additional support.

Project staff demonstrated their ability to seamlessly support young people to benefit from different elements of the programme at different points of their journey. Informal and formal

mentoring was evident across the projects which provided a framework for working effectively with participants. The approach was not uniform but typically included identifying and responding to young people's needs and aspirations, setting achievable goals, providing opportunities to reflect and to practice new positive behaviours and to create new pro-social friendships.

The findings highlighted that, in contrast to universal, open access sport programmes, SportPlus programmes achieve the best results when their work was focused and targeted on a smaller number of young people who met clearly defined criteria at the secondary or tertiary level of need. This allowed project staff to build longer term, consistent and more holistic relationships with the same small group of young people which was important for engagement and an indicator of reduced or no involvement in youth offending.

Ensuring that the SportPlus workforce has expertise in both sport and youthwork and sufficient time to spend with young people providing additional support is central to achieving these outcomes. This requires sufficient resource to recruit and retain a workforce able to deliver a SportPlus approach not reliant on casual and zero-hour employment contracts but moving towards employment supported by continued professional development opportunities, recognition and career pathways in place.

#### ***Recommendations:***

It is recommended that during the delivery commissioners should:

- Recognise the need to undertake targeted and focused work with smaller numbers of young people and resource this accordingly
- Support projects to recruit and retain staff with the necessary skills to undertake SportPlus delivery recognising the additional financial investment that is required
- Ensure that funded projects have staff with the necessary skills and experience to undertake this complex work
- Consider how they can support projects with the retention of staff in the long term and reduce staff turnover

#### **4. Sharing insight and building collaboration to enhance effectiveness**

Projects reported that they had enjoyed the networking opportunities that they had received because of being an NNNVRP funded project. This included attending conferences and training events which were valuable in enhancing the effectiveness of projects through developing knowledge and skills and in creating new contacts and partnerships. There was the potential to provide specific networking opportunities for SportPlus projects in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire to share learning and to explore potential opportunities for collaboration. There was also the opportunity to make good use of a place-based approach in Nottingham City to bring projects together with other voluntary organisations to support collaboration,

avoid duplication and competition. This was viewed as growing in importance with the funding cuts required by Nottingham City Council and the reliance of so many organisations on this funding which had the potential to result in negative competition and lack of collaboration.

***Recommendation:***

It is recommended that commissioners should:

- Consider ways in which funded projects could benefit from sharing insight and effective practice
- Resource staff to engage in networking opportunities which are identified as having potential to enhance project delivery and staff development and recruitment

**5. Greater alignment between monitoring and evaluation and the programme outcomes**

The collection of monitoring and evaluation data by projects was a funding requirement for this programme. Although it provided a snapshot of some basic statistics, it provided limited data on the programme delivery in key areas which were significant for SportPlus programmes. As an example, identifying the patterns of a young person's attendance at a session can be an indicator of their levels of engagement, including their motivation, commitment, involvement and the strength of the relationship with the project staff as a trusted adult. Similarly, identifying the reasons for no or low attendance by a young person can help to determine whether the young person needs to be re-engaged by the project or would benefit from an onward referral to another agency for specialist support. Specific data captured at regular intervals about levels of engagement by young people at sessions would also help to indicate the effectiveness of the session for the young person's engagement and identify progress.

Structured case study templates could be used by projects to provide consistent and regular updates about young people's progress. Although 'before' and 'after' surveys were used at some of the projects, there was limited alignment between the project aims and the data that was collated. It was also not evident that the data collected influenced the delivery of projects. There was also a lack of consistency between projects in terms of data collection methods which limited the ability to draw conclusions at a programme level or to compare projects.

As most projects used bespoke monitoring and evaluation software, there was the opportunity for projects to include additional data and results from their own systems (anonymised and not including confidential data) which would help to demonstrate the effectiveness of their projects more clearly over time.

The StreetGames M&E toolkit includes practical guidance and resources that might be helpful to collect this type of M&E data (this was also used for the Youth Justice Sports Fund). Projects should be required to use at least one common validated data collection tool for each of the programme outcomes so that a meaningful comparison can be carried out between the projects for future evaluations.

It is recommended that commissioners should:

- Ensure that projects are supported to collate monitoring and evaluation data that informs their planning and demonstrates their success in achieving their intended outcomes recognising this may need additional financial support
- Consider building in some common data collection across funded projects to enable comparison between projects and programme level conclusions to be drawn.

## **6. Maximising impact through adopting a strategic approach**

Identifying where SportPlus programmes can add the greatest value over a large geographical area is challenging. Adopting a strategic approach based on an audit of both need and sport provision using a public health approach can be helpful for showing where funding can be used most effectively. The audit would facilitate identification of priority areas based on factors such as youth offending, deprivation and poverty, school exclusions and overlaying it with existing community sports provision can help to show where primary, secondary and tertiary provision is in place and where it is needed but missing.

This insight could then inform a sport and violence reduction strategy to guide commissioning priorities that could be used by a range of funding partners and contribute to building a wider network of quality primary, secondary and tertiary sports provision to promote positive activity and intervention at all public health levels. This process would enable SportPlus interventions to have a clear remit for contributing to broader violence reduction work and enable sports projects to identify where they are best placed to work with young people and at what level (primary, secondary or tertiary).

The availability of funding for secondary and tertiary level delivery is attractive to projects seeking funding in an uncertain funding landscape which can draw delivery away from important primary level work. A strategic approach can help to ensure alignment between sport provision and identified need. Primary level sports interventions are often not so highly valued by funders even though they provide an essential universal offer to young people as a key tool for prevention. Similarly, this approach could be used to help sports projects develop their offer to young people and to extend their delivery over time into secondary or tertiary provision to fill strategic gaps.

### ***Recommendations:***

It is recommended that the commissioners should:

- Develop a Sport and Violence Reduction Strategy for Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire based on conducting an audit informed by a public health approach to inform future commissioning priorities for sport and SportPlus programmes

## References

- Blechman, E. A., Maurice, A., Buecker, B., & Helberg, C. (2000) Can mentoring or skill training reduce recidivism? Observational study with propensity analysis. *Prevention Science, 1*, 139–155
- Coalter, F. (2007) *A Wider Social Role for Sport: Who's Keeping the Score?* London: Routledge
- Hennigan, K.M., Kolnick, K.A., Vindel, F. & Maxson, C.L. (2015) Targeting youth at risk for gang involvement: validation of a gang risk assessment to support individualised secondary prevention *Children and Youth Services Review, 56*, 86-96
- Mason, C., Walpole, C. and Godfrey, T. (2020) *Evaluation Report: Sport and Serious Violence Prevention Project* Loughborough University
- Minkes J., Hammersley R. and Raynor P. (2005) Partnerships in Working with Young Offenders with Substance Misuse Problems *The Howard Journal, 44* (3) pp 254-265
- Nichols, G. (2007) *Sport and Crime Reduction: The role of Sports in Tackling Youth Crime*. London: Routledge
- Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic evaluation*. sage.
- Stephenson M., Giller H. and Brown S. (2011) *Effective Practice in Youth Justice* Routledge: Abingdon
- Weaver B. (2011) Co-producing British Justice: The transformative potential of personalisation for penal sanctions *British Journal of Social Work* (41), 1038-1057
- Wong, G., Greenhalgh, T., Westhorp, G. and Pawson, R. (2012) Realist methods in medical education research: what are they and what can they contribute? *Medical Education* (46) 89-96
- Zilberstein, K. & Spence R. (2017) Breaking Bad: an attachment perspective on youth mentoring relationship closures *Child and Family Social Work, 22*, 67-76

## Appendix 1: Programme and Project Outcomes

<b>Project outcomes</b>	<b>Switch Up</b>	<b>3 Pillars</b>	<b>Support through Sport</b>	<b>Trent Bridge</b>
Improved mental & physical well-being	Improved mental & emotional well-being  Sustain weekly involvement in physical fitness and/or other positive activities during the programme (pathway engagement)	Improve the mental health and wellbeing of participants	Improved mental & physical well-being	Improved mental and physical well-being
Improved relationships	Participants develop new skills & coping mechanisms to deal with challenging situations	Support improved relationships with family and peers	Sustained improved relationships, family life and established support network (self-reported)	Sustained improved relationships, family life and established support network.
Education/employment		Gain a sports qualification (CSLA or Level 1 Gym Instructor)	Sustained positive engagement with education/work (Vocational qualifications, peer support etc)	Number of participants who sustain positive engagement with education/work.
Reduction in offending risk	No new involvement in the criminal justice system during the programme (self-reported)	Promote positive behaviors that reduce the likelihood of being involved in crime	Sustained positive behaviour change and will receive support that reduces their likelihood of involvement in crime (self-reported)	Sustained positive behaviour change and will receive support that reduces their likelihood of being sent or returning to prison



