

Reaching out to young people who are NEET

Sportivate is providing evidence of sport's power to engage young people who are not in employment, education or training and to introduce purpose and motivation to their lives.



Department for Education figures published in August 2012 revealed that 968,000 16 to 24 year olds were NEET (not in employment, education or training) in quarter two of 2012—that's 16% of all young people in the age group. The characteristics of young people who are categorised as NEET are diverse, although those with few or no qualifications and/or with a health problem or disability are more likely to fall into the category.

"It's helped build my confidence around new people... I now play for a Rugby team, we train once a week and we play on a Sunday."



In South Ribble there were no low cost sporting activities targeting the unemployed. Funded by **Lancashire Sport**, the South Ribble sports development team worked in partnership with Lancashire County Council Youth Services and Leyland Youth branch. After consulting with unemployed people, and on the basis of past experience, organisers felt the activity which had the broadest appeal would be football.

The sessions ran between 11.00 am and noon on Friday at a venue provided by Lancashire FA which is close to residential areas, the town centre and bus routes. The aim of the project was to offer enjoyable coaching sessions that would motivate unemployed young people to join teams in the local area and take part in regular physical activity. The project was designed to also offer further training, volunteering and work experience opportunities. The organisers have steered the men towards refereeing and coaching awards.

South Ribble sports development staff were on hand to advise and support the players, who were signposted to local teams and as result of the project informal matches have been set up against Lancashire Sport staff to celebrate the success of the project. A total of ten young unemployed young men were engaged of which eight were retained. Three of the men are now playing in local football leagues. Due to the success of the project Lancashire FA want to reach out and deliver more projects aimed at NEETS and unemployed men and women in targeted areas in Lancashire.

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Greater Sport funded the sport development team in Bury to run a series of sessions including boxercise, zumba, spinning, boot camp and aqua aerobics for thirteen young mums who were recruited through Bury's integrated youth support service (IYSS), local connexions, health visitors, children's centre and social services. The team used Sport England's market segmentation tool to identify that a high proportion of young mothers were likely to want to do more physical activity. The IYSS provided constant communication with the young mums through face to face reminders, phone calls and text messages. These support mechanisms helped the project to retain eleven out of the thirteen women. The NEET young mums had low self-esteem and confidence which proved challenging as they were often de-motivated and had done very little physical activity in recent years. To break down these barriers, the activities were delivered in response to fitness, ability levels and preferences. In this way the young mums could feel a sense of ownership of the classes. This class ran for a further eight weeks after the initial Sportivate funding through IYSS and Bury lifestyle project. Long term exit routes were made available by signposting to similar sessions at the Castle Leisure Centre and other local facilities. 80% of the young mums are still active in either the leisure centre or in the community.

"I have seen a massive difference with the young people who have attended these sessions, they have been a lot more focused on their sporting activities and engaging with the youth offending service They have learnt a lot."

In the **Living Sport** area, Peterborough Youth Offending Service have successfully introduced a boxing project to give youth offenders a positive boxing experience that they can then continue with in the long term. All of the young people involved were defined as NEET, and in the words of the facilitator "had a lot of time on their hands". In the past, the youth offending service had always tried to keep group activities to a minimum as they had often led to problems. The project was challenging as the young people had previously displayed challenging behaviour. Initially, attendance was poor but organisers persevered realising that changing the young people's minds about sport was likely to be difficult. The project broke new ground and brought together young people from different backgrounds to cooperate with each other. Motivation levels grew with each session and with that came mutual respect within the group. A total of 15 people were engaged of which 8 were retained and 3 are continuing to participate at a local partner club.

Leicestershire and Rutland Sport funded the Blaby Positive Activities referral scheme to prevent anti social behaviour in the area. A number of local agencies, such as the community safety team, probation service, Connexions, integrated youth service, youth offending team and Leicestershire Constabulary were seeking positive activities that would engage young people that were at risk of causing anti-social behaviour, typically those young people defined as NEET. As a result an 8 week Sportivate football project was delivered on Friday evenings that engaged with 22 young people and retained 9 (exceeding the original target). The local police were able to establish a positive relationship with the young people in a new environment. The project faced some challenges as local police officers decided to travel around the area to speak individually with the young people, and although this proved to be very time consuming it was also highly valuable. Future sessions are now planned to engage with females and consultation has begun on what activities to offer.

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Supported by **Suffolk Sport**, Ipswich YMCA identified that many of the young men at their hostel were unemployed and as a result had little confidence or self-esteem. The need was seen for an activity that would engage the young men at the YMCA and address these issues. A six week football Sportivate project was set up that ended in a YMCA team being entered into a football tournament against other local teams. Sessions were run at the YMCA which provided a familiar setting for the men and was received very positively. A total of twelve people were engaged and nine were retained, partly as a result of the incentive of a tournament for those that attended four of the first five sessions. Exit routes proved challenging as the cost of playing in local leagues was a deterrent. As a result, Friday pay and play sessions have subsequently been run successfully for YMCA residents, ex residents, and other unemployed young people at modest cost of £1 per session.

Doncaster Rovers, with the support of **South Yorkshire Sport**, ran a Sportivate project as part of the Job Centre Plus pilot that aimed to increase participation in sport, develop personal skills and provide attendees with an insight into coaching. It was aimed at NEETs with a view for them to also learn skills which would help them to move towards training and/or employment.

The project enabled the Doncaster Rovers development team to interact with the participants in a relaxed and fun environment where the participants could develop their interest and skills. The course engaged 12 people of which 8 have expressed an interest in attending the Doncaster Rovers FC Level 2 Coaching Academy. This gives students the chance to develop their coaching skills and knowledge through a curriculum comprising vocational qualifications at level 1 and level 2 which helps to develop an understanding of the different employment opportunities available within football and the wider sports industry.

“We feel we operate a very inclusive environment and have years of experience delivering and engaging with NEET young people from across the borough. The football club is the carrot that attracts young people, and we believe our informal and down to earth approach is what retains them.”

For a young person to enter a Sportivate project as NEET and leave motivated, determined, confident and positive about their future they must have a high quality experience. This experience must not only change the way they see their world but more importantly how they see themselves.

Critical success factors

- The NEET group is not homogenous. There is a diverse range of young people in the group with quite different characteristics
- Recruitment is best done with the involvement of organisations that have access to young people defined as NEET, or at risk of becoming NEET, and that understand their needs and expectations
- It takes time to recruit the right people to take part. Organisations that plan sufficient time often have better success with engaging the people they want to reach
- NEETs often need specialised support and so the expertise of the delivery organisation is important. Work alongside organisations that really understand how to engage this group
- Constant communication is essential to keep the group engaged and motivated
- Picking a venue that is easy to get to is a simple but vital ingredient
- 'Ownership' of the project is important especially if you have soft outcomes such as building confidences, resilience and self esteem
- Projects must have affordable exit routes. Club membership will often be too expensive and pay and play sessions can be more successful
- Facilitating a tolerant, patient and respectful environment is important for retention. This environment can then lead to social interaction and friendship which helps with sustaining activity levels
- Education and employment exit routes should ideally be in place alongside a participation exit route as part of a wrap around service.

