

# street games briefing paper



## Report Subject: Participant Retention

### Title: Retaining participants in sport within areas of high deprivation – learning from the StreetGames network

#### Introduction

Participant retention is a complicated business – often made even more challenging when delivering sports sessions within areas of high deprivation. At StreetGames we've recognised this challenge and have undertaken research to explore the key problems and in response, developed some potential solutions and top tips.

Many of the lessons we have learnt can be applied to work with almost any group of young participants – regardless of their social standing. What works in Surrey might not work in Salford - but what works in Salford is pretty likely to work in Surrey.

#### Background

Currently young people living in low income households in England, are a little over half as likely to participate in sport on a regular basis, hold club membership, volunteer, be coached or compete as those living in more affluent households.



Therefore, it is vitally important that sports workers and NGBs which deploy coaches to deliver in areas of high deprivation, work effectively to not only increase levels of participation and engagement in sport but to also ensure that:

- Existing participants are retained – by making sessions so good that participants want to keep coming back time and time again (and bring their friends);





- Participants are equipped with the skills and knowledge to enable them to 'make their own way' in sport – either by joining a local club/team or continuing activities independently either now or as they grow into independent adults.

Essentially, participant retention is the product of sessions delivered **at the right time, right place, right price, and, critically, in the right style**. This briefing paper provides a short summary of some of the key factors we have found to be important.

## Doorstep sport

To overcome participation barriers in disadvantaged areas, sports sessions need to be delivered at the right time, in the right place and the right price and in the right style. Without getting these factors right all else is likely to fail

So for example, in terms of 'the right place' this means:

- Holding regular sessions at a local neighbourhood facility

within the subjective neighbourhood of the disadvantaged community. This negates any reliance on car or public transport travel and enables participants to walk or cycle to sports session with a friend should they wish to do so.

- The need to use of both traditional and non-traditional sports facilities to ensure ease of access; such as community halls, youth centres, MUGAs, parks and amenity green spaces within housing estates. Therefore, coaches need to be flexible and able to adapt their sessions for non-traditional venues. The quality of the venue is not a dominating factor for this youth market, it is all about proximity.

Consultation with potential participants is essential to tell you the right time and price. The right style is harder to pin down. It's more than just the look of the project, what people wear in the venue; it's also about how a coach runs a session and what happens over a series of sessions. The successful coach is a good ringleader, a good listener, a desirable role model and a good enough coach to keep the sessions interesting and rewarding. See 'An overview of doorstep sport' at:

[www.streetgames.org/www/content/ngb-briefing-papers](http://www.streetgames.org/www/content/ngb-briefing-papers).

## Retaining existing participants

Data analysis of attendance registers, by StreetGames, showed that participants tended to fall into one of four groups:

- The 'newbies'
- The 'settling in'

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- The 'core'
- The 'committed/motivated'.

It was quickly recognised, that different strategies are needed to ensure that the needs of different groups of participants are met and progression up the 'hierarchy of attenders' is achieved.

The data analysis showed that a significant proportion of the 'newbie' participants were in danger of dropping out. So for example, with these participants, coaches and leaders need to remember:

- The importance of welcoming and integrating newcomers.
- Using a volunteer or established group member to 'buddy' the newcomer and ensure they are invited to the next session.
- To explain the ground rules and boundaries.
- Consider adapting the game and rules to ensure new members are included.

For participants within the within the 'settling in' and 'core' groups, it is vital that coaches maintain a positive relationship with these participants to encourage further, more dedicated participation. Some simple actions which were found to minimise drop-out amongst these groups include:

- Ensuring regular personal contact between the coach and participants to build relationships, provide positive feedback about performance, check they are coming to



the next session.

- The inclusion of opportunities for participants to take part in a competition or special events at regular intervals.
- Setting personal goals and fun challenges.
- Providing opportunities for young people to input into the sessions.
- Recognition – such as player of the week or month.
- The use of incentives to reward regular attendance such as water bottles, certificates and t-shirts. These are best used at certain stages – e.g. after attending 4 sessions or 10 sessions.
- Including time within the sessions for participants to socialise and build friendships within the group.

Those within the 'committed/motivated' group can be relied on to attend most sessions and therefore, efforts should be made to make sure they're constantly challenged and helping to shape the internal life of the sessions. For example, they need more challenging and a wider variety of activities and progression/exit routes – such as

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opportunities to play in project based teams, referral onto local clubs/leagues where appropriate and also into volunteering, leadership, umpiring and coaching roles within the project.

On their own, each of these actions may appear small or inconsequential, but put into practice collectively, we have found that they can have an extremely positive impact on retention levels.

As such, this highlights the importance of maintaining accurate attendance records. We recommended that coaches develop the habit of analysing the registers of attendance to check on the progress of each participant and decide how to relate to that person on the basis of their attendance pattern.

By reviewing attendance patterns, coaches and project leaders will gain a better understanding of the group's

profile and dynamics and what actions they should be taking. This can be done manually, or alternatively coaches using a standard attendance template can make use of the Retention Wizard developed by StreetGames which automatically charts the retention rates of individuals and projects.

## Role of the Coach

Within any sports setting the role of the coach/leader is an extremely important factor, but in disadvantaged areas, this is especially true.

Young people living within disadvantaged areas often face challenging complex community and home circumstances. As a result they may have fragile self-esteem and confidence regardless of the image they project.

Recognising this, it is imperative that doorstep sport coaches are consistent, reliable and deliver sessions which are participant centred. One let-down and a cheerful group can quickly become a challenge to manage.

It is important to remember that the group's priorities might not be the same as the coach's. Having an on-going conversation lets the coach know what they are most concerned about.

Sports coaches working within disadvantaged areas need to have a good rapport and be able to interact well with participants, as well as having good delivery skills to ensure that sessions are fun, interesting and challenging. They also need to provide the support and confidence to enable

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participants to make the next step.

Successful coaches are often local and know the social issues within the area, know key families and individuals, and can gain the respect of the participants. They care about the area and want to give something back to make it a better place.

Coaches and leaders need to establish clear ground rules and boundaries. It may be helpful if they have access to additional support and training beyond their sports coaching qualifications; for example in areas such as managing challenging behaviour, the essentials of working with young people and conflict resolution.

## Sports Citizenship

As well as retaining participants for as long as possible, within specific projects and groups, it is essential to also provide them with the skills and knowledge to 'make their own way' in sport – whether this be in terms of having the confidence to join a local team or sports club, or knowing where to go to play badminton with a friend, join an exercise class or go for a cycle. Therefore, it is essential that coaches working with groups of young people in disadvantaged areas also:

- Plan to increase participants confidence to learn new skills.
- Visit sports venues – teach how to use them.
- Develop youth leadership through volunteering and devolved decision making.



- Show where sport can be read about and watched.
- Connect to clubs and events.
- Explain value of life-long activity.
- Show how to do solo/informal sports.

The information provided above, provides just a short summary of some of the key factors we have found to be important in terms of retaining participants in areas of high deprivation. More detailed information about delivering sports sessions is available on the NGB pages of the StreetGames website, including sports specific briefing papers, good practice case studies and data analysis.

[www.streetgames.org/www/ngb-support](http://www.streetgames.org/www/ngb-support)

However, if you would like to know more about this topic, StreetGames has also developed a retention specific workshop. The sessions are all led by tutors with many years of doorstep sport experience and over recent months, the workshop has been delivered to a range of

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sports workers, including NGB Development Officers, local authority sports workers and sports volunteers – with much positive feedback:

*“It was good to have the opportunity to discuss thoughts and ideas with other members of the group. I liked the way the course looked at realistic and practical solutions to retaining participants. There are 3-4 ideas I can take away and use straight away which isn't always the case with some courses.”*

**Get into Football Officer, Middlesex County FA**

*“From my point of view it was suitable for both coaches and project managers as it highlighted the need for retention to be the responsibility of everyone involved.”*

**Club Development Manager, Pendle Leisure Trust**

## StreetGames

StreetGames is a national partner of Sport England and a centre of expertise for developing doorstep sport in disadvantaged communities.

The charity supports community based sports projects that deliver sport and volunteering opportunities to young people living in the 20% most deprived wards in the UK.

StreetGames works with National Governing Bodies of Sport to establish and develop links between community and mainstream sport. Recognised by the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games Inspire Mark, StreetGames is creating a lasting legacy of doorstep sport in the UK.

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[streetgames.org](http://streetgames.org)