



## People's Health Trust - Active Communities Case Study

# Positive 4 Young People - Activity Roadshows

## Introduction

People's Health Trust believes in a world without health inequalities. The Trust funds small and local projects in neighbourhoods that are most affected by health inequalities with funding generated through The Health Lottery. Active Communities is one of its funding programmes and grants aim to support people to create or shape local projects that will help their community or neighbourhood to become even better, and require local people to design and run these projects. Typically lasting up to two years, the grants are between £5,000 and £50,000 for each project. The programme's main intended outcomes are:

- **Collective Control:** Ideas designed and led by local people. Regular participation of residents, who are empowered to lead and take ownership of the project design, delivery and development.
- **Social links and ties:** Stronger connections between people. Decreased social isolation and loneliness, and improved connection, friendships and collective support networks among participants.

As part of the 2016 - 18 Active Communities evaluation, this case study explores how local people got involved with and helped to shape the delivery of Positive 4 Young People's (P4YP) activity roadshows. Drawing on telephone interviews with project staff, a delivery partner and participants, the case study explains how people came together and participated, what they learnt and achieved along the way.

## Key facts

### HealthCalm

Derbyshire Health  
Community Interest  
Company (CIC) area

**£49,984** of People's  
Health Trust funding

### Main activities

The project aims to support community leaders to deliver activities for young people including dancing, boxing, mobile skate park activities, graffiti art and fencing

### Key outcomes

- Improved social links and ties
- Increased confidence, knowledge, skills and assets
- Collective action and control



## About the project

Based in Chesterfield in Derbyshire, P4YP is a Community Interest Company that provides early intervention services to raise young people's aspirations and meet the needs of families in the local community. Many residents in the area experience disadvantage and financial barriers that limit the local activities and services that are available to them. P4YP delivered a programme of activity roadshows with local partners, informed by what young people said would engage and inspire them, which included boxing, fencing and dancing sessions, a mobile skate park and graffiti art. More widely, the project set out to involve residents in running the project to create stronger communities by introducing something positive in to the area for local people to develop.

After a year and a half, the project had engaged more than 450 participants, with around three-quarters of those taking part in activities regularly. This case study focuses on the dance, fencing and boxing roadshows that were particularly successful. Through word of mouth, the boxing roadshows had great appeal amongst adult females as well as young people so staff approached the local boxing club to start running women only and intergenerational sessions. Over time, these sessions have proved inspirational in helping to strengthen the community and improve wellbeing. Following the success of the overall project, participant volunteers are now developing a new project.

## How are local people shaping and leading the project?

There were a range of processes in place for young people to get involved in shaping and leading the project, but often participants shared their views informally through conversation. Having informed the design by responding to a P4YP consultation in schools, which asked what new opportunities they would like to see locally, young people regularly had a say in how the activities were run by talking to project workers and commenting using a 'wall of words'. Within sessions, they have shaped the content and format, for example, by making song, dance and drama choices as part of the dance roadshows. The dance sessions were "ever-evolving" in response to how the children felt on the day and what they said they wanted to do. All activity sessions, including fencing, started by discussing what to cover that session, with some young people happy to lead from the outset and others needing a bit more support.

"There are a lot of them who know themselves [and what they want to do], and there are others who need to be led." (Project staff)

There were also more regular arrangements in place for young people to contribute, although these are not specific to the project. Two young people are members of P4YP's management committee and help to shape all of the organisation's work.

## What has the project achieved?

### Improved social links and ties

By taking part in the roadshows, young people have developed **new friendships** and become more confident, raised their aspirations and become more active – both physically and within the community.

"There are a lot of them who know themselves [and what they want to do], and there are others who need to be led."

(Project staff)



“They have developed different friendships, which is what we wanted to do, and then friendships in schools. With those who are vulnerable and quite isolated, having the added confidence can spread at school and in the community. It brings different perspectives, new friendship groups and you can see their confidence improve from that. They started quite shy and now they are judging [fencing] bouts”. (Project staff)

Importantly, through these new friendships the children have gained confidence in speaking to new people, **increasing social connections between and within different groups**. Staff said that the older dance participants often take the younger ones “under their wing” and the younger children learnt how to talk to the older ones. They have socialised together during school lunch breaks, shared ideas and offered encouragement as they practiced and planned for the next sessions. In a more informal way, they have developed **collective support networks**, helping them to cope with any difficulties they might face.

“It has been fascinating to watch... The confidence is the first things you see, [the younger ones] are not worried about bumping into the older children.” (Project staff)

“They’ve become more sociable, seem to mix better and seem to face challenges a bit better.” (Project staff)

Some young people have attended more than one activity in different areas of the town. Several went to dancing and boxing classes and, from there, joined the fencing. This has created **different friendships from different areas** and further increased their confidence.

The boxing roadshows offered an opportunity for parents and children to come together to try something new. Participants welcomed the **intergenerational** aspect of these sessions, which was also an example of increasing social connections between different groups. They were keen to highlight the **increased sense of community** the project had created by ensuring that everyone felt welcome and comfortable to take part.

“I like the fact that me and my girls can go together.” (Participant)

“I want to do what my Mum does as well.” (Participant)

#### **Increased confidence, knowledge, skills and assets**

Participants have grown in **confidence** not only from new friendships, but also because they have stepped outside their comfort zones and tried new activities. Increases in self-confidence have helped individuals to develop their **skills** and to perform in front of others, and staff commented that they have witnessed a growth in confidence of both individuals and groups. Talking about the fencing roadshows, a project partner said:

“You can see different levels, but generally there is a lift in confidence.” (Project partner).

At the fencing activity sessions in particular, this confidence has come from engaging with an activity that was so different to what the young people have done before and some had not previously participated in any activities outside of school at all. Building on the success of the roadshows,



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(Project staff)

the fencing instructor set up a junior fencing series competition and after advertising on social media, nearly 40 young people competed.

“It is something they thought would never apply to them. They’d always thought of it as an elitist sport.” (Project partner).

Through regular engagement with the roadshow activities, participants have become increasingly **empowered to take the lead**.

“One little girl... was very shy and new to the area... She was quite clingy at first, but by the end of the first six-week term, she was singing in school, surrounded by older girls and boys, discussing what to do at the next session. She was teaching them dance routines. She has become a lot more confident and now attends a dance club on a Saturday morning.” (Participant)

Staff observed changes in the young people they worked with, too, commenting on the change in their overall outlook and growing levels of **aspiration**, which both made them **happier** and contributed towards an improved **quality of life**.

“[From being] quite shy and isolated and quite distant, to engaging confidently; a completely different person – you can see it in the eyes, really”. (Project partner).

“A lot of our parents don’t give their children experiences... And [now] they’ve learnt that it doesn’t have to cost a lot of money... Now, they appreciate the simple things, like singing and dancing, a bit more... They have a happier outlook, rather than sitting about and watching the telly, now they listen to music and make up dances.” (Project staff)

The adult boxing participants (over 100), many of whom had not tried boxing before, highlighted similar benefits. This was another positive outcome, and one they had not anticipated when they first set up the young people’s project.

“You feel better in yourself after doing it. It is confidence-building. You get to meet new people who have similar interests... Time for myself, and it’s a bit of fun.” (Participant)

“You think if you can do that, you can do other things, and apply it to everyday life.” (Participant)

By regularly attending sessions, participants also **learnt about other community groups**. For example, some of the fencing participants who had never engaged in any activities beforehand have since sought out and started to attend other clubs in the area.

### Collective action and control

Building on the organisation’s existing processes to support local people to get involved, young people and adults have influenced the design and delivery of the roadshows.

“In the area, people are quite vocal. They will tell you.” (Project staff)

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(Participant)



Project staff highlighted the importance of "**constant communication**", and noted that this did not necessarily involve asking participants questions, because they often proactively approached staff. When participants requested changes, the staff responded, changing session days and venues in order to make the activities more accessible. The processes in place for project evaluation demonstrate that the **activity roadshows have met participants' needs**, which is a key outcome of individual and collective action and control.

Participants felt the welcoming and comfortable atmosphere at the sessions had helped them achieve a tangible **sense of ownership**. The ability to have a say every time, alongside the act of participating in a new, challenging and enjoyable activity, proved to be **empowering** for many participants. One believed the **group element was vital**, because it created the atmosphere, ethos, and **collective support** in sessions to ensure participants felt free to have a go, to engage, and to achieve.

There was also evidence of **increased participation in community activity**. Project staff described how one young person supported the coach and, as a rugby player, he had respect and authority within the group. They felt that through sharing his enjoyment of fencing with others who were less familiar, he showed that fencing can be for anyone.

### Longer-term outcomes

Many of the roadshow activities supported participants to becoming more physically active, which has improved their physical and mental health as well as their personal wellbeing.

"Coming to boxing has been the best thing ever; I am keeping fit and have met lots of new friends from other places, who I didn't know before."  
(Participant)

"[I feel] less lethargic, it improves your mood. If you're feeling a bit stressed, you don't after."  
(Participant)

"Fencing is a gentleman's sport, really fast and physical. Those elements together are really good for kids."  
(Project partner).

The opportunity to work towards medals in fencing was a motivating factor that sustained participants' engagement and provided a sense of achievement, with the discipline required also supporting **educational achievement**. Project staff remarked that the dance participants who had to learn and remember new routines had improved their ability to concentrate, which had a positive impact on their schoolwork.

The success of the P4YP activity roadshows has encouraged the lead organisation to set up another project in a nearby neighbourhood that also experiences high levels of deprivation. Supported by participant volunteers, this new project will centre around healthy eating. PY4P are planning to run an intergenerational youth club with a vegetable co-operative, with young people working alongside older people.

"[This has been] quite a good platform when you look at what we've achieved in those areas. We've already had a small group of five volunteers [who want to work on the new project idea]."  
(Project staff)



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(Participant)

## What has worked well?

- Working with local people who know the area and the people and are able to create a welcoming atmosphere that facilitates engagement through the activities and opportunities to take control. The warm and encouraging nature of the experienced staff involved in delivering the roadshows together with the freedom to choose when to go, what and how much to do, has put people at ease to step out of their comfort zones. Offering the right balance of support and encouragement has helped to sustain participants' engagement with the roadshows over time and experience the associated benefits.
- Offering flexibility and no commitment. Every week there were different tasks and activities so everyone could drop in and out, the flexibility was important and enabled people to continue attending. They have always fitted straight back in; there was no stigma with non-attendance and the nominal charge and no contract arrangement helped to reduce financial barriers, noting that people were happy to pay for an activity - "they've paid to do it so they own it".

## What are the lessons?

- Know the target audience and ensure that the project is meeting an identified need. This has involved engaging local people in project design from the start, and staying in constant communication to ensure that the project continues to meet their needs.

## The future

Most of the activities will continue in some form beyond the project, either through links with the lead organisation or local community groups. For example, because of their involvement in this project, some young people have joined the fencing club in a neighbouring village and others have joined the local dance club. In addition, due to the success of the boxing roadshow, the boxing coach has agreed to continue with the female only sessions beyond the project because the project has grown demand locally.

Encouragingly, this means that the social, confidence and wellbeing outcomes that the project has achieved are likely to sustain. The fact that the project has demonstrated that it possible for local people to come together to deliver and participate in activities that meet local needs is significant in the area where people experience disadvantage and limited opportunities. In a relatively short time, the project has been able to inspire increased participation in community activity. It has the potential to grow individual and collective capabilities and capacity in the future.



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