

Identification, attendance and social, emotional and behaviour difficulties in disaffected adolescents: An opportunity for University of Greenwich undergraduate research assistants

Learning Evaluation Research Network

Background

Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT) is one of 12 national pioneer Youth Achievement Foundation (YAF) projects set up by UK Youth (funded by the DCSF's Youth Sector Development Fund). CACT uses sport as its speciality, having access to first class facilities and various vocational courses. They offer in-house work experience placements.

The YAF programme is an integrated vocational and activity-based alternative curriculum provision for young people in Key Stage 4 who have been, or are at risk of being, excluded from school.

Charlton Athletic has a strong brand presence for young people and CACT uses the brand to engage young people in a wide range of accredited education and employment programmes. These projects include numeracy and literacy support, expressive arts, hair and beauty, motor mechanics, ICT maintenance and sports qualifications.

In March 2011 the Research Centre for Children, Schools & Families were successful in obtaining funding from the University of Greenwich Alumni Development fund to conduct this study to understand how the YAF was helping its' students engage in learning.

Research Question

How effective is Charlton Athletic Community Trust's (CACT) new Youth Achievement Foundation (YAF) in reengaging disaffected youth in the education system?

Specific objectives were to:

1. To assess the effectiveness of the YAF on adolescent antisocial behaviour, school attendance, identification and aspirations.
2. To improve employability of 8+ University of Greenwich students by providing paid research employment opportunities.
3. Facilitate further projects with CACT

Methodology

This study used mixed methods design. Quantitative methods involved completion of self-report questionnaires, to gather demographic data, measures of students' social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire); and their identification with school, family and peers ('About Me' Questionnaire). Qualitative methods involved student

focus groups concentrating on student satisfaction, aspirations, feelings of belonging to school and changes in behaviours.

Participants were identified by their enrolment on the Youth Achievement Foundation. All 25 pupils of YAF were invited to participate in the study. Thirteen participants took part in both the quantitative part of the study and the qualitative focus groups (3 female, 10 male). All participants were between 15-17 years of age and predominantly of white, British ethnic origin.

There are three CACT YAF centres, two in Avery Hill, and one in Thamesmead. Researchers, who were psychology students at University of Greenwich, visited all three sites to distribute questionnaires and to conduct audio-recorded focus groups, lasting approximately 45 minutes.

Results

Preliminary quantitative analysis

'About Me' and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scores were totalled and averaged. A Pearson's correlation was used to investigate the existence of significant relationships.

A key trend observed was a significant negative relationship between family identification and conduct problems, indicating that participants with higher conduct problems identified less with their family.

Due to the small sample of participants in this research the data was analysed qualitatively.

Qualitative analysis of focus groups

Preference for YAF over mainstream schools

In general, students reported a preference by the children for a YAF over mainstream schools.

"...I prefer it; it's more like I don't know like. You know like in a school you get one teacher per 30 kids, here you get like a couple of kids in a classroom that's better I prefer that..." (Participant)

"...I find it easier, but when there is more people you get distracted and you want to sit with that person talk to that person you end up getting in a conversation with them and end up just not doing your work." (Participant)

"I think it's where we get on really well; he reckons we are like a family. He does he reckons we are like a family. He said we are like that because we spends so much time together, we don't spend much time with our actual like real families." (Participant)

Parental / Family Engagement

It appeared from focus group analysis that participants with good relationships with their parents and other family members were more engaged with their education and with their plans for work after leaving CACT YAF.

"...to make my brothers proud of me, really, make my family proud of me..." (Participant, when asked about his plans for completing a construction apprenticeship).

Where participants feel that their behaviour hasn't improved and they are not engaged with their learning, it seems that there is negative parental feedback, which may provide more evidence of the relationship between family identity and engagement with the CACT YAF.

"...my mum thinks I'm worse" (participant)

"...my mum barely even trusts me" (participant)

Changes in behaviour

Some participants self-reported positive changes in their behaviour which were attributed to their change in school environment. They reported better attendance and less disruptive behaviour compared to mainstream education.

"I don't know my behaviour is like improved in different areas...I try to keep my language down." (Participant)

"Learnt to be more upfront, learnt to voice my opinion more." (Participant)

"I think I've calmed myself down a bit....cos in mainstream school I always used to bunk...and then when I come down here, obviously had a chat with my mum and that...I just settled down here." (Participant)

Future Aspirations

Participants seemed to have aspirations for the future which varied from enrolling on apprenticeships to going to Higher Education. Some reported an interest in pursuing an interest in sports which may have been promoted through the CACT YAF.

"I'm going on to do an apprenticeship....I've got work experience." (Participant)

"I wouldn't mind being like a coach or a personal trainer...I like working with little kids because you got like a lot more, they got a lot of energy...so it's just to keep them active. I don't mind that." (Participant)

"When I leave here, I just want to go to college or university. Get something better." (Participant)

Other Participants reported that they were still unsure about their qualifications and what the future held for them.

"Yeah, coming here, it's just like long and all you get is two and half GCSE's." (Participant)

"...two and a half GCSE's...you can't even stack the shelves in the co-op with that..." (Participant)

Conclusions

Overall, participants reported a preference for YAF over mainstream education and the following objectives were achieved:

- **Targeting anti-social behaviour;** participants reported a reduction in anti-social behaviour
- **Increasing academic engagement;** participants reported to be more engaged with education and reported better school attendance than mainstream education.
- **Increase in identification;** Participants reported feeling close and identifying more with family members and being able to voice opinions.
- **Increase employability;** the majority of participants were positive about the future and reported various, education, sports and vocational aspirations.

Recommendations

The project suggests that as a whole the YAF has had positive outcomes in terms of anti-social behaviour reduction, increasing identification with family members and future aspirations for those participants who are engaged with education. However, there is a small sample who are not so engaged with education and lack family identity. These participants are less certain about what the future holds and future research would be advised to investigate further the relationship between family identity and engagement with CACT YAF and future aspirations.

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