

Running head: Utilizing sports-based interventions

Mount Saint Vincent University

Utilizing sports-based intervention: A case study of a community youth club

by

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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study

March 2017

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Table of Contents

AbstractIII

Chapter 1- The Power of Sport

Introduction1

Literature Review..... 4

 Psychosocial Benefits..... 4

 Physical Benefits..... 6

 Sport as an Intervention.....8

Theoretical Frameworks..... 9

Methodology..... 13

 Program Details..... 13

 Participants..... 14

 Method of Data Collection..... 15

 Analysis..... 17

 Ethical Considerations..... 18

Chapter 2

Results 20

Discussion..... 31

Conclusion..... 37

References..... 43

Appendix A: Interview Guide- Youth
Workers..... 47

Appendix B: Interview Guide- Executive
Director..... 49

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Appendix C: Consent
Form..... 51

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Abstract

Prior literature suggests that participation in sports and athletics lead to both psychosocial and physiological benefits for youth participants and more specifically, at-risk youth.

This thesis focuses on the utilization of sport-based interventions (SBIs) in the programming of a community youth club in an Atlantic Canadian community. Short, semi-structured interviews with youth workers and an executive director were conducted in order to compile data involving the sport programming, retention rates, and structure of the local youth club. Upon analyzing the data, it became apparent that the youth club experiences near negligible rates of program drop out. Six significant themes were recognized: need for suitable staffing, using recreational and competitive athletics, promoting community involvement, affiliation to pre-established programs, suitable infrastructure and facilities, and consistent evaluation. These common themes are presented as a potential model for future youth programs to reference when utilizing and developing SBIs. It is believed that by following the suggestions of this model, there is an increased likelihood of a SBI having improved retention rates and favorable outcomes for youth participants.

Chapter One- The Power of Sport

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand.” - Nelson Mandela

In North American culture sports are observed through a wide variety of lenses. For many members of our society, sports are considered as being a valuable pastime that can offer community growth. Whether recreational or competitive, properly implemented sport programs have the potential to offer numerous positive outcomes and benefits for participants (Armour, Sandford & Duncombe, 2013; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2014; Magee & Jeanes, 2013). Such beneficial aspects are often magnified when working with at-risk children and youth. Currently, many programs geared towards at-risk youth implement the usage of sport and athletic teams to attract and aid youth in need. As both a former athlete and current youth worker, I have witnessed first-hand the potential positive outcomes involved with partaking in athletic programs. As a coach and athletic official, I have observed the positive effect that sports can have on both children and youth, equipping them with many skills beyond that of the physical. Formulating a sense of connectedness to a particular athletic activity or sport can act as a healthy alternative to high-risk activities in which socially vulnerable youth may participate. I feel I have benefited on many social and psychological levels as a result of more than two decades participating in sport and athletics. During my involvement with sport, I have been able to substantially develop leadership abilities, stress management skills and the capability to focus on specific goals.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

In regards to social benefits, I have made many long-term friends and gained valuable social insight through interacting with athletes and coaches from a vast array of backgrounds. Luckily, the majority of my experiences with sports and athletics were solely positive and any stressful or difficult circumstances often resulted in a positive outcome. It is likely that my involvement in sports and athletics was favorable because of my exposure to properly managed teams and programs. However, I recognize that this is not the case for some individuals who have participated in sport. It is due to these potential contrasts to my positive experiences, that I have developed a firm sense of purpose behind this area of research. Not only do I hope to provide support for the benefits of sports, but I also aim to offer clear and concise information on the proper implementation of sport-based interventions for at-risk youth participants.

In order to achieve such goals, a case study of the sport and athletic programming of a Nova Scotia community based youth organization was conducted. By doing this, I hoped to gain input on the current retention rates within a youth club that appears to be thriving in a small community that has experienced economic hardships. By collecting data via semi-structured interviews, the current programming and structure of the youth club was examined to illuminate aspects that lead to high retention rates. By pinpointing such aspects, it may be possible to offer input on program structure for other community-based youth organizations.

Throughout this thesis, the terms “at-risk” and “socially-vulnerable” are used interchangeably. For this study, the definition of “social vulnerability” refers to the definition utilized in the research of Haudenhuyse, Theeboom and Coalter (2012). In their study, social vulnerability refers to “distorted and disconnected relations of young

Utilizing sports-based interventions

people with the institutions of society” (Vettenburge, 1998; as cited by Haudenhuyse et al. 2012). It is believed that through a continual accumulation of hurtful experiences involving society’s institutions, a youth becomes what is defined as socially vulnerable. This term considers society’s ability to discriminate, stigmatize and persecute members of specific groups.

The definition of social vulnerability suggested by Luthar (1991) coincides with that of Haudenhuyse et al. (2012) in that an emphasis is placed on negative life events. These events promote high levels of stress in the daily lives for these youth. Luthar (1991) also highlights the significance of socioeconomic status (SES) when considering the definition of socially vulnerable youth. Individuals from low SES are considered to be of higher vulnerability. Youth belonging to a low SES group are more likely to experience higher daily stress levels, have lower educated parents, belong to a single-parent household and belong to a minority group (Luthar, 1991).

Although participation in sports has been observed to offer positive outcomes in many cases, there is the question as to why this occurs. Coakley (2011) argues that there must be substantial research into the reasons for positive effects rather than simply a reliance on a holistic view of sports and athletics. It is only upon learning why favorable experiences take place during participation that there is potential for offering structure models and guidelines to ensure proper implementation of sport-based interventions. It is the goal of this study to illuminate the positive interactions that take place within sports and to also consider the structures and programming in place at the youth center being studied.

Literature Review

Participation in sport or sport-based interventions (SBIs) has been observed to offer numerous benefits for youth, particularly physiological and psychosocial positive developments (Armour, Sandford & Duncombe, 2013; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Halas, 2002; Haudenhuyse et al. 2014; Magee & Jeanes, 2013; Rasquinha & Cardinal, 2014; Richmond, 2013). Although the rates of development may vary depending upon a given program or population, the literature on participation in sport appears to be in agreement with the potential value of properly implemented and monitored sports and athletics. It is worth noting that negative experiences can arise from sport participation when programs are not properly planned or managed. Examples of such negative experiences are acts of bullying, unwanted physical contact, and violence.

In this section, potential positive psychosocial and physical benefits of sport and athletics participation is discussed. Relevant findings of research studies from numerous countries will be discussed in regards to their findings of positive outcomes through participation. After discussing the psychosocial and physical benefits of sports, the usage of sport as an intervention tool will be discussed. In this subsection, the value of sport as a social intervention will be presented as it has been found and analyzed in prior research.

Psychosocial Benefits

Sport participation has been suggested to lead to improved levels of self-esteem, self-confidence and overall improved social relations (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013; Findlay & Coplan, 2008). After completing a systematic review of literature on the topic, utilizing 14 electronic databases, Eime et al. (2013) suggest that increased positive social interactions and better psychological health may result from

Utilizing sports-based interventions

sport participation. Particularly, they emphasize the potential value of community-based team sports, as these are most frequently found to produce healthy outcomes. Similarly, Findlay and Coplan (2008) examined aspects of shyness and psychosocial maladjustments amongst school-aged children. Participation in sports and athletics was found to have a positive association with aspects of improved psychosocial health, such as increased self-esteem and the development of improved social skills. Findlay and Coplan suggest that participation in sports might be “particularly advantageous for shy children” (p. 159), by offering decreased levels of anxiety after prolonged participation.

Youth who participate in sport have been observed to develop positive leadership skills (Eley & Kirk, 2002; Halas, 2002; Haudenhuyse et al. 2012). Such change might directly relate to an increased level of social awareness, particularly the development of social responsibility. By gaining a heightened sense of responsibility and respect for others it is possible that youth may develop a greater sense of “citizenship” (Eley & Kirk, 2002, p. 154). Through the development of pro-social beliefs and behaviors, youth participants are more likely to form a sense of connectedness to both the particular program and to their community in general (Haudenhuyse et al. 2012). By including an aspect of critical social awareness in sport programs and interventions, Haudenhuyse et al. (2012) suggest that youth participants might develop a clearer sense of the social settings in which they reside. This awareness could be beneficial for socially vulnerable or at-risk youth, by allowing them to become critically aware of their current circumstances and identify the factors that place them at risk.

Super, Hermens, Verkooien and Koelen (2014) suggest that participation in sport is likely to increase a youth’s academic performance and prospects for current/future

Utilizing sports-based interventions

employment. Their mixed-method study examined an intervention strategy that aimed to increase sport participation in socially vulnerable youth. Through the usage of The Motivational Climate Scale and interviews with coaches, Super et al. examined positive effect and skill development in the participants ranged in age from 12 to 23 years. Their study found support for the promotion of sport participation, as it showed there to be positive effect in many facets of personal development. However, in agreement with Coakley (2011) they argued that simply enrolling in sports does not solve potential social issues. Rather, it is important to utilize the social aspects of sports to promote the development of healthy behaviors and relationships. In order to take full advantage of these aspects, Coakley suggests that there is a crucial need for further research into the relationship between sports programs, community involvement, and personal development. Through developing a sense of critical awareness, it is suggested that youth may be able to identify negative elements of their lives and seek positive relationships through interaction in sport. Further, by promoting the formulation of a sense of empowerment, properly managed sport programs may enable youth to become more involved and connected members of their communities.

Physical Benefits

Participation in sport and SBIs has also been observed to promote numerous physiological health benefits. Such benefits tend to range from immediate or short-term well-being to long-term and preventive characteristics. For instance, Richmond (2013) suggested that consistent participation in high intensity activities during childhood and adolescence, such as sport and athletics, might prevent the likelihood of future lower body injuries such as sprains of the ankle or knee. Such an observation seems surprising.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

However, it is suggested that such activity may promote the proper development of supportive muscle groups as well as a healthy body weight, therefore lessening strain on individuals' joints (Richmond, 2013).

Potentially the most beneficial physical outcome of sport participation may stem from regulation of healthy body mass. Such a benefit is significant, as socially vulnerable youth are typically observed to be less physically active than their peers (Super et al. 2014). Currently in North America, obesity and more specifically childhood obesity rates, are reaching all-time highs. In 2012, the World Health Organization, using the Body Mass Index (BMI) as a measurement tool, found nearly one third (31.5%) of children between the ages of five and seventeen years to be overweight (Roberts & Duongs, 2013). BMI is an estimated level of an individual's body fat in relation to their weight and height. Roberts and Duongs analyzed the Canadian Health Measures Survey for 2009 and 2011, which recorded the BMI results of children and youth nationwide. Such findings are causing much concern amongst healthcare providers and promoters of sport and athletics, as such rates of obesity seem to foreshadow future negative health outcomes. Roberts and Duongs state it rather simplistically, "obese children tend to become obese adults, making childhood obesity a public concern" (p.3).

Similar to the findings of Richmond (2013), participation in sport has been found to be a crucial facet in decreasing youth obesity and promoting future healthy lifestyles (Rasquinha & Cardinal, 2014). In their study, they highlight the importance of positive social experiences when partaking in a sport, as this relates to the potential of positive outcomes and suggest that simply identifying as an athlete can have a positive impact on a youth. Coinciding with the increasing rates of childhood obesity are the inflating rates

Utilizing sports-based interventions

of childhood Type II diabetes. This is concerning as Type II diabetes has rarely shown onset during childhood, as it relates highly to diet, body fat composition and other environmental factors (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011).

Sport as an Intervention

The usage of sports as an intervention for at-risk or vulnerable youth is not a new phenomenon and it has been frequently observed to have favorable outcomes (Eime et al. 2013; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Parker et al. 2014). Properly implemented SBIs have been found to contribute to successful development and a sense of control for at-risk youth (Kelly, 2013). In this study, Kelly (2013) examined current and past youth crime reduction policies while acquiring data regarding SBIs. This research presented three potential ways that the usage of SBIs can result in a decrease of youth crime. The first, is by promoting a sense of individual change through positive development that occurs as a result of the mentor-mentee relationship. The second, is offering healthier alternatives for children and youth, such as access to organized sports and athletics. The third is through policy and regulation change. By addressing problematic behaviors in ways that promote change and rehabilitation, there is a possibility of improved outcomes in regards to youth criminal activity. Kelly proposes that the usage of SBIs may allow for practitioners to have input on the policies and regulations within the given community.

Christens and Dolan (2011) offered similar suggestions of youth organization. By combining a level of personal development achieved through participation in sport and a sense of community development, there is potential for social change. Christens and Dolan (2011) highlight critical awareness as a key aspect, suggesting that it is developed through a sense of connectedness to a given community. It is through this connectedness

Utilizing sports-based interventions

that youth can observe current power struggles within society and develop a critical awareness. This development is of significance for members of marginalized groups, for it prepares them with the requisite knowledge to seek social change.

The importance of community involvement is supported by the research of Coakley (2011), who has argued that if there is a strong sense of community collaboration, SBIs have more positive outcomes. Coakley describes the significance of proper programming and the impact it has on the individuals involved. Some SBIs may be limited in their scope and only offer influence at the individual level, where properly designed and implemented SBIs may affect both the individual and a community.

Theoretical Frameworks

For this research study, a socio-ecological theoretical framework was utilized for analyzing the information gained from interviews conducted with employees of the youth club. Analysis utilized a socio-ecological model in order to allow for compartmentalizing data into differing levels of the community that was studied.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) formulated the socio-ecological theory model to analyze complex social issues. It has been widely used in the study of the child and youth sector and it appears to be well suited for this research. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner stressed the importance of considering contextual differences between individuals within society. Social, cultural, genetic and demographic variations can be intricate aspects that result in diversity of individuals, all of which greatly alter the ways in which they view and understand the world.

A socio-ecological model allows for the observation of multiple levels, starting from that of the individual and progressing outwards to that of the society and culture.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

This model encompasses four specific social realms: the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems. These systems create a complex structure, relying on reciprocating interactions and relationships between the individual and their environment. Such a vast model of developmental factors was seen as necessary, as you “must understand the entire ecological system in which growth occurs” (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p. 40).

Microsystem. The most intimate realm is the microsystem, which includes aspects of the individual and their closest interactions between peers and family. The microsystem has a strong, direct influence on the outcomes and beliefs of the child or youth. A large proportion of learning and development within the microsystem takes place “in a given face-to-face setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p. 39), therefore emphasizing the significant impact individuals have within a child or youth’s immediate environment. The microsystem may include an individual’s family, school, peer group and as in this study, youth club. Within this system there is a bi-directional influence on youth in which behavior of the individual may affect aspects of outer systems, and outer relationships influence the individual. For example, a child’s cognitive thought processes would have an impact or relation to an outward behavior in the home, at school or youth club. A child who is experiencing high levels of anxiety may have difficulties interacting with their peers in a community setting (individual factors affecting the environment). In contrast, a child who is having difficulty forming relations may develop high levels of anxiety (environmental factors affecting the individual). Issues within the community or society (macrosystem), a parent’s workplace (exosystem) or the dynamic between a child’s school and home-life (mesosystem), can directly impact the most intimate aspects of a child/youth’s social experience. For example, an increased level of stress at a

Utilizing sports-based interventions

parent's workplace may cause heightened levels of tension in the home, therefore causing increased anxiety within a child or youth and potentially straining their relationship with their parents.

Mesosystem. The mesosystem involves “linkages between two or more settings containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p.40). Often, this system involves relationships between home and school, home and a community center, or home and work. Basically, the mesosystem is comprised of numerous microsystems and allows for the interaction between these systems to become apparent. The potential relationship between a child's parents and their athletic coaches, teachers or youth workers are examples of the mesosystem. In an optimum, healthy environment, there would be a consistent flow in interaction and information between the different systems within a child/youth's mesosystem.

Exosystem. The exosystem is broad based and the individual does not directly act in this system. Instead, events or relationships that the individual is absent from, indirectly affect the individual at the level of the exosystem. The exosystem typically involves relations between numerous settings, such as a parent's workplace, a community, or any potential networking between families. The exosystem can have a strong effect on the individual, as it involves the beliefs or values of the community at hand. For example, community support or financial funding towards a youth program can affect the individual without them being directly involved. Continual support from the community is likely to be a key factor in potential positive outcomes within the program at the center of my case study. This would potentially provide examples of interactions within the exosystem that influence the microsystem of youth participants.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Macrosystem. The macrosystem encompasses all major influences of the micro-, meso and exosystem's attributes within a specific culture. This system is considered the "societal blueprint" for a culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1997, p.40). The macrosystem involves the major belief systems, traditions, resources and customs that are fixed within a culture or subculture. In this study, there will be a focus on the common beliefs towards sports/athletic involvement, education, youth center participation and parental responsibility. The community in focus hosts a wide variety of cultural and traditional beliefs and this will likely be evident in the data that is collected. Also, as this community has a large population of individuals from visible minority groups, the aspect of oppression and social constraints will be a focal point.

Methodology

This study examined the perspectives of employees of a community youth center that utilizes SBIs with socially vulnerable youth. Through semi-structured interviews, I aimed to collect information on how programming dynamics influence youth retention rates and program success.

Program Details

Location. The youth program was located in a Nova Scotia community of approximately 10,000 people, and is one of the most ethnically diverse communities in Nova Scotia. Many economic hardships have plagued the community in recent years since the closure of one of the main sources of its economy. The community currently has a nearly 50% unemployment rate, and a dwindling population.

Youth club structure and personnel. The youth club at the focus of this study is a chapter of the Boys and Girls Club of Canada, an over century old organization. The club is a youth focused, non-profit registered charity and is managed by a volunteer Board of Directors. A mission of the club is to offer assistance to community members that may have little access to healthy programming that may promote personal development. The club relies on funding from community members, local businesses and government grants in order to cover all financial needs. This youth program employs an executive director and five youth work. It has also established a relationship with numerous education institutions, allowing for work placements for students of a variety of different post-secondary programs.

Programming. There is a wide variety of programming and activities offered by the youth club, many of which focus on promoting the development individual life skills.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

This research study focused on its programming of sports and athletics. The youth center not only supports sport-based intervention within its day-to-day activities, but also strives to promote youth involvement in athletic programs in the communities. For example, if a youth member becomes interested in basketball, employees of the club seek opportunities for the youth to further pursue the sport in the community. This may involve contacting local coaches, introducing the youth to other athletes, paying athletic fees for the participant or providing transportation to sporting events.

Participants

This study focused on the usage of SBIs by at-risk or socially vulnerable youth as perceived by club youth workers and executive director. The executive director and four youth workers were interviewed for the purpose of determining the ways in which its retention rates are influenced by program dynamics. The youth workers had an even distribution of two males and two females. Due to the small number of participants, youth workers' gender was not presented in relation to their responses.

These individuals were chosen in order to highlight the multifaceted nature of a successful youth program, by gaining insight from numerous levels of the socio-ecological systems involved. The executive director was interviewed in order to examine issues surround the larger scale design and structure of the club, such as infrastructure, policy, funding, and future goals of the program. Youth workers were interviewed in order to gather information about the day-to-day operations of the club, as these are the front line workers who potentially have the most input on the experiences of the youth. Four interviews were completed, allowing for input about different aspects of the program.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

This number of interviews was chosen for a variety of reasons. First, in regards to time efficiency, participants of the club were more readily contacted, interviewed and their data analyzed in the allotted time to complete this thesis study. This is partially in relation to previous personal contact I had with the program's coordinator in the past during involvement in athletics. Second, it was not possible to base the study on more than one youth club, as this study was not funded. Lastly, the club was chosen due to its proximity to the researcher's hometown and therefore it held strong personal value to the researcher. By engaging in a case study, there was the potential for gaining information that would be helpful for other local programs to utilize.

A case study was utilized as a research method as it allowed for an acquisition of a variety of data and information from participants. "With a case study the case is an object of interest in its own right and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it" (Bryman, Bell & Teevan, 2012, p. 38). This was accomplished by interviewing individuals involved with the club (the case), regarding their experiences with SBIs. I used this study to gain information regarding features of this youth club and their implementation of SBIs.

Method of Data Collection

In order to efficiently collect information for this study, person-to-person semi-structured interviews were conducted. Within semi-structured interviews, the researcher followed an interview guide of specific topics or questions [Appendix A: Interview Guide- Executive Director and Appendix B: Interview Guide- Youth Workers], while allowing the interviewee to "still have a great deal of leeway in deciding how to reply" (Bryman, Bell & Teevan, 2012, p. 166). Qualitative interviews were chosen as the

Utilizing sports-based interventions

“researcher wants rich, detailed answers” (p.165), as opposed to quantitative surveys, where specific answers are the aim (Bryman, Bell & Teevan, 2012).

These interview guides differed in some regards, with the Executive Director being asked questions on management structure and with those asked of the youth workers more focused on day-to-day activities. For instance, the executive director was asked questions such as, “Please describe the overall focus or orientation of the club”; “Could you describe how major planning decisions are made?”; “What are the duties or role of the Board of Directors?” The youth workers were asked for information such as, “Please describe a typical day in the youth club.”; “I realize that participants need to feel emotionally safe in order for them to stay in the program. How does the program help participants feel emotionally safe?” However, there were also numerous similarities in the interview guides. Both the executive director and youth workers were asked questions on their thoughts of an ideal youth club; why they believe youth may drop out; and to identify the current strengths of the club. Including similar questions allowed for contrasting and comparing the different perspectives of the executive director and youth workers.

The purpose of the interview questions was to allow for the interviewees to interpret relevant issues or events. This matched with the suggestions of Bronfenbrenner (1979), in regards to the significance of individual contextual differences and how people may experience the same events differently. Another benefit of using semi-structured interviews was that they allowed me to follow different lines of thought that were presented and deemed relevant to the study. After conducting the interviews, common themes and phrases were identified and compared to these frameworks to to illuminate

Utilizing sports-based interventions

specific aspects of the SBIs that were well-suited for the youth, and the program in general.

All interviews were conducted by the researcher and were digitally audio recorded. On completion, the recordings were transcribed into a word document. This transcription was coded and analyzed for relevant data. Specific information regarding the coding practices is further described in the *Analysis* section of this chapter. The transcriptions remained solely with the researcher to protect confidentiality. Once the thesis has been completed the recordings will be destroyed. Transcriptions will be maintained for five years.

Foddy (1994) suggests that answers provided by participants should be consistent with their behaviors or attitudes towards the related subject. However, in order to ensure that such answers were representative of the individuals' experiences and beliefs, the specific wording of the questions of the interview was of the utmost importance. Specifically, because this study was examining youth drop out from programs in which the participants have affiliation, the researcher must ensure that there was no questioning of their personal abilities or reference to inadequacies. The youth practitioners and members may hold a strong sense of connectedness to their related programs and therefore it was important to avoid eliciting potential shortcomings, as these individuals may exhibit a sense of protectiveness. Such a feeling of protectiveness would then potentially have had an effect on the validity of the answers they provided.

Analysis

Upon completing the data collection portion of this study, analysis of the data was conducted in a qualitative, inductive approach. The interview transcripts were interpreted

Utilizing sports-based interventions

and coded. The goal of coding was to produce common occurring themes or concepts; these concepts were then referenced to the socio-ecological framework previously described.

Relations between specific concepts were then visible, as well as relation to the theoretical frameworks. It was the goal of the researcher to formulate a particular theory or model as result of this analysis. Such potential findings could encourage further research into the structure and operations of local youth programs utilizing SBIs on a broader scale. The potential for increased quality assurance and improved youth participant retention are possible positive outcomes aimed particularly at the Youth Club at the center of the study.

Ethical Considerations

All methods used while conducting this research study abided by the rules and regulations of the Research Ethics Board of Mount Saint Vincent and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, to which ethical approval was obtained. During all interactions and recordings (via one-on-one interviews), personal information was protected. No names or other personal information of previous youth participants were recorded or discussed and the names and information of participants was omitted or modified to protect their identities.

The name of the youth club remained anonymous, recording only their estimation and recollection of typical drop-out rates within previous years/seasons and the possible reasons provided by the individuals whom have dropped out. Individuals were asked their position within the center in order to allow for an in-depth analysis of results. Any unintentional personal information provided was deleted from transcripts.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Before beginning the interviews, all participants were asked to provide their consent. These individuals were provided with a consent form (Appendix C: Informed Consent) regarding this thesis study, outlining the goals and purpose. Contact information of the researcher was also provided in case participants wished to follow-up regarding results or has further questions at a later time. It was also of importance that the participants were addressed as competent individuals and therefore had the parameters of the study explained to them as well.

Chapter Two

Research Findings

This chapter describes findings of the study, for which four person-to-person semi-structured interviews were conducted, to investigate how SBIs are utilized within the community youth club at the focus on the study. By interviewing the Executive Director and four Youth Workers, there was a goal of pinpointing the common themes within the youth club's programming and culture, allowing for the development of a model that may be implemented in other programs.

Thematic Analysis

Importance of Well-Trained Staff

While interviewing the Executive Director (ED) of the youth club, numerous references were made to the need for properly trained youth care workers in order to achieve an effective program. The ED stated, "I take great pride in having all trained youth workers here in this facility because you need the skill package." He also suggested that there was a "need for trained youth workers" as he asks his staff to "look at development stages of youth and adolescence, because that is where you focus your programming." He stated that this required knowledge comes from proper training and education, which may come from a variety of sources. This is noticeable in that youth workers of the club have a variety of educational backgrounds, such as Child and Youth diplomas, Bachelor's of Community Studies, and other university social science degrees.

The youth workers appeared to agree with the ED, sharing a belief in the importance of proper training and education. Youth Worker 1 stated,

Utilizing sports-based interventions

We all come here from different backgrounds in schooling, but we share a common purpose and I think that it really benefits us as a program to have workers who may have different perspectives.”

Similarly, Youth worker 2 stated, “my education has been in child and youth, but some of my coworkers come from psychology or social science backgrounds and I think it helps when we are planning out our programs.”

These findings coincide with the suggestions of Stodolska, Sharaievska, Tainsky and Ryan (2014), that a properly trained and educated staff is crucial to ensure that youth receive an optimal experience. Within their study, two key factors for a successful youth athletic-based program were the provision of a safe environment and having well-trained youth care staff. Through the staff developing mentor-mentee relationships youth in their study were observed to achieve optimum social and athletic development.

The ED also expressed the benefit of experience; “it just benefits you when working with kids if you have some life experiences because that is what it’s about...the interaction.” He further stated that having these experiences allows a youth worker to “learn to build rapport,” an act that he says is complex in nature:

I find too many (Youth Workers) try to be a youth’s best friend, but you’re not there for that purpose. You’re their mentor, their guidance and that’s the purpose you are there for. If it eventually works into a friendship, that is fine. But, I mean it is that structure that you have to put in.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Through both life and youth care experience, it is suggested that workers will gain a firmer sense and comfort of how to properly define and structure the mentor-mentee relationship.

Ensuring that youth care staff are properly trained, screened and prepared promotes positive interactions for youth participants within the microsystem level of the socio-ecological model. Having quality, effective face-to-face communications within the environment of the club might create a positive wave of affect that could potentially radiate outwards to the meso-, exo- and macrosystems. Such affect is readily observed by the fact that many members of the program's staff are former youth participants. Having positive interactions as participants, has had an impact on them, and has allowed them to reach out to their wider environment and reciprocate for the youth of the community.

Competitive and Recreational Sport

Participation in sport often has many positive outcomes and many of these outcomes are observed through both competitive and non-competitive or recreational sports (Armour, Sandford & Duncombe, 2013; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Haudenhuyse et al. 2014; Magee & Jeanes, 2013). Similarly, Bowers and Green (2013) propose that participation in both organized and unstructured sports and athletics can result in an increased sense of community connectedness or belonging. It is their belief that because both types of sport can produce positive outcomes, they should not be held in direct juxtaposition. Instead, the individual experiences of participants in each should be considered in research looking to utilize positive aspects of both.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

The ED of the youth club takes a similar approach and agrees that competitive and recreational sports have their place within the club. He stated that he often reminds the youth and staff of the after-school programming, that “there are no contracts being handed out here,” promoting the approach that youth have enjoyment in the recreational aspects, and to “check egos at the door.” However, both the ED and youth care workers mention the program’s connectedness to competitive sport programs in the community and that they will often look to outsource programming for youth who might be looking to participate at more of an elite level.

Interestingly, a common theme found within the interview with the first youth care worker was that of “challenging the preconceived notion of what is sport.” The worker stated that the club offers programming geared towards what might be viewed as “alternative sport,” such as parkour, Crossfit, and slacklining. This “challenging” of the definition of sport has been noted by the workers as positively affecting many of the youth, by allowing them to gain confidence and a sense of belonging in sports and activities that they may not have encountered outside the youth club. This youth worker and I discussed the activity of Crossfit, as it is a fitness sport that has moved from being considered a fringe activity to being a globally recognized sport. Crossfit is defined as “constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity” (www.crossfit.com, 2016) and incorporates a range of movements stemming from weightlifting, gymnastics, rowing, running and more. It started in basements and garages in North America and now has worldwide competitions broadcasted on ESPN. The youth worker and I further discussed how this was an interesting phenomenon that relates to their youth members, by opening their experiences and repertoires to new sports and

Utilizing sports-based interventions

activities potentially opens a world of future endeavors. A future professional athlete in a sport that is not yet globally recognized might be sitting in a local youth program, waiting to learn the basics of a new activity.

The second youth worker appeared to believe that a need for variety and the ability to adapt were crucial when offering athletic programming to children and youth. This worker stated, “It is all about staying flexible, one day the kids want to play something competitive like hockey or basketball, but the next day they feel like swimming or skating.” The worker went on to state,

You don’t want to always be competitive, but it definitely has its place. However, sometimes it is nice to just see the youth doing activities that they are working together, enjoying themselves without worrying about scores or rules.

The third youth care worker stated that they felt he pursued competitive athletics solely due to his experiences within the club when he was a youth. The worker stated that being exposed to new sports and learning the basics within a supportive, non-judgmental environment allowed him to further his athletic abilities while becoming more confident, as well as making many long-term friendships. Such experiences appear to support the findings of Findlay and Coplan (2008), who suggest that participation in sport promotes positive psychosocial growth and stronger social skills.

Within the exosystem, there are clear values placed on sports and athletics and the community support for athletics is readily observed. A support system for competitive or elite athletics is able to successfully co-exist with recreational or “just for fun” athletics.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

It is through the cohabitation of these systems, that youth participants of this community club develop a sense of belonging to not only the program, but the community in general. Such a sense of community belonging supports the arguments of Haudenhuyse et al. (2012) and Coakley (2011), that properly designed SBIs result in increased community involvement and inclusion. By going through the positive psychosocial changes many youth experience during sport participation, they further identify as belonging to their community or communities that make up their exo-system. Such observations lead into the next theme identified from the analysis, that of community involvement.

Community Involvement: “It takes a village to raise a child”

An obvious component of this youth club is the importance of it to the community, and community involvement. The employees of the club appear to take great pride in both their larger, surrounding community and the community within the club. As someone who grew up in an adjacent community, I have witnessed how the local community supports the club. The ED expresses it this way; “I am a product of my own community and a lot of good people put a lot of good tools into me,” and describes this as the driving force behind his work within the community and his life-long involvement with youth and youth athletics.

Coakley (2011) suggested that the development of a sense of critical awareness allows youth to strive for personal and community improvement. By promoting a feeling of empowerment within youth participants, Coakley argues that well-structured programs would increase the likelihood of youth becoming firmly connected with their communities and thereby be actively involved community members.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Likewise, Haudenhuyse et al. (2012) argue that it is through the development of pro-social beliefs and behaviors, that youth are likely to form a sense of connectedness to both a particular program and to their community in general. This could benefit socially vulnerable or at-risk youth by enabling them to become critically aware of their circumstances and to identify the external factors that place them at risk. This is particularly significant for my study, as the club resides within, and services, a community that is low-income with a wide range of minority persons.

This idea of critical awareness was discussed with the Executive Director, with his stating;

It is all relative... our kids can become doctors and lawyers, but a particularly troubled or disadvantaged youth who manages to get his life together enough to hold a minimum wage job is also a huge success.

Recognition of contextual differences in the lives of club youth and understanding that they do not often start on equal footing is paramount. The ED elaborated, "it's the journey man, you need to look at the amount of growth. It is not always about where someone ends up, but we measure our success by seeing the individual growth in our kids." Recognizing and appreciating individual growth was a common perspective amongst staff interviewed. These individuals appear to truly believe in the goal of positively affecting youth. Youth worker 3 insisted that it was due to this belief system, that is present within what I would consider the exo- and macrosystem of the youth club and community, that he pursued a career as a youth worker. The worker stated,

Utilizing sports-based interventions

I remember coming here [the youth club] as a kid and always feeling supported. I always felt like the workers really cared and were proud of me and I think all youth feel that level of support.

By intertwining belief systems that promote respect, support and a sense of community involvement, this youth club is able to boast a drop out rate that, according to the ED and Youth Workers, is “almost non-existent.”

Such a synthesis of beliefs appears to coincide with the suggestions of Christens and Dolan (2011) that there may be a merging of personal development and a sense of community connectedness achieved through participation in sport. They further suggest that such experiences can lead to social and community change. By developing a sense of critical awareness, the youth participants are likely to reach out and look to affect change upon their community or exo- and macrosystems. These beliefs are being observed as former participants eventually become individuals who focus on today’s children and youth within this small, multicultural community.

Difficulties of a Non-Profit Organization

During the interviews, the ED and youth workers made reference to the difficulties or downsides of the club being a non-profit organization (NPO), and some of the issues that may stem from negative perceptions of NPOs. The ED stated, “one big issue is by being NPO, the amount of the kids that come here can throw our ratios off sometimes, so they (youth) may not be getting that one-on-one.” This was describing a potential reason for youth leaving the club, in that many activities and programs can have high youth-to-staff ratios, therefore cutting down on valuable interaction at the microsystem level. Youth care worker #1 stated, “we usually max out at about 13 kids

Utilizing sports-based interventions

per one adult” and “if you have two staff, you will likely have a minimum of 20-25 youth participating.” Such an issue can likely be traced back to funding, as there is often only four youth care workers overseeing the afterschool program, which can service as many as 80 youth. Limiting the number of youth workers employed limits the youth that can be provided with the service. This is unfortunate, as the club currently has 150 youth on a waiting list for the clubs’ afterschool programs and activities. This appears to be a clear example of an issue of the exosystem level (funding) negatively impacting the microsystem (youth-to-worker interaction).

Youth worker 1 also stated, “non-profits should not always have to be rubbing pennies together in order to make ends meet... especially when we are taking care of the youth.” Another concern is a “perception” or negative connotation that NPOs may receive from community members. Youth worker 1 continued, “Another thing that limits us is people’s ideas of what a NPO is supposed to look like.” Workers expressed concern that the youth club is viewed as strictly a program geared towards low-income households and therefore not allowing them to reach a wider breadth of youth in the surrounding communities. Youth worker 2 stated, “this club gets a lot of respect from community members, but it seems that people from other communities have the wrong idea about this club. We are here to serve youth, but some people may think we are only here for youth who cannot afford other programs.” The youth workers feel it is important that the surrounding communities become more informed and educated on what opportunities are offered by the club. By increasing its reach, the youth club would likely gain participants, employees, and funding from a wider demographic.

Need for Infrastructure Expansion

Utilizing sports-based interventions

The youth club center is currently undergoing a major renovation and expansion to, with a planned completion in Spring 2017. The ED explains that they are nearly doubling the size of their current building, a much-needed increase in space for the youth they service. During the expansion, the youth club is functioning out of a local junior high school that is located across the street from the club. Youth worker 1 explained, “our biggest issue was a lack of space and we physically could not take in more youth.” Similarly, Youth worker 2 believed that older youth were more likely to drop out, due to not wanting to be in the same program space as elementary-aged youth. The ED appeared to agree with this rhetoric, stating “unfortunately, some of our youth may feel that they are taking a step back, having to return to their old school, with younger youth, in order to participate in our programs.” By increasing the sizes of the physical infrastructure, not only will the youth club be able to potentially service more youth, but they can provide more specialized and age-specific program activities.

The club has plans to implement many new programs on the opening of the renovated and expanded center, such as a recording studio, a fitness facility, new gaming rooms, and increased area for sport programming. Public donations and government funding have funded renovations and expansions, which unfortunately has led to many delays in the process. However, the level of community support was truly evident during such delays, with local business owners, trades people, and anyone who could lend a hand chipping in and trying to keep the renovation process moving forward. The ED stated, “I see a lot of potential for this club. I mean we are in a building phase right now, where we will be able to further engage our teens with a bigger building as we will be more than doubling the size of the center.” He further elaborated on how this could

Utilizing sports-based interventions

positively impact the program at all levels, “I don’t think people realize, with our smaller staff, how big of a role the older kids play...they’re like extra staff. Also, by understanding youth development, it sends a message when we can find a leader in that older peer group, that is how you can get all of the youth to commit.”

Adapting to Trends

Within each interview reference was made to the dynamic nature of youth sport programming. The ED stated, “in the youth field there are fads... if you wanna call it that. But you try and stay ahead of the curve so your programs will be interesting enough so that the kids can engage.” He further explained how he addresses this with the staff, “I tell my workers that there is no shame in running a program that you ran for two years successful and then all of a sudden the kids change, the fad dies.” The ED explained that he sees his staff struggle with this at times, as many people have put countless hours and effort in to designing and running this program. But, as he states rather succinctly, “there is no shame in admitting a program no longer works, sometimes it has simply ran its course.”

Similarly, Youth worker 1 stated, “its so important that we that we pay attention to what the youth are interested in and be willing to adapt when they develop new interests.” This worker also explained that this is beneficial because “lots of trends are cyclical,” so gaining experience with a program will allow for improved implementation if or when the interest “comes back around.” Youth Worker 2 appeared to share these views, stating, “at first it is important that we try to re-ignite the passion for the activity, but eventually it may come to a point where we realize it is time to move on... for the time being.” This worker explained that sometimes interest can completely shift away

Utilizing sports-based interventions

from certain activities seemingly overnight and it can stem from something as simple as “if one of the older kids that people think are cool quits something, the rest may follow suit.” The youth worker provided examples of youths’ interest towards skateboarding and also previous hip hop dancing programs.

Discussion

This study was conducted to address the current lack of empirical research on the proper utilization of SBIs in Canadian society. Sport and athletics are observed to promote development of many positive psychosocial and physiological aspects. This study aimed to address what Coakley (2011) referred to as a lack of research focusing on theoretical orientations of SBIs. It was hypothesized that by collecting and analyzing this study’s data, it would be possible to develop a model or specific protocols surrounding the implementation of SBIs, promoting the most beneficial experiences and increased retention rates.

Upon analyzing the data, six common themes emerged: staffing, using recreational and competitive athletics, community involvement, connection to pre-established programs, infrastructure and facilities, and evaluation. All six themes have been included in a model of suggestions that is presented in the Conclusion chapter of this thesis. There appeared to be three themes that were most frequently referred to and appears to have the most substantial influence on the youth club and its dynamics. There was no perceived difference found in the responses provided by male and female youth workers.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

The first and likely most influential theme was that of staffing and the importance of well trained, educated, and experienced employees. Every participant made numerous references to this theme and how each employee brings something valuable to the program due to their educational and training experiences. This coincides with the finding of Stodolska, Sharaievska, Tainisky and Ryan (2014), who suggest that by having well-trained staff, a program is likely to enhance the experience of the youth. They further stated that properly trained staff is more likely to understand what is required to develop mentor-mentee relationships, as well as offering a positive, safe environment.

The youth club includes both competitive and recreational sports in their programming and the data suggests that this is a key aspect in the positive experience of participants. The youth club promotes competitive athletics, but ensures that recreational options are presented consistently as well. The data suggests that competitive sports can enhance teamwork capabilities, communication and allow youth to accept both winning and losing as part of the sport. In contrast, the recreational sport options can promote the improvement of self-esteem in a non-competitive, judgment free environment. These findings appear to support the suggestions of Armour et al. (2013), Findlay and Coplan (2008), Haudenhuyse et al. (2014), and Magee and Jeanes (2013), that both competitive and recreational sports offer numerous benefits and that the inclusion of them in SBIs can lead to favorable outcomes.

The third key finding is the importance of promoting community involvement. A sense of community involvement is included in many aspects of the youth club stemming from day-to-day programming, fundraising events, and employees and volunteers of the program. Many of the employees and volunteers of the youth club are former youth

Utilizing sports-based interventions

members, who have come to terms with the current concerns in the community and want to give back. These findings support those of Coakley (2011), in that offering a sense of community belonging can enhance critical awareness and empowerment, promoting individuals to strive for the betterment of their community. These findings also coincide with Haudenhuyse et al. (2012), who suggested that a sense of critical awareness becomes increasingly important for socially vulnerable or at-risk youth, allowing them to recognize the current issues and constraints within their communities and act accordingly to elicit positive change.

Limitations

Number of Participants. A limitation of this thesis study is the small number of participants. It is the opinion of the researcher that increasing the number could result in thereby potentially be more themes that are relevant to the proposed model. There was no perceived effect of gender in regards to youth worker responses. By increasing the number of participants, a gender effect may be observed. The study was limited to four participants due to the time and financial constraints, as this research is part of a Master's thesis that did not received funding.

No youth participants. Another limitation was the lack of input from participants of the programs. By interviewing youth workers and an executive director, this study does not present direct information from youth. The decision to exclude youth participants was based on efficiency. Including youth participants, would have required additional ethical considerations and could be less time efficient, as youth would need to provide consent from parents and/or guardians.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Experience of researcher. Another potential limitation was the researcher's lack of experience conducting and analyzing interviews. This study was the first in which the researcher utilized a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis.

Employee Bias. There is also a potential limitation in that staff members may have been reluctant to provide statements that were could be viewed as critical to the program.

Personal Bias. The final potential limitation is that of my previous personal connection to the executive director of the club. Throughout my involvement in local sport, I had become acquainted with this individual and therefore formed a social connection. Although I have no affiliation to the club, there is the potential for sub-conscious bias leading to a more positive viewpoint towards the data.

Future Research

This thesis study provides an interesting option for future research that could offer more in-depth and complex information surround the utilization of SBIs in the local area. Specifically, by increasing sample size, the breadth of data would be increased and therefore have the potential of further elaborating on the findings of this study. Through increasing the number of participants, future research could include a greater number of workers of varying employment and educational backgrounds. Also, by increasing the number of participants, there is the option to examine the potential gender effect interaction. By potentially offering this increased variance of demographics a greater breadth of ideologies and approaches might be prevalent.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Also, it is the opinion of the researcher, that by including youth participants in future research could lead to enhanced findings. This could uncover a variety of input and information directly from an aspect of the socio-ecological model that was not possible in the current study. Specifically, including youth participants would allow for more direct research into youth reasoning for dropping out of SBIs. Also, including youth would allow for the inquiry into potentially differing interactions with male and female staff.

Finally, there is the potential for future research into the effects of varying demographics. By conducting a similar study, in which multiple programs utilizing SBIs are observed, there would be the ability to compare findings based on a variety of demographic aspects. By including programs from a variety of communities, it would decrease the likelihood that findings are based on unique social phenomena.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to offer information that may improve the implementation of SBIs and therefore the potential outcomes for at-risk youth. By obtaining data regarding programming, participation and dropout rates within this particular youth center, I have illuminated strengths and weaknesses of current programming and have offered a model of suggestions for other SBIs to utilize. The aspiration of this research was to pinpoint the reasons as to why youth leave the provided athletic programs and/or why the youth club has such high retention rates. Through investigating such reasons, there is a potential for gaining knowledge as to how programs could be better tailored to serve particular youth. As suggested by Armour et al. (2013),

Utilizing sports-based interventions

social interventions such as SBIs are not a one-size-fits-all scenario. In order for positive outcomes to arise, the needs and contextual experiences of the youth must be examined. By considering the suggestions put forth by this thesis study, might allow for modifications of program structure and delivery to prevent some youth from leaving and missing out on what could be a life-enhancing experience.

With an aim of offering such information, it is the hope of this researcher that the findings will reduce youth dropout rates from sport and recreation programs and therefore increasing the likelihood of youth gaining positive experiences. It is also a hope of the researcher that this research study may be a useful tool in acquiring further funding and support for the youth club and therefore allow for continued aid within the community.

As the youth club at the center of this case study is located within a vastly multi-cultural community of Atlantic Canada, there is the potential of transferability of findings to other youth programs in surrounding communities. Many current issues within maritime communities would likely be uniform across the Atlantic Provinces and therefore suggestions stemming from this study could be relevant to other youth center programming and delivery. It is the opinion of the researcher that this study could act as a springboard for future research regarding the usage of sport as an intervention within Canadian society in general.

Conclusion

Properly implemented sport-based interventions are incredibly complex, with many dynamic aspects leading to positive outcomes. The purpose of this study was to identify specific aspects and characteristics of a successful youth club in order to present suggestions to the implementation of SBIs in other programs. The findings of this study focus on the six key aspects that presented in the data collected: staffing, using recreational and competitive athletics, community involvement, connection to pre-established programs, infrastructure and facilities, and evaluation.

Staff

Training. It is imperative that members of the staffing unit within a successful youth club have quality training and knowledge basis. Not only is experience valued, but having members of an organizational structure with a well-developed sense of proficiency and skill set allows for the most beneficial production of SBIs. The community youth club within this study has staff members with a variety of educational backgrounds, ranging from community college youth care programs to several different university degrees. This program offers an interesting perspective towards this multi-disciplinary setting that is most youth organizations, as staff can individually utilize their unique abilities, while working as a cohesive group. I suggest that staff should possess education directly related child and youth such as a child and youth diploma, degree in community studies, or a social science degree. Staff should also have relevant experience with sport programs as either a participant, coach or volunteer. I also suggest that staff receive training in areas such as trauma-informed care, Non-Violent Crisis Intervention, and sport-specific coaching.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Community-based. Nearly all staff members of the youth club have either been a previous participant or have a personal connection to the community in general. It was a common theme of the data that it was beneficial to have ties to the community and for workers to come into the program with a personal sense of what the mission statement and belief systems are. Although this is not a requirement for a program to have favorable outcomes, it would be highly recommended that a program utilize at least some community members when staffing a program to focus on SBIs and youth programming.

Recreational and Competitive Athletics

There are numerous pros and cons towards implementing one or the other, in regards to competitive and recreational (just-for-fun) sports. However, the data and previous literature agree in the value of utilizing both of these forms of sport/athletics.

Recreational. Participants described a sense of comfort and a lack of judgement within the youth club when they engage in recreational athletic activities. Such programming allows for the positive development of self-efficacy, while also reaping the physiological benefits of participation in sport. This level of athletics can be a phenomenal entry point for youth, allowing them to learn and develop skill sets, all while constructing their own personal feelings towards the activity. It is also suggested within both the data and literature that recreational sport may be viewed as a cornerstone of social development and promoting social bonds between participants.

Competitive. This level of sport is observed to promote the development of teamwork, leadership and allows youth to develop the abilities to cope with win and loss. By implementing competitive athletics, a program fits a wider demographic of interests for potential participants. The youth club in this study developed numerous social ties to

Utilizing sports-based interventions

competitive athletic programs within the community, allowing for an outsourcing of services for youth that may wish to pursue a more competitive, elite level of sport.

Community Involvement

Both the findings from this thesis study and that in the literature suggest that a program with a high level of community involvement is likely to present favorable outcomes for youth and potentially lead to increased retention rates. Community involvement can take on many shapes and be a part of numerous facets of a youth athletic program.

Staff and members. The findings of this thesis study would suggest that by hiring and incorporating individuals from the local area, leads to an increased sense of community and greater involvement of the community in aiding the youth club. By involving individuals from the community, and who might have been former participants, there can be improvements in rapport building, fundraising, and forming connections to other facilities and options in the community.

Increased critical awareness. Findings of this study appear to support that of Coakley (2011), in that a sense of community involvement can lead to increased critical awareness for the members of a program. Specifically, this is observed to benefit members of low-income communities with high unemployment rates, where an increased focus on educational supports within a youth program can lead to favorable outcomes. This was found through this study, as the club offered numerous programming options surrounding tutoring and also provided opportunities for scholarships and bursaries for older youth.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Positive cycle of effect. By promoting increased community involvement and critical awareness, members of a youth program are more likely to want to encourage positive change within their community. This was found to be the case in this club in that many workers and volunteers are former members of it. In recognizing the positive effect that the program had on them, they in turn want to reach out and offer aid to children and youth going through both the athletic and non-athletic programs of the club. It is likely that within a properly implemented SBI, former participants will be willing and able to give back, and continue the cycle of positive effect within the program as well as the larger community.

Connection to Pre-Established Programs

By forming a connection or affiliation to a program that is already well established and successful, there may be an increased likelihood for positive outcomes, as well as increased levels of funding and support. In this study, it was found that the youth club's affiliation to the nationally recognized Boys and Girls club of Canada offered numerous benefits in the ways of recognition, support, and programming opportunities. It is also likely that successful organizations have well defined structures, models and mission statements surrounding their programs. This can be extremely beneficial for new youth athletic programs, allowing them to take previously proven models and guidelines and adjust and utilize them as to best serve their clientele.

Suitable Infrastructure and Facilities.

A significant difficulty a youth organization may encounter is that of acquiring quality facilities for their programming options. The findings of this thesis study

Utilizing sports-based interventions

illuminate some specific aspects of infrastructure to be considered when designing a youth-focused athletic program.

Sport-specific facilities. It is suggested that having proper facilities for given sport programming may lead to favorable outcomes. For instance, proper equipment, adequate space, and a safe environment are crucial.

Ability to separate programs. One interesting finding of this thesis study was the importance of being able to separate youth programs if need be. Specifically, having adequate space would allow for the provision of programs geared towards older youth to be separated from those for younger children and youth. This would allow for programming to be more age-specific and likely lead to increased retention rate.

Availability of community space. Although this would not be a crucial aspect, the ability of community members to gain access to program facilities can lead to favorable outcomes. Something as simple as renting out facilities for birthday parties, local fundraisers and or functions can lead an increased sense of community belonging or involvement, previously explained to be beneficial.

Consistent Evaluation

Youth programs, more specifically athletic programs, must be highly dynamic and able to adapt the ebbs and flows of the sector. Participants of this thesis study all stated similar claims in regards to the fads that present themselves in regards to youth interest and their programming options.

Monitor and evaluate. It is suggested that a program frequently monitor its athletic programming in regards to participation rates, drop out rates and reasons, program costs and other variables. It is also suggested that staff discuss programming

Utilizing sports-based interventions

options with youth participants, as they may offer suggestions that could lead to increased interest.

Adaptation. It is crucial that an SBI is able to adapt to changing interest levels or demographics of participants. By conducting proper monitoring and evaluation, a program can make fact-based decisions around the alteration of programming.

Willing to Terminate a Program. As suggested by participants of this study, some programs simply run their life course and staff have to be willing to admit this before re-engineering a new alternative.

The purpose of this study was to identify what aspects and characteristics are present within a successfully ran youth club. It was the hope of the research to provide clear recommendations for the implementation of sport-based interventions. It is the belief of the research that this study has achieved its initial goal, while opening a realm of numerous possibilities for further research.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Executive Director

SECTION I: Opening questions

How would you describe the “ideal” youth club?

What positive characteristics of the ideal club does your club possess?

Please describe what you would consider to be the “ideal” youth worker.

What characteristics of the ideal worker does your staff possess?

In what ways does this program/service help develop and prepare youth for the future?

SECTION II: Program structure and focus

Please describe the overall focus or orientation of the club.

Could you describe how day-to-day activity programming decisions are made?

The youth club has an emphasis on sport and athletic programming. Why is this the case?

Could you describe how major planning decisions are made?

Probe: Could you provide an example or two to illustrate the process?

What are the duties or roles of the Board of Directors?

Are Board members involved in the day-to-day activities?

SECTION III: Relationships

“Youth trust of youth workers can influence program participation and outcomes.”

How does the program build positive relationships between youth participants and youth workers?

Probes: Involvement in decision-making?

Offer leadership opportunities?

“Parental involvement can influence youth development.”

In what ways do you see parental involvement in the program?

In what kinds of ways do you think this involvement influences the youth?

In what kinds of ways can there be an association between youth workers and parents?

As a youth worker, do you view any negative influences as a result of these relationships?

SECTION IV: Youth retention

In what ways does the club attract youth? And what steps are taken to keep youth from dropping out?

How does the club encourage youth to participate?

What might be some of the reasons that youth leave the club?

What happens when somebody stops participating?

How does the club try to address the reasons that youth leave the club?/ Why do you believe youth drop out?

SECTION V: Evaluation and planning

In what ways do you consider the youth club to be successful?

What do you see as the potential for the club?

Can you describe future plans or actions in place to work towards this potential?

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Youth Workers

SECTION I: Opening questions

Please describe for me what you would consider to be the “ideal” youth club.

What positive characteristics of the ideal youth club does your club possess?

SECTION II: Describing the structure of programming

Please describe a typical day in the youth club.

“I realize that participants need to feel emotionally safe in order for them to stay in the program.” How does the program help participants feel emotionally safe?

“Participation in sports and athletics can have many positive effects on the development of youth, specifically at-risk youth.”

How are decisions made about the sport programming? Who is involved?

SECTION III: Examining relationships

“When youth participants develop trusting relationships with youth workers there is a greater likelihood of positive outcomes and continued program participation.”

How does the program build positive relationships between youth participants and youth workers?

Probes: Involvement in decision-making?

Offer leadership opportunities?

“Parental involvement can influence youth development.”

In what ways do you see parental involvement in the program?

In what kinds of ways do you think this involvement influences the youth?

In what kinds of ways can there be an association between youth workers and parents?

Do you observe any negative influences as a result of these relationships?

SECTION IV: Youth retention

Why do you think youth stay with the program?

What is done to encourage youth to participate?

What happens if a youth stops participating?

Utilizing sports-based interventions

What do you think might be their (participants') reasons for leaving the program?/Why do youth drop out?

SECTION V: Evaluating the youth club

In what ways do you consider the youth club to be successful?

What do you consider to be the club's best attributes?

In what ways do you think the club could further retain youth or attract more youth?

Are there any plans in place to make changes to the program?

Appendix C
Consent Form

Provided on MSVU letterhead

Informed Consent

My name is Kenzie Kozera and I am a Master of Arts student in the Department of Child and Youth Study, Mount Saint Vincent University. I am inviting your participation in my research study: “Utilizing sports-based intervention: A case study of a community youth club.” This research is important for improving knowledge about ways of supporting youth involvement in sport.

I am asking for your participation in a one-on-one interview with myself. During the interview I will be inquiring about your ideas about the benefits of youth participation in sport, how that participation can be supported. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will take place at a location agreed upon by both of us. With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded, or otherwise only written notes will be taken.

Recorded interviews will be transcribed and coded with only the researcher having access to the code key. The electronic version of the transcript will be stored on a flash drive. Interview notes taken by the researcher and the flash drive will be kept in locked areas accessible only to the researcher, and thesis supervisor. After five years, all hard copies and the digital storage devices will be destroyed.

The research will be part of a thesis available to the public and potentially published and the findings shared at conferences or other venues. In any written or oral report I make about the study, no identifying information will be revealed about the program or participants. Upon completion of the thesis you will be provided with a written summary of the findings.

Please note that your agreement is voluntary and can be withdrawn even after the interviews have started, without any explanation needing to be given, and with no negative repercussions.

There are no anticipated risks of participating in this study. Assumed benefits are participants’ potential to inform practices through communication of their experiences. Please note that although these benefits are assumed there is no guarantee they will be achieved.

This research is being supervised by Dr. Donna Varga, and you may contact her at 902-457-6325 or at donna.varga@msvu.ca. Also, if you have any questions about the

Utilizing sports-based interventions

conduct of the research you may contact the Chair of the Mount Saint Vincent University Ethics Board at 902-457-6788. I can be reached at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]@msvu.ca and would be pleased to discuss any aspects of this research with you.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in the study by completing attached consent form. If you are willing to have the interview recorded please sign the “Digital Recording Consent” section.

Sincerely,

Kenzie Kozera

Interview Consent

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Please note that your agreement is voluntary and can be withdrawn even after the interviews have started, without any explanation needing to be given, and with no negative repercussions.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Do you wish to receive a summary copy of the report? YES NO
If you indicated YES please provide an address (home or email) to forward the report summary:

One signed copy to be kept by the researcher, one signed copy to the participant.

Digital Recording Consent

By signing below, you are consenting to the interview being audio-recorded.

Please note that your agreement is voluntary and can be withdrawn even after the interviews have started, without any explanation needing to be given, and with no negative repercussions.

Utilizing sports-based interventions

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

One signed copy to be kept by the researcher, one signed copy to the participant.