

Football for Unity Project Self-evaluation Report

1. *Brief Description of Project*

The **Football 4 Unity** project addresses issues of equity and social inclusion and intends to break down stereotypes based on prejudice and bias. Essentially, it aims to provide equal access to sport and physical activity whatever the age, gender or ethnicity of the participants. It pays particular attention to integrating different groups within a community such as girls and boys, minority ethnic and faith groups, travellers, asylum seekers and refugees as well as individuals who need support to learn English as an additional language.

2. *Tasks and Milestones*

It was intended that the project would be a sport-based community relations and reconciliation project that the University of Brighton in partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council and the local community and districts of Eastbourne would develop and pilot at the University of Brighton's Eastbourne campus. It involved bringing together groups of adults and up to 50 boys and girls to participate together in weekly football coaching session lasting approximately two hours. The project was facilitated by four coaches and one project leader recruited from the University of Brighton. Local sports coaches, Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club, Eastbourne Borough Football Club and community leaders also took part.

The football for unity project started in September 2005 and aimed to target particular disadvantaged groups such as children from families who are economic migrants, travellers, asylum seekers, and other marginalised groups in the south east of England. The first project was piloted in September 2005 and was initiated in order to establish the feasibility. The outcomes of the first project were generally positive and led to project two in January 2006 and a third project in May 2006.

3. *Partnership working*

Football for Unity consisted of several community partners – University of Brighton, Brighton and Hove Albion F.C, Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange, East Sussex County Council, youth development service, Eastbourne Borough Council, Eastbourne Borough F.C, local junior and secondary schools. All of these agencies worked together in developing the project during the first twelve months of its establishment.

During the course of 2005 – 2006 three projects were run for ten weeks for communities in Eastbourne. This involved 32 coaches, 65 children per project from six Junior and secondary schools. Coaches involved in the project used this football for Unity project as a basis for their training and preparation for football 4 peace in Israel and followed the guidance within the unique coaching manual. All of these individuals were FA qualified volunteer coaches and leaders from Brighton University who worked with local volunteer coaches and in partnership with coaches from Brighton and Hove Albion FC. Wherever possible, there were mixed coaching groups/teams of 12 who were coached in separate quadrants of the facility and each project culminated in an inclusive football festival at the end.

4. *Outputs*

While getting children to enjoy learning and playing football together in non-threatening settings is one of the guiding principles of F4U, through experience the coaching team had learned that simply playing football is not sufficient to promote the kind of interaction that can allow longer-term relationships and cross-community understanding to flourish.

A major innovation, therefore, has been the development of the F4U coaching manual, the idea behind which is to underpin a technical football coaching programme with values and principles which in practice help to promote mutual understanding and inclusive citizenship. The F4U project introduced a series of training for volunteer coaches that included University of Brighton-based training for coaches and volunteers in order to improve community links between sport leaders from partner communities and train them as mentors with the F4U Manual. The intention was that this would form the basis of training for other related initiatives such as the football 4 peace project in Isarel.

An academic supervisory team acted as a facilitator and worked with the community supervisor and project manager to liaise with local communities. The project was subject to quality assurance and progress review by the academic and community supervisors and written evaluation provided. The research framework was based upon a multi-methods approach that included the following research instruments for collecting data:

- Pre and post project attitudinal questionnaires for all children and coaches;
- In-depth 'ethnographic' study of project 1 & 2
- Evaluation reports from leaders and coaching staff;
- Interviews with parents and community leaders
- Interviews with children
- Weekly project overview and project report
- Observations
- Documentary filming and photographic evidence.

The working party has consisted of 15 members each with strategic roles. Several members of the working group have attended international conferences and been able to present to a wider audience on how to implement a values based approach to teaching sport. The project leader has also presented a paper at The CUPP conference hosted by the University of Brighton in April 2006.

5. *Impact*

Four focus group interviews were undertaken by Dan Burdsey and John Doyle during the final coaching session in June 2006 at the Chelsea School Sports Centre, University of Brighton. The groups were divided by both age and gender, with one group comprising younger primary age boys, two comprising older primary age boys, and one comprising older primary age girls. Each group contained between six and eight participants. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded for subsequent analysis of data. The names of participants have been changed for purposes of anonymity. What follows is a selection of interview transcripts pertaining to issues linked to the project's aims and outcomes.

The majority of children who voiced an opinion stated that, overall, they enjoyed the project. Unsurprisingly, along with the opportunity to play football, cementing existing and developing new friendships ranked highly in the reasons participants mentioned for attending the project. Whilst many children attended with existing friends, others reported that they had made new friends from other schools in Eastbourne.

Significantly, interaction was not necessarily facilitated through the football coaching drills themselves. Instead, it was actually the process of being together at the project and, more specifically, the time spent outside of the football components, e.g. breaks in play, that proved significant. In fact, the girls reported that it was during breaks in play that some of the most significant interaction had taken place.

For some, it was the fact that they were attending a *football* project that was significant in facilitating interaction. For others, it was not football specifically but the fact they were involved in an activity that revolved around team-work that was important.

Many children were aware of the educational component of the project and the fact it was about citizenship and friendship rather than simply about football coaching. They were asked what they perceived the aims of the project to be. Some thought that it was about:

AMY: Communicating with other people...If you make more friends, you are more likely to be a good footballer.

SOPHIE: How football can make you closer to people...I think it's just about meeting new people and playing games with them. We learn things and we are meeting new people which is really nice. When we come, like, every week we've got, like, something to look forward to, 'cos we can have a laugh.

CONNOR: Really, the whole project is for mixing together people, from like different countries, so people don't keep fighting.

Sophie went on to pick up on the notion of interacting with people from different cultures or backgrounds. Despite the fact that the majority of participants throughout the year have been 'white British', she posited that:

SOPHIE: I thought it was about the world. Different countries.

DB: What, meeting people from different countries?

SOPHIE: Yeah! It is about that really, yeah!

6. Sustainability

At present there is empirical evidence that is currently being evaluated (See above). This has included questionnaire surveys of the children involved within the project as well as several focus group interviews. The project team also has anecdotal evidence to show that many of the young people gained both personally but also educationally from such experiences. In this respect, the children had an enormous amount of fun, learned a bit of football, made new friends, were given opportunities to visit each other's communities, and started to begin to view 'the other' in different ways. It is hoped and intended that a future project might help to facilitate a programme whereby community/sport leaders can begin to develop sustainable cross-community links and networks.

We believe that the football for unity project has provided excellent training and preparation for volunteer coaches for the parallel project based in Israel and the intended transference to countries such as Cyprus. From a University perspective F4U was a very good advertisement for UK excellence in education and training. In this context the F4U model is adaptable to any social context where there is community disharmony and dovetails with existing sport-based enterprises both nationally and internationally. In this respect the working party and management team intend to offer the opportunity for more children across other community networks within the south-east. It is also hoped that the F4U curriculum and associated training manual can be developed into a more professionally produced learning resource to include DVD material, graphics and photographs to accompany the text.

In this respect, the team with who the children had worked have developed a reservoir of knowledge, expertise, logistical know-how and experienced leadership. The model is a tried, tested and successful model that has been quality assured (by University of Brighton) through which there is now access to a pool of highly trained and well qualified volunteer coaches and teachers who can make a contribution to the project's position on Anti-Racism and increase the profile in the local Community. Ultimately this can develop positive behaviours and attitudes that transfer beyond the football pitch and encourage team bonding and respect amongst young players who may sharing experiences and empathy for one another and enable youngsters to become responsible citizens of their own communities.