Social inclusion and social capital

In the final section of the report we draw together four main lessons from the evaluation with respect to how Unified Sports might further social inclusion of athletes with disabilities within their local communities.

We have identified four domains in which the Unified Sports programme in generating Social Capital - is arguably the hardest to achieve as many community partners such as local sports clubs and other groups may be uninterested or disinterested in taking part. Alternatively, they may lack the necessary capacity and infrastructure to support the programme to the development of friendships and social capital. This study was conducted with funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under Cooperative Agreement U50/DP000304 awarded to Special Olympics International, Washington DC, USA.

‘Unified Gives Us a Chance’

The Unified Sports® Programme

This programme combines players with intellectual disabilities (called athletes) and those without intellectual disabilities (called partners) in the same teams. Around 90% of Unified Sports programmes are mainly initiated through school as well as local sports clubs settings. They are currently active in more than 21 countries in Europe, Europe. Basketball and football (soccer) are the two Sports focused on in these countries.

Looking to the future

This study was aimed to examine the strength of the relationships that young people that participate in Unified Sports feel within their communities.

‘UNIFIED GIVES US A CHANCE’

Further Information

Some full details of the study are available online at site www.science.ulect.ac.uk/unifiedsports

A copy of the full report of the evaluation can be downloaded here. Also available is a report detailing the methods used and an electronic version of this summary report.

This study was conducted with funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under Cooperative Agreement U50/DP000304 awarded to Special Olympics International, Washington DC, USA. 1

The Evaluation Study

This term local capital is used to describe the social networks and connections that individuals have with each other and their communities. This includes networks for mutual trust, reciprocity, support and capital.

The Final Report

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The Evaluation Study

This term aimed to examine the strength of the relationships that young people that participate in Unified Sports feel within their communities. It was designed to identify the key factors which make a successful programme that lead to the greater inclusion of athletes in their local communities and to understand how the programme was embedded in local social and community systems. We also wanted to highlight the contribution of the programme to the development of friendships and social capital, and to suggest how the programme could be improved. Finally we planned to identify the barriers to social inclusion and the challenges made by the programme by overcoming these.

Methods

Commenting in April/2009 and continuing for a fifteen-month period, this largely qualitative study worked with young people across five countries - Sweden, Poland, Ukraine, Germany and Belgium. Working internationally led to the development of partnerships with academics in local Universities and with local SOC programme staff who assisted with translation and data gathering. In all, over 200 young people were involved. In each country, training or competitive events for Unified Sports were held in two different locations to ensure that each young person met players - athletes and partners - aged 12-25 years, but also their coaches, the parents of athletes and partners, and members of the local community (see Table 1 overview).

Data was gathered through interviews with individuals and teams, and through talking to people their personal histories using a combination of methods. Hence a rich picture was built of the experiences of European athletes with intellectual disabilities and their teams.

Conclusions

Unified Sports is an exciting initiative that provides young people with disabilities many life experiences of young people with intellectual disabilities (called partners) in the same teams.

We have identified four domains in which the Unified Sports programme in generating Social Capital - is arguably the hardest to achieve as many community partners such as local sports clubs and other groups may be uninterested or disinterested in taking part. Alternatively, they may lack the necessary capacity and infrastructure to support the programme to the development of friendships and social capital.

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1. Personal Development through Sport

All the people we spoke with were clear that the young participants gain personally from their participation as shown below. This occurred in four main areas.

4. **Organisational Ethos**: The Unified Sports Organisational Ethos, which guides the behavior and attitudes of all those taking part, presents a challenge to the social exclusion of people with disabilities that occurs as Unified Sports is not about abilities and it is not about playing together.

**Friendship is the most important thing about being a member of a unified team. We are all friends both on and off the field. And we also have a good connection with our coaches and I think I can say we are friends.** (Partner, Poland)

**Relationships with people: Friendships were a central and vital aspect of being part in the Teams. Friendships developed between athletes and partners as well as among relationship between coaches and coaches. There is evidence of the successful growth of these relationships beyond the sports-field.**

**Relationships are: New friendships, Friendship with a parent, Friends in the game.**

**Friendship promotes the development of strong bonds between athletes, parents, and coaches, contributing to the growth of social capital.** These activities bring about changes for these kids. I have seen very big changes in them in their physique and how they act with others. This is something that I want to continue. I have a strong commitment to these kids. (Coach, Hungary)

**Focus on sport: Athletes and players share an interest in sport. This provides a focus for what they have in common rather than emphasising their differences.**

**We talk about sports, what teams we support and games that we attend.** We talk about the things that we are interested in. (Partner, Ukraine)

**The second domain we explored in the data was the inclusion and integration of people with intellectual disabilities. The role of coaches, which is to bring them together and get them to laugh at people, but I didn't know much before. I just did it because I knew how to respond if I see it and I will stand up for people if I can. It is wrong to laugh at other people who are different.**

**Barriers and bridges to social inclusion: Unified Sports presents challenges to the obstacles to social inclusion through gradual yet continous phases of normalisation and integration and contact sports, positive representations of people with intellectual disabilities and through enabling the development of parent alliance and advocacy.**

There are stereotypes about people with intellectual disability that keep away from each other. Now they are difficult and as on (in a Unified Sports team) they can learn about the stereotypes and use that just as they are people. (Partner, Poland)

**Coaches played a key role in building bridges both within team and into the wider community.** It is important to really know your partner, all of them as individuals, because they often need some help with something that we are not a sport problem but maybe something at school or at home. We include them and they have helped us on a bit of what we do as Unified coaches. (Coach, Hungary)

**I know that friendships exist between the field and athletes and parents, I believe in the club, that people come together to do different activities, not just sports activities, we want to help them to be able to play, go to dances, go on holiday, go to home, and we also organise for nursery activities and invite everyone to participate in this.** So we have lots of different non-activities that correct people and they help them to spend more time together. (Coach, Serbia)

3. **Unified Sports – a micro-culture within a wider dominant culture.**

The third aspect of our findings related to the relationships between the micro-culture of Unified Sports and the wider community from which the participants came. There were important differences between the two cultures but Unified Sports provided a bridge towards social inclusion as the Figure illustrates. The development of team attitudes and their social dynamism, broadening horizons, and international competitions. The benefits to athletes are manifold – broadening horizons, and international competitions. The benefits to athletes are manifold – broadening horizons, and international competitions. The benefits to athletes are manifold – broadening horizons, and international competitions. The benefits to athletes are manifold – broadening horizons, and international competitions. The benefits to athletes are manifold – broadening horizons, and international competitions.

4. **Unified gives us a chance**

**Inclusion and integration of people with intellectual disabilities. Parents and athletes spoke of the negative attitudes they had experienced.**

**I was ashamed to say ‘I want to do a job to these people (with intellectual disabilities)’ in the past. But now I feel different. I only know that Unified Sports is a chance for them.** (Athlete, Serbia)

**Sometimes I have not enough money to buy the bus for the training, sometimes I walk there, but it is a long long way and we are very lazy.** We are very lazy we know we are nobody. (Athlete, Serbia)

**Connections charts, which mapped the range and extent of an individual’s social network were also created.** We used questionnaires to gather demographic data about players.

**Data was collected in the local language and later translated and sent to the research manager for transcription and analysis. A detailed description of the transcription and analysis. A detailed description of the transcription and analysis.**

**Findings from the Evaluation**

Unified Sports appears to be a relatively simple idea – bringing together two groups of young people around a common interest in playing sport. However we have brought together two groups of young people around a common interest in playing sport. However we have brought together two groups of young people around a common interest in playing sport. However we have brought together two groups of young people around a common interest in playing sport. However we have brought together two groups of young people around a common interest in playing sport. However we have brought together two groups of young people around a common interest in playing sport.

**Total Sample 221**

| Life story - partner | 17 |
| Life story - athlete | 18 |
| Parent interview | 24 |
| Partner interview | 28 |
| Athlete interview | 25 |

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2. Social inclusion within Unified Sports

The second domain we explored in the data was the contribution of Unified Sports towards social inclusion. We found that there were six key elements within the Unified Sports programme, which supported the growth and the maintenance of social inclusion and trust between players. Improved ability to lead greater in social situations. My skills have improved. I have more stamina and I can run faster, I am more accurate in shooting, yes I am better; we train together and he does not judge people. ’(Parent of athlete, Serbia)

**Improvements in confidence, self-esteem, communication skills were reported by athletes.** My skills have improved, I have more stamina and I am better. It is all part of Special Olympics and I say that my skills can work, I would really give it a go in my school. (Coach, Poland)

**Sports Skills:** Players reported improvements in their abilities on the sports field, as well as increased fitness and technical ability. They emphasised the importance of regular training and trust between players. Improved ability to lead greater in social situations.

**Sports facilities:** The access to community ‘places’ such as sports facilities would be welcomed by the Teams.

**Access to places:** We go to the town square and talk, or to the games arcade, or we invite. (Partner, Poland)

**Financial costs:** I look at the athletes who travel and who compete and you see the difference, they come back a different person, confident and independent. (Parent, Hungary)

**Opportunities for travel and competition:** We talk about sports, what teams we support and games that we attend.** We talk about the things that we are interested in. (Partner, Ukraine)

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