

The following pages set out London Youth's response to the Public Health England consultation on developing a national physical activity approach.

About London Youth

London Youth supports a network of over 400 diverse community youth organisations where young people choose to go. With unique reach to over 75,000 young Londoners, we deliver programmes with and through this network in every London borough and out of town at our two outdoor learning centres.

Our mission is to support and challenge young people to become the best they can be.

We nurture a breadth of expertise, because it creates integrated pathways for young people to learn in a range of settings through sports development, youth social action, outdoor education, inclusion and employability.

We work with all young people, but place a particular emphasis on those who wouldn't otherwise have access to the kind of opportunities we offer.

London Youth does not consider itself a specialist health organisation, but we do have strong expertise in engaging young people in sport, and physical activity, through community settings and in outdoor education environments. As well as supporting their health and wellbeing, this helps to support them to make positive choices about their lives, including around healthy living. We have responded to all those questions where we believe this expertise can influence the opportunities for young people to engage in more physical activity.

1. Social norms

Our experience is that by making participation in sport - and broader healthy living choices - easy, routine and young-person led, there is a better chance of sustaining their impact. Therefore from our experience, the 'social norming' challenge is to ensure that access to opportunities to live healthy lives are engrained in a young person's experience within their community.

Research has shown that people are more likely to play sport into adulthood if they are really engaged with opportunities as 11-16 year olds. It may be stating the obvious, but there is clear value in the assertion that if you persuade people to love sport during their youth they're more likely to stick with it and create a lifelong habit.

One of the ways this can be achieved is through delivering access to sport and other physical activities through community settings. In London alone there are at least 400 community-based youth organisations working exclusively or significantly to support young people, beyond the family and formal education. These organisations – often, though not always described as 'youth clubs' – are supported by skilled staff and volunteers who have an expertise in building trusted relationships with young people so that they begin to better engage and progress to stronger pathways toward their own personal development.

These organisations provide an ideal vehicle for engaging young people in sport and in making healthy lifestyle choices, and understanding the options available to them. We have seen effective examples of partnerships where health professionals carry out outreach and engagement work within these settings. The recently opened TNG youth centre in Sydenham offers a range of sports

activities and services for young people and the local community including a health and wellbeing suite housing a walk-in sexual health clinic.

London Youth has delivered a particular structured programme aimed at increasing sports participation by young people. The programme has targeted London boroughs where levels of obesity and other child health challenges are disproportionately prevalent. For a relatively small investment, this structured approach to supporting young people has seen significant and widespread success in helping them change their lifestyles. These programmes can also be linked to other activities, such as healthy living advice, alcohol and drug awareness and smoking cessation, which may be better understood as part of a broader approach to health and wellbeing.

London Youth's *Getting Ready* sports development programme

Since 2009 London Youth has delivered a programme, funded by the GLA and more recently Sport England, which specifically targets support to inactive young people, engaging them in regular sport and physical activity in community settings.

The sports are chosen by young people and delivered in places young people choose to attend. Youth clubs are trusted institutions where young people feel safe and are encouraged by youth workers to engage in positive activities. The programme is particularly important for those young people who are disengaged from school and not accessing after school sports clubs.

Delivering the programme in this way helps remove some obstacles to participation: young people are already attending a youth club and can access sports sessions at no extra cost; clubs have the ability to provide a huge diverse range of sports so something for everyone to try; removing peer pressure by providing female-only sessions delivered by a female sports coach (behind closed doors if necessary). 43% of young people who now take part in regular sessions on the sports programme were previously considered inactive.

The programme helps sustain young people's involvement through:

- High quality provision – sessions are delivered by qualified and experienced local sports coaches using new equipment. Young people are more likely to come back each week – currently there is a 78% progression rate from taster sessions to completing an eight-week sports programme
- And through the element of choice and 'youth-leadership' where the sports are chosen by young people

Our experience is that many young people accessing youth clubs want to make healthier lifestyle choices – and they can see that their own personal development will be enhanced through these – but they do not readily always step forward to access health services delivered in conventional settings (e.g. through clinics or GP surgeries).

We are currently developing partnerships with Brook and MindEd (the Royal Colleges' new mental health advisory service) to broker additional support within community youth clubs. But local commissioners and public health boards could do more to proactively engage with community youth centres and offer to deliver services in settings where young people are more likely to access them.

2. Technology

This is not an area of huge expertise for us. However, we have piloted the development of a new urban sport – Cage Cricket – in community settings over the past year, with backing from the

Mayor of London. Cage Cricket is interesting because it uses flexible materials and resources to recreate a sporting environment and simulation of 'real' cricket in enclosed urban spaces. Alongside this, the sport combines the physical activity of playing an inclusive sport with a mobile app which young people can use to record their scores and virtually compete against one another. Streetgames, a partner organisation of ours, is also developing an app to sit alongside the provision of some of their sports programmes.

It is not a huge step to envisage this to move from 'pure' gaming and on-line competition to a more developmental model whereby young people could actively monitor their own physical performance and wellbeing while playing team sports or engaging in other physical activities.

Technology also should have an increasing bearing on the opportunities for young people with disabilities to participate in sport and in other healthy living activities.

3. Economic

Access to sport and healthy living options is still a major challenge for significant numbers of young people, particularly in areas with high indicators of economic deprivation or few community facilities. Our experience of delivering programmes to young people which support them to live more healthy lifestyles provides some useful learning and a case for further investment in a structured community-based approach to sustained support for health and wellbeing.

For example, in Tower Hamlets a group of young Muslim women who did not readily participate in sport were supported through their local youth club, the *Attlee Youth & Community Centre* near London's Spitalfields Market, to choose a sport that they wanted to try, and combine their learning with healthy eating sessions. Not only did they find the sport more enjoyable than they thought, the programme also gave them the opportunity to engage their family in broader discussion about healthy lifestyles. Two of the girls on the programme have now gone on to train as sports coaches working with younger peer groups at the club, and will instil similar learning to help develop their understanding too.

We also believe there is a clear need for further proactive outreach in health services, so that they are delivered in places where young people congregate and are therefore more likely to engage. We have found that this approach is essential in other contexts, such as employability and training. For some young people, it is not enough to simply market an activity or service and hope that young people attend or engage. While many will respond, many others will not – and some of these may be the ones facing the biggest barriers. So engagement with youth services and community-based professionals is key.

It is also important to recognise that young people with mental and physical health problems are often those furthest away from employment, and that sustained support from one worker who understands their needs can not only support them to participate in activities that improve their physical health and wellbeing – thus bringing them closer to being ready to access education or work) – but can also help them to recognise how these activities have developed their employability skills, and how these relate to what employers are looking for from them (e.g. teamwork, taking initiative, confidence, and so on).

4. Environmental

Our experience suggests that as well as opening access to more opportunities for young people to do sport and engage in health services within their communities (outlined above) two other policy options should be explored.

Firstly, developing the potential for further sharing of facilities between schools and youth clubs. Sports provision that is accessible to young people through school in the day time, and community

based youth centres in the evenings and at weekends, will afford more young people the chance to engage for longer, and as our examples show, may offer the chance to those who are not currently involved in school sport to become so. More school facilities should therefore be opened up to community usage (and vice versa).

Second there needs to be recognition of the value that outdoor education can offer young people who may be facing health inequalities. Many challenges to healthy lifestyles may come from within the communities in which young people live. While these can't be changed in the short-term, young people can be equipped with the confidence, the resilience and the relationships to make better choices and challenge some of these inequalities themselves. While school, family and – as set out above – community-based youth provision all play a huge part in this, the role of 'outdoor education' is also very important. Offering young people the opportunity to come out of their usual physical environment and learn – with each other and with trusted adults – how to challenge themselves and enjoy and flourish in the natural environment – can be a key part of their personal development. Many schools and youth organisations already build this kind of experience into their development plans for young people. There should be considering of how to make the provision of outdoor education opportunities a key plank of their strategy for addressing health inequalities amongst young people within schools and in the broader community.

5. Political

The principle of involving young people in decision making around community facilities and provision of sport, leisure and broader health and wellbeing services is an important one. Local youth parliaments and community consultations provide useful routes for this, but through networks such as London Youth's membership of 400 community based youth organisations there are opportunities to engage a potentially larger and broader range of views, particularly amongst those of young people facing disadvantage.

Equally significantly, more emphasis should be put on involving young people as stakeholders – broad members, advisory group members etc – in the development and management of local sport and health facilities and services. Our experience is that one of the reasons we have engaged as many young people onto our sport programme is that they get to choose the sport they will try and to shape some of the delivery. Some of the young people are also trained as coaches alongside the professional tutors so that they can encourage and support other young people to get involved. So this principle of involving young people in designing, delivering and implementing sports and health programmes is something we'd like to see applied in the development of mainstream sport, health and leisure provision.

6. Legal

We have no response to make here.

7. Ethical

Under the question on 'economic' changes (above) we have already outlined our thoughts on engaging those young people from poorer communities into healthy lifestyles. However, there are certainly further ethical questions around the provision of access to sport and health in poorer communities. Demand for sport among disadvantaged communities often exceeds current supply; participation in sport among those from lower socioeconomic groups is substantially lower (up to 15%) than for the highest groups. And according to a Streetgames survey 40% of girls and 30% of boys from lower income households had never taken part in an after school sports club. However, there are community workers, youth workers and sports coaches working within those communities who could – with training and support – provide enhanced support to young people to access health services and understand healthy living.

Through our sports development programme, we use high quality, trained professional coaches. But it is important for the success of the programme that they are not just technical experts, but are able to engage with young people. We have found that the best sessions on Getting Ready are those delivered by coaches who have experience of engaging young people who may face challenges – which can be very different to running sessions at a sports club. We have encouraged less experienced coaches to do a youth work qualification to provide them with the necessary skills and insight into how to engage these youngsters most productively.

This approach could be mirrored with healthy living information and advice. Providing training and professional development to youth workers, sports coaches, and others interacting with young people around basic wellbeing issues would create a permanent cadre of professionals who day by day could integrate healthy living support into their broader work with young people.

Finally, it is very important that the particular needs of young disabled people are recognised. We are not a specialist disability charity so will limit our input to where our experience has given us useful insights. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Young Disabled People provided a thorough and up to date audit of the practical issues disabled young people face through its ‘Removing barriers, promoting independence’ report published at the end of last year.¹ They experience difficulties getting around because of the lack of universal access to trains, buses and aeroplanes; their particular individual needs often mean it is harder for them to study at an equitable level to their non-disabled peers at university; independent living may be more difficult because of care needs and limited adapted housing; and, during leisure time to pick just two examples from many, cinemas aren’t particularly accessible and holidays are much harder to organise.² Despite great strides made on inclusion since the London Olympics and Paralympics of 2012, disabled young people still face significant barriers to participating in sport, as well as being twice as likely to be bullied³ and four times less likely to find work⁴ than non-disabled young people. For their families it can cost up to three times as much to raise a child with disabilities⁵ and they are thus much more likely to live in poverty⁶. This clearly has implications for physical activity which others will document with far more knowledge than we have.

However, from our experience, one recommendation we would make is that investment in improving facilities for young people with disabilities to access sport and other leisure activities should continue to be increased. And at the same time there is a need for investment in developing and supporting those professionals working with young people – youth workers and sports coaches are two examples – to improve their confidence and ability to engage young disabled people and adapt programmes and services so that they are accessible to young people of all abilities.

¹ www.mdctrailblazers.org/assets/0000/8395/APPG_report_Web.pdf

² *ibid*

³ www.anti-bullyingalliance.org/media/13558/SEND_bullying_literature_review_briefing.pdf

⁴ www.jrf.org.uk/publications/education-and-employment-disabled-young-people

⁵ www.dlf.org.uk/content/key-facts

⁶ www.childrengsociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/4_in_10_reportfinal.pdf