Breaking Barriers
Community cohesion, sport and organisational development
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Supporting Statements

My passion for sport springs from the fact that it can be used to bring communities together. This report demonstrates how sport can offer young people new chances to succeed in life. The young people who have participated in the Breaking Barriers project have experienced huge personal growth, such as greater self-confidence and a better understanding of others, whilst the commitment shown to them by the staff has also enabled them to start on their personal pathway to the future through education, training, volunteering and mentoring. Building self-esteem, motivation and closer links between communities makes for stronger neighbourhoods and a better quality of life for all residents. Of course, we cannot forget that this project has also helped create a generation of healthy, physically active young people who will continue to make sport part of their daily routine. I am looking forward to making the most of this research to deliver real change to communities.

Kate Hoey
MP and Mayor of London’s Commissioner for Sport

This report is a valuable study into the effectiveness of various approaches to using sport to engage with minority ethnic communities and to strengthen community cohesion generally.

The report underlines that, if they are to be successful, community sports projects cannot operate in isolation, but must work in partnership with key organisations, such as housing associations and local charities. It also illustrates the importance of entrusting outreach delivery work to the right people to ensure maximum impact in engaging with hard-to-reach groups and individuals.

The significant community regeneration and social cohesion impact that a sports facility can have on an area is also clearly demonstrated in this report. It illustrates how the recently-transformed community sports hub in Stonebridge Estate, North London, which was funded with a £1m Football Foundation grant, has been a key factor in the wider regeneration programme for the area, and a major platform from which to effect positive change across the whole community.

I do hope that you enjoy reading this document and that you find it a useful contribution in helping to shape how we are using our sporting spaces and sporting activity to improve the quality of life for everyone in our towns and cities.

Paul Thorogood
Chief Executive, Football Foundation
Foreword

Growing up in North West London, on the Stonebridge estate featured in this research, I am acutely aware of the challenges faced by young people growing up in areas where opportunities, role models and employment are thin on the ground. For young people whose race, ethnicity or culture somehow excludes them from ‘mainstream’ services – be they in sport, education or any other arena – these challenges are magnified and can often seem insurmountable. Often the answer seems to lie with insular approaches, bonding only with people from the same culture, class or locality. This further reinforces stereotypes and can have extremely negative impacts on both individuals and the wider community. We only have to look at the gun and knife crime, postcode territorialism, gang culture and divisions that currently blight our urban centres and young people’s lives for proof.

Throughout my own life I have seen the power that sport can have in engaging young people from all backgrounds, creating a common bond and familiar environment within which people relate regardless of background. I have also witnessed the way that coaches can be so much more than just the coach, acting as advisor, role model and motivator for young people from all backgrounds. For me, football provided a pathway for employment and opportunity to play a sport I love at the very highest level. It has also, through the Jason Roberts Foundation, given me an opportunity to put back into the communities from which I came.

The Breaking Barriers research is a very important document in underpinning my belief that sport can be used to change individuals and communities, to bring people together and forge a wider understanding of different cultures. It not only demonstrates how the use of sport and facilities contribute to the wider social agenda, but also illustrates perfectly why local community groups and role models are so important if we truly want to turn lives and communities around.

For my part the research has helped frame a new initiative for my Foundation, the Respect Brent programme launched in July 2010, and I very much look forward to working with the Active Communities Network, Football Foundation and other partners in ensuring the success of that programme. I am certain the Breaking Barriers research will help decision makers, funders and other delivery organisations alike in delivering effective projects to promote community cohesion in our most marginalised communities.

Jason Roberts MBE
Premier League and Grenada International footballer
Founder and Patron Jason Roberts Foundation
Introduction

Breaking Barriers was a three year, pan-London, community cohesion project, with a focus on engaging and supporting young people from minority ethnic communities into mainstream participation in sports, education and employment. Led by the Active Communities Network (ACN), with funding from the Football Foundation, it ran alongside an integrated research strand designed to inform the project’s development as well as reporting on its achievements. This is the Summary Final Report on that research.

Breaking Barriers has operated in targeted communities around Stonebridge/Harlesden in west London; west Bermondsey in the central London area; and a number of locations in Lambeth in the south of the city in order to ‘test’ different approaches to delivering community cohesion in each borough.

In Southwark, it sought to provide additional resources for an established service provider (ACN) to deliver focused activities within the context of wider sport/community development initiatives. In Brent, Breaking Barriers provided finance, training and support for an identified grass roots sports-based community organisation (Hornstars) to broaden its work beyond its initial focus on Somali young men. The Lambeth case study was to explore whether Breaking Barriers could work alongside statutory sector providers to develop new cohesion initiatives and partnerships with voluntary organisations. However, in a context where very few initiatives were exclusively branded or marketed as ‘Breaking Barriers’, the approach was principally concerned with embedding new ways of working among relevant agencies and workers so that a focus on community cohesion emerged through new and existing programmes of activity.

In summary Breaking Barriers sought to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Greater community cohesion and multi-cultural participation in football/sport
2. Entry routes into mainstream sports clubs
3. Entry routes into volunteering opportunities and sports coaching/administration for project participants
4. Greater cultural awareness and shared community identity through workshops and community events
5. Improved citizenship and community ownership by project participants
Understanding Community Cohesion and Sport

Community cohesion became a hot topic in public policy circles in 2001 following a series of disturbances in a number of towns in the north of England which involved groups of young people, particularly those from white and Asian ethnic groups. Subsequently, the Home Office commissioned the Cantle Report into the issues which lay behind the disturbances and this was a prime driver behind the development of a national strategy to enhance community cohesion.

Since then, much of the focus of the debate has been around how groups of people from different ethnic groups can live together better and prosper. However, it is important to stress that other factors, such as age and social class differences, may also contribute to conflicts that impact on the cohesiveness of a community. Indeed the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's (CIC) Final Report in February 2008 painted a vision of a cohesive society as entailing:

“Thriving and prosperous places where people from all different backgrounds are equal, and where everyone matters – whether old or young, settled or new, Black or White. There are local places where all groups feel that they are treated fairly, and that they have a responsibility to others that transcends the differences between them. Places where people are not fearful of meeting their neighbours, and where they don’t see individual differences as a barrier to the success of the whole community.”

Overall Outputs and Outcomes

In terms of the outputs and outcomes for the project, Breaking Barriers employed the Substance Project Reporting System to record statistical data. In total Breaking Barriers:

- Engaged 5,524 young people in the reporting period
- Delivered 293 separate schemes of work
- Delivered 7,085 session hours
- Recruited 675 volunteers
- Recorded 1,000 qualifications achieved by participants and 121 other outcomes
- Engaged a wide range of people from different backgrounds as evidenced by the recorded ethnic breakdown of participants

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<td>657</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,681</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,466</strong></td>
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Table 1
Ethnic Breakdown of Participants in Breaking Barriers.
These are aggregate figures across the Breaking Barriers project where information has been recorded. For a fuller breakdown please see the full version of the Final Report.
Clearly the advent of sport could never be expected to deliver such a vision on its own, even within geographically limited areas. However, community cohesion has emerged as an increasingly key agenda for those working around the social uses of sport because sport is cited as one of the mechanisms by which people from different backgrounds can be engaged together. Community cohesion has become a key strand for the Football Foundation and one of its seven community programme strategy objectives is to, ‘contribute to promoting respect amongst communities and bringing people together through football’.

As such, sport is seen not only as a physical and temporal ‘space’ that allows barriers to be broken and meaningful interaction to take place between people from different backgrounds. It is also seen as an activity that can be used to engage people in activity that can provide a gateway to ongoing development in education, volunteering or understanding of other communities, which can help underpin community cohesion. For those workers with whom we conducted the research then, understandings of community cohesion included:

- Bringing different communities together, overcoming stereotypes, interacting with and learning about each other
- Engaging specific communities with the ‘mainstream’
- Bringing members within specific communities together to share cultural knowledge and understanding
- Providing a supportive social framework that provides people with confidence and acceptance, from which they can move on
- Empowering communities to help themselves

Perhaps more significantly though sport was widely recognized to be a strong driver for many young people, with the provision of sports activities providing a launch-pad for further developmental work aimed at building more cohesive communities. Sport was seen to combine a unique mixture of physical, social and psychological aspects which, whilst varying with each activity, had a uniformly pleasurable and non-academic ethos which is attractive to many young people.

The research into Breaking Barriers has highlighted 10 principles of effective practice. We believe that commissioners and practitioners can use these principles as the foundation stones for delivering real community change through sport.

“It’s made us more sociable. We’ve been able to meet new people, adults and kids, and we’ve learned from older coaches. We used to stick with our own people, our friends and groups. We wouldn’t play with anyone else... it’s broadened my horizons a bit. I wouldn’t mind talking with anyone now. I’ve got nothing against anyone.”

Ghedi from Brent

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10 Principles of Effective Practice

1. Focus

2. Using the Right Facilities

3. Credible Staff

4. Benefits of Sport

5. Appropriate Events

6. Positive Peer Pressure

7. Partnership Working

8. Developmental Approaches

9. Smarter Commissioning

10. Monitoring Impact and Outcomes
10 Principles of Effective Practice

Focus

There is a need to understand the difficult and at times complex nature of community cohesion as a set of aims and outcomes and how it is distinguished from, but overlaps with, broader social issues.

One of the successes of Breaking Barriers has been its ability to create spaces where groups from different ethnic backgrounds can interact with each other and then build on these ‘events’ to develop more meaningful and ongoing relationships. Linked to this is a need for community cohesion work to move away from the tendency for work focused on diversity issues to fund, target and engage with one particular ethnic group or another. The experience of Hornstars in Brent, which shifted its orientation from a focus on Somali young men to work with a far wider range of people, is particularly noteworthy.

As such, whilst a focus on Breaking Barriers between different ethnic groups will always be a major priority for community cohesion projects, they should also involve:

- Providing access to venues that generate relief from the physical deprivation of urban centres
- Embedding work within a broader developmental approach
- Developing opportunities for shared experiences for people from different areas
- Helping to overcome potential sources of conflict
- Working with other organisations that are addressing wider deprivation

In delivering such an integrated approach, a focus on particular areas, rather than social groups, may be most effective.

“For some areas, the priority may be to bring people from different faiths or ethnic background together, for others, it may be about enabling people from different estates or areas to mix, whilst for others, it may be about helping young people and old people to get to know and understand each other. Some Pathfinders have made the point that for them it was important not to focus on race since this can sometimes create a perception amongst the majority community that they are excluded.”

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Breaking Barriers
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10 Principles of Effective Practice

Using the Right Facilities

Whilst projects need to engage people in a variety of settings, the effective use of facilities within community cohesion work can contribute significantly to project outcomes. It has been recognised that poor urban architecture and decaying physical environments can exacerbate community conflict and create a lack of cohesion. Access to venues can provide an escape from this environment and provide a neutral space for new interactions and bring people together from different areas, ethnicities and backgrounds.

Whilst new, high quality venues placed within estates – such as the Pavilion in Brent – can open up new opportunities and attract participants, we have also seen how other spaces such as Lilian Baylis Old School (LBOS) in Lambeth can be effective in different ways, attracting people from a wider geographical area.

In some ways what is more important is that, regardless of the type of venue, they are also:

- **Accessible** – meaning affordable, available at relevant times and open in the broadest sense of the word
- **Comfortable** – a place in which people can feel at ease
- **Neutral** – in terms of not being perceived as being either provided for, nor owned by a particular constituency
- **Within reach** – either locally situated or via good transport links to encourage use from different areas
- **Positive in their contribution** – minimising the negative impacts of use to local residents and businesses
- **Connected** – working with agencies and organisations that are locally engaged to help bring people to venues
- **Professional** – ensuring that delivery at the venue is of high quality as poor experiences will lessen ongoing engagement

“The kids around here all come here, it’s a hub and they feel safe here. It’s calmer locally, there are less kids hanging around and in groups. Why would you not come here? There’s lots happening and it’s free. Because it’s so big this place... it doesn’t feel that it belongs to anyone... it is structured though.”

Natalie, Lilian Baylis Old School, Lambeth
It has been evident that it is not so much the background of staff members as their ability to relate to people from a variety of social and cultural environments and work comfortably in a wide range of settings that counts most in community cohesion work.

Having, or working alongside, locally identifiable staff employed over a long period of time in particular neighbourhoods and estates helps to create local intermediaries between different groups of people. These familiar faces can then negotiate relationships, be it at a football tournament; between residents and users of sports facilities or even on residential away trips.

There is also a need for organisations to embed the experience and learning from staff within the organisation, so that successful approaches are not lost when staff move on. Staff will need supporting in their professional development through workforce training, which has been a feature of the Breaking Barriers project and Football Foundation investment.  

Previous research has argued that whilst sport should not be seen as an end in itself, its ability to engage and provide a space with the potential to suspend the burden of everyday relations and behaviour, is of key importance in social development. This is particularly so in relation to community cohesion objectives in that it provides participants with opportunities to:

- Enter unfamiliar locations and meet new people
- Create neutral times and places in which activity happens
- Reflect on experiences with other participants as a way of developing relationships and interaction
- Be encouraged to take responsibility
- Act as a gateway for ongoing participation and development

The Breaking Barriers programme has revealed both football and boxing to be particularly well placed to bring people of a range of ages together from a wide variety of territories, postcodes and ethnicities. Furthermore, the evidence from Lilian Baylis Old School (LBOS) in Lambeth has been that the delivery of a range of activities can also help to broaden relationships, allowing participants to interact with people in less familiar environments.

“Football is good ‘cos it keeps us off the street and away from the bad stuff.”

Amad, Rockingham crew
10 Principles of Effective Practice

It is also important to use the opportunities presented by sport effectively if the interaction created in a sports event or session is to be made more meaningful. In particular:

- The development of teams can help embed relationships
- Providing routes to sports qualifications and certificates can give participants a sense of achievement, progression and responsibility
- Providing opportunities for volunteering and coaching can help:
  - Embed participants’ involvement in a project
  - Develop responsible roles
  - Introduce individuals to work with other groups in a structured and neutral way
  - Provide easily recognised progression routes

5 Appropriate Events

Events, and particularly sports events and tournaments, can be important points of interaction. To be effective they need to:

- Be run smoothly and professionally, in appropriate facilities
- Have adequate capacity, especially for large events such as football tournaments
- Convey a sense of being a special occasion
- Create opportunities for people and different teams to mix and exchange
- Help to broaden horizons

However, whilst events provide important moments where people can come together, they also need to be staged within a broader context of project work. This is important in two respects:

1. To be most effective they need to build on existing work by projects at the local level to ‘bring’ people with them
2. They should be part of a longer term developmental approach

Residential trips and visits can also be important events for community cohesion projects, providing opportunities to experience strange and new environments which help to bond people from different estates or backgrounds.

Case Study – The Dublin Trip

In summer 2009, an exchange programme was organised between young people from LBOS and a group from Dublin. Following a week spent in Lambeth, the Londoners headed over to join the Irish youngsters in a big house in the depths of the countryside. The groups were split up into mixed dorms. Oli Rahman, ACN’s Programme Development Manager says, “That first night, they were all a bit wary which was interesting to watch but there were a few comedians in there and that began to break things down.” Oli felt proud of how the group behaved and the way they developed, “It was good to see how they worked outside their own environment. We’ve always seen them within their comfort zones, even though they’re from different estates. Now, I noticed that they kind of looked after each other.”
10 Principles of Effective Practice

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Active Communities Network

6 Positive Peer Pressure

One of the most effective ways in which the work of community cohesion projects can extend their impact and influence a wider group of people in a particular area is through the development of peer role models. We have seen in a number of cases the importance of key individuals who are trusted and familiar within the locality in engaging particular groups of marginalised young people. This is especially effective where participants on projects are given access to the skills and training that enable them to help deliver project activities themselves and even gain employment in other areas.

Case Study – Andy and Asad’s Story

Asad and Andy are 17 years old and of Somali origin, living in Lambeth. They have been able to broaden their networks and freedom to move around London through their engagement with LBOS. Rubel Ahmed met them both at a football session and as they built up their trust in him, they have been confident to pursue a series of coaching and refereeing courses which has led onto work with a Saturday League and volunteering at a number of big events and tournaments. Asad is now clear that he wants ‘to be a role model’ whilst Andy talks of ‘introducing young people to things, offering young people opportunities to get off the streets’. Perhaps, the change in both boys is best summarised in this statement from Andy: ‘One day me and Asad will be doing what Rubel’s doing.’

7 Partnership Working

All organisations have limits in terms of capacity, scope and experience so it is important that community cohesion commissioners work with locally engaged and experienced organisations. This helps to enable new approaches and bring new participants but also to embed these new approaches within existing structures.

Whilst this might be seen to preclude organisations without a pre-existing record of working in an area it should be possible to build partnerships which augment the work of those organisations that are more established and trusted locally.

Generally, commissioners and projects seeking to deliver sports-based developmental work should look for delivery agencies that are:

- Independent and innovative
- Cooperative and not duplicating
- Providing value for money
- Capable of growth
- Receiving funding from a variety of sources
In addition, those seeking community cohesion outcomes should:

- Be able to engage, work and develop partnerships with a range of organisations
- Recognise the complexity of community cohesion and be willing to learn
- Have staff that are appropriately skilled and able to relate to people from a wide variety of backgrounds
- Be focused on community cohesion outcomes, not their own project profile

In community cohesion work it is important that commissioners are not overly concerned with the branding of the project, but allow the approaches outlined in this report to develop within existing organisational structures. This project did not have successes because the work was labelled as Breaking Barriers, or even community cohesion but by a subtle application of approaches and use of locally recognised individuals and organisations who were its brand.

The work by organisations involved in Breaking Barriers has demonstrated the benefits of a developmental approach with a number of compelling individual stories. These emphasise the potential for community cohesion work to enable participants to grow from an involvement in conflictual and criminal activity to internships, volunteering and employment.

Creating pathways, often through non mainstream education, from participant to volunteer/deliverer and even employment provides a powerful visible route for others to follow and helps develop the next generation of community leaders. In generating such pathways it is important to:

- Identify the potential of participants whilst recognising different starting positions
- Provide the means for development, whether through formal training and coaching or through informal and non mainstream education
- Use sport as a route to other positive outcomes, including training, youth work and personal development
- Raise awareness and provide training to tackle barriers, help develop conflict resolution and widen horizons and networks
- Recognise that development is rarely linear and work to agreed outcomes not delivery targets
- Take a long term approach that involves sustained and in depth work with individuals and particular neighbourhoods
- Generate, process and present appropriate evidence of impact
10 Principles of Effective Practice

Case Study – Alan’s Journey

Alan was in custody aged 15 and became involved with Breaking Barriers whilst on probation. He had developed goals and plans while in prison and wanted to ‘change my life around’. He found the options presented by the Probation Service frustrating and things only started to change when he met Steve who he felt was the first professional person to encourage him and see the ‘leader in me’. He started a Community Sports Leaders Award and got involved with a range of sporting activities, appreciating that sport provided him with transferable skills like focus, drive, discipline and passion. After further training, he was offered the chance to do some peer mentoring. He realized ‘his passion is working with young people’ and facilitating their development: ‘We are in a prime position to work with other young people. We’re at an age where we can relate to young people, find creative ways to work with young people…’

Smarter Commissioning

The Breaking Barriers approach has illustrated both some of the teething problems associated with, and also the effectiveness of, funding arrangements which sit alongside and are co-presented with other investments. Whilst at times this can blur the lines of accountability, it can also generate better outcomes. This approach allows staff to find creative ways of continuing the community cohesion approach within organisations beyond the life of specific projects. In order to support this push for sustainability commissioners should also seek to develop:

- Expert practitioner groups
- Capacity building infrastructure and funding
- Training and workforce development
- Access to monitoring and evaluation tools
- Networks of key partners through which delivery partnerships can be built

“We’re part of a bigger picture here, we’re cogs in the wheel and it’s about how it all works together…”

Staff member, Active Communities Network
Increasingly, ‘smart’ commissioning emphasises the need to be able to fund projects that are more likely to deliver desired outcomes. Accordingly, it is vital that a framework is developed for assessing the achievement of outcomes relating to the community cohesion agenda. For commissioners, it is also necessary to have a set of indicators that inform them of the type of organisation best placed to deliver community cohesion outcomes. We would suggest that delivery organisations need to demonstrate:

- An understanding of the specificities and context of community cohesion in their literature and applications
- An ability to embed community cohesion approaches within the wider work of the organisation and its partnerships
- How they employ sport and culture as engagement and developmental tools rather than as ends in themselves
- How they create pathways for individuals to develop skills and access training, in particular, with a view to becoming locally identifiable peer role models
- An ability to use one-off events within broader strategies of engagement, accessing unfamiliar environments and creating opportunities for meaningful interaction
- An ability to access facilities that are ‘open’, flexible and above all neutral spaces for people to interact
- Their position within broader, ongoing delivery, funding and development partnerships
- The deployment of ‘front line’ staff that are embedded in local networks and able to relate to people of all backgrounds

“It’s a good place to have here. It’s good to see things differently, how things can be changed, how things can be done differently.”

Shenice, Lilian Baylis Old School, Lambeth
Concluding Comments

Breaking Barriers was in part a research project that should inform both the delivery of the project but also ongoing practice, commissioning and evaluation of sports based community cohesion interventions. As such ACN has sought to take a lead in the development of this important area of work as a learning process, something that has been supported by funders, notably the Football Foundation. This document summarises that learning in terms of understanding the role that sport can play in generating more cohesive communities; approaches to project delivery and the organisation of interventions; and smart commissioning.

It sits alongside a longer research report which provides more in depth evidence and case study material; as well as more focused practice guides.

Both of these are available from: www.substance.coop/projects/breaking-barriers

Research Team

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In particular we would like to thank the Active Communities Network and the Football Foundation for commissioning and supporting the research and for staff of all partners for their contributions to it. Further and special thanks must go to the staff and participants in the locations where we conducted our work. The venues and organisations we engaged with all provided excellent access and support and in many cases inspired our vision of how sport-based community cohesion work should be organised and delivered. All young people’s names have been changed in the report although staff and project workers have not.