Stepping into community? The impact of youth sport volunteering on young people's social capital

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Introduction

Since 1997 the UK has energetically deployed sport in pursuit of diverse social policy agendas including enhancing health, engaging disaffected youth, countering anti-social behaviour and contributing to community well-being. Initially focussing on issues of social inclusion, the policy discourses have progressively shifted to those surrounding active citizenship and social capital. The extent to which the intended social outcomes are definable, realistic and measurable has however been queried, as has the causal role that sport can play in achieving them. In this chapter we address aspects of this debate through a focus on the capacity of youth sport volunteering to develop social capital. In many senses youth sports volunteering 'ticks the boxes' of a number of topical UK policy agendas, providing a form of social participation that potentially engages young people in community-oriented activities, empowers them as resourceful individuals and contributes to the development of citizenship and social capital. These concepts are however much disputed and the debate surrounding the associated policy agendas is intense. Here we analyse the extent to which young people's experiences of volunteering in sport may match or fall short of these policy expectations.

We start by setting the context for our analysis through a review of the debates surrounding social capital itself and its location in UK social policy and sport policy. These issues have been the subject of detailed analyses by previous writers (see for example Coalter's (2007) examination of sport, social capital and social regeneration) and by others authors in this volume, and our purpose here is to provide a sufficiently detailed but reasonably concise overview to locate this chapter in relation to these wider debates. Like Graham Cuskelly (this volume), our interest is in the relationship between volunteering activity and social capital, and we therefore also examine key literature relating to volunteering in the UK. We pay particular attention to patterns of youth volunteering, and the experiences of young people who engage in it.

We then turn our attention to the specific case of youth sports volunteering. Our main purpose here is to explore whether, and in what way, experiences of volunteering in sport may contribute to the development of social capital among young people. As the editors of this volume stress, there is a need to move beyond 'intuition, suggestion and political opportunism', both in analysing the concept social capital, and applying it in policy. We aim to contribute to this by providing an empirically based analysis that draws on extensive monitoring and evaluation data for the Step into Sport programme, a major national initiative in the UK that trains young people as volunteer sports workers and provides them with placement opportunities through which they gain direct experience of volunteering. Step into Sport began in 2002 and

at the time of writing had been running for almost five years, during which time an estimated 60,000 young people had participated in its various stages. It is a high profile and long-term initiative, jointly funded and managed by a consortium of national sports agencies and government departments, and recently given further impetus by Britain's successful bid for the 2012 London Olympics. The programme provides a series of structured 'Steps' that progressively develop young people's skills and abilities to undertake effective sports volunteering, and provide them with opportunities to actively volunteer in school and community settings. In the later stages the Community Volunteers element of the programme allows older teenagers (from age 16) to undertake extended sports volunteering placements that actively engage with their communities. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from young people participating in this element of the programme, we examine whether being actively engaged in this way impacts on the social connectedness that underpins social capital.

Social Capital and UK social policy

The concept of social capital has become increasingly popular in UK policy making circles in recent years as a result of its perceived capacity to contribute to greater social cohesion and civic renewal (Policy Action Team 10 1999, Cantle 2001, Harper 2001). The conceptualisation of social capital as a panacea for economic growth, political engagement and active citizenship has also become a subject of increasing academic debate in economics, political science, sociology, and leisure studies in North America, the UK and France (Fukuyami 1995, Putnam 1993, 1995, 2000, Coleman 1990, 1994, Bourdieu 1984, 1999, Blackshaw and Long 2005). This has led to a range of competing and contested definitions of social capital and some confusion as to what constitutes social capital and the way in which its effects become manifest to impact upon social relations and civil society.

The most popularly utilised academic conceptualisation of social capital has been Putnam's (1995, 2000) definition of it as '*networks, norms and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives'*. Putnam central argument is that increased social connectedness encourages greater social solidarity and social cohesion through 'bonding' and 'bridging' individuals into a larger collective whole. Broadly speaking, bonding capital refers to the value assigned to social networks between homogenous groups of people where ties, interaction and familiarity are relatively strong. In contrast, bridging capital refers to social networks between socially heterogeneous groups of people where social ties and bonds may be looser and more diverse. From this perspective, social capital is conceptualised as a collective property based on shared norms, trust, reciprocity and establishment of a range of formal and informal social networks. Whilst other 'social capitalists' have argued that social capital is also premised on rational individual action (Coleman 1990, 1994 Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), there is a more general agreement with Putnam that social capital underpins a more productive, supporting and trusting society and allows society's mechanisms to operate with greater efficiency to the benefit of the wider population. Conversely, however, an identifiable withdrawal from networks of collective reciprocity and cultural participation can weaken social capital and have direct negative consequences for the productive and cohesive functioning of society.

As has been noted elsewhere in this volume, the work of Putnam and the 'positive' social capital thesis has not been without criticism and contestation, especially in its implication that social capital is a force for individual and collective good. Whilst Putnam also recognises the potential for a 'dark side' of social capital, a number of

authors have further elaborated on some of the processes of exclusion which can inhibit an increased and unproblematic engagement in wider civic society amongst some groups (Portes 1996, Blackshaw and Long 2005). For example, Putnam's conceptualisation of 'bonding' social capital can lead to the exclusion of outsiders across a range of group settings, with particular reference to sustaining patterns of racism, sectarianism, xenophobia, sexism and homophobia and the closed hegemonic structures within which such attitudes and behaviours flourish. Further, social capital of this kind may operate to impose conformity and social division at the expense of tolerance and inclusivity. Putnam's overly nostalgic overview of the immediate post-war period in America as the peak of social connectedness and civic virtue largely downplays some deep-rooted societal fractures and the institutionalised marginalisation of racialised minority communities and gender discrimination prevalent in the US at this time. In this sense, social capital can have distinctly exclusionary effects on civic and social participation and can limit access to decision-making hierarchies amongst a range of more marginalised groups.

A key challenge to Putnam's functionalist conceptualisation of social capital and its potential for collective good is that it neglects the central issue of the unequal distribution of access to material and symbolic resources which shape power relations in society. Bourdieu (1996) utilises the theoretical concepts of field, habitus and capital to offer a more complex understanding of the way in which social, cultural and economic capital synthesise the relationship between individual and society. Whilst the work of Bourdieu (like Putnam) is interested in structural determinants and social connections there is also a strong account of individual agency and the implications for the way in which social capital can be acquired through 'profits of membership' and civic associations at an individual level by those with the material and symbolic resources to do so. In this sense, Bourdieu is interested in the acquisition and effects of social capital as a way of explaining inequalities in society. From this Bourdieuian perspective, social capital is:

> *'on the one hand, a tangible resource made by advantage of family, friendship or other kinds of social networks, and, on the other hand, like all forms of capital, it has a symbolic dimension, which contrives to hide networks of power woven into the fibres of familiarity' (Blackshaw and Long 251: 2005)*

Whilst Bourdieu's more complex sociological conceptualisation of 'capital' which alludes to the interplay between real and perceived individual agency and structural relations of power in society has found significant favour across a range of academic disciplines, it has had less influence in UK policy making circles. In the UK, Coleman's rational choice theory and, especially, Putnam's more structural functionalist approach to social capital have found strong favour with New Labours 'third way' approach to governance which has sought to establish a 'middle ground' between the state and the free market and which depends significantly on the capacity and effective functioning of third sector provision of a range of public services. Key to the appeal of social capital in UK policy circles is its linkage with public policy concerns around social exclusion and civil renewal and the idea that social capital can contribute to increased individual and collective citizenship and strengthen fractured communities through increased social participation and social interaction. The convergence of these theoretical and political approaches to understanding and managing civil society are philosophically informed by civic communitarianism (Giddens 1991) and the belief that high levels of social capital are necessary for the effective functioning of modern liberal democracies. For some authors, the civic communitarianism/social capital approach ignores the pervasiveness of market forces in society and their consequences for

disenfranchised groups (Blackshaw and Long 2005). For other authors, these approaches prioritise social order over social justice and can lead to a downward levelling of norms and values which are imposed upon marginalised groups (Portes 1996). Nonetheless, it is probably the case, that the influence of Putnam and Coleman's social capital thesis on UK policy is also reflective of a general commitment on the part of the New Labour government to re-introduce a distinctly social dimension into late-modern capitalism in the UK and marks a concerted effort to engage citizens in the wider, albeit flawed, democratic process, through the medium of active community participation.

Despite significant contestation over the meaning and processes of social capital, a number of UK government departments have sought to come to a consensus around its measurement and application in a policy context (Babb 2005). The Office for National Statistics has identified five key indicators of social capital; social participation, civic participation, social networks and social support, reciprocity and trust and views of the local area (Whiting and Harper, 2003: 7). These indicators feature both objective and subjective dimensions, ascertain individual attitudinal and behavioural processes and evaluate levels of engagement with wider community networks. This approach recognises social capital as a multi-dimensional concept which is located within relational networks of sociability and civil society and follows from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) definition of social capital as '*networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups*' (Cote and Healy 2001: 41).

Within this conceptualisation, social participation is defined in terms of involvement (and frequency of involvement) in organised groups, clubs and associations. The 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey indicates that around 65% of a broadly representative sample of the population surveyed had been involved socially in groups, clubs or organisations at least once in the previous 12 months and that 52% were involved in social participation of this kind on a more regular monthly basis. High levels of social participation were equated more strongly with key socio-demographic factors such as higher socio-economic status, higher educational achievement, with males and with people from White-British and Black-British ethnic groups. The survey findings also identified some correlation between high levels of social participation and other indicators of social capital such as positive views of the neighbourhood, length of residence in the neighbourhood, feelings of trust and safety, and stronger social networks.

It is in the light of these conceptualisations, we are interested in exploring the potential role of (sports) volunteering to contribute to the development of social capital. In recent years, volunteering has increasingly become a focus for UK government attention because of its perceived potential to encourage active citizenship and civil renewal (Social Exclusion Unit 1998, Home Office 1999, Attwood, Singh, Prime, and Creasey 2001; Kitchen, Michaelson, Wood, and John, 2005; Munton and Zurawan, 2003). The driving force behind the linkage of voluntarism with wider policy issues has been the New Labour project which has sought to establish a devolved 'third way' approach to governance and which is philosophically underpinned by notions of civic communitarianism (Giddens 1991) and the social capital thesis expounded authors such as Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) and Coleman (1988, 1990, 1994). Within this ideological framework, volunteering is viewed as a key element of social participation with the potential to increase individual and collective citizenship through the medium of active community participation. In this respect, volunteering is construed as a site where social capital

can be measured and increased through key policy interventions designed to encourage greater voluntary activity.

The tendency within UK government policy to view volunteering as having a positive integrative function with wider social benefits of increased citizenship and social solidarity can be problematic. For Rojek (2000), such assertions are reflective of an overtly functionalist approach to linkages and networks in civil society and risk reducing volunteering to a 'rationalist-purposive activity'. Blackshaw and Long have also questioned the assumptions inherent within functionalist conceptualisations of volunteering as a causative force for 'good' social capital and which '*neglect the role of power in social networks and voluntary associations [and] ignore the way social capital within this [functionalist] thesis is divorced from economic capital*' (2005: 249). From these more critical perspectives, UK government policy and its theoretical informants overplay the capacity of volunteering to contribute to increased social cohesion and, conversely, underplay some key dimensions of power, access to economic resources and exclusionary practices within voluntary organisations. In the next section we examine how these structural issues are evident in patterns of engagement in volunteering.

Volunteering in youth policy in the UK

In the UK's 1997 National Survey of Volunteering (Davis-Smith 1998) volunteering is defined as *'Any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit (individuals and groups) other than or addition to, close relatives, or the benefit of the environment',* indicating a popular perception of social participation and citizenship in political thought as one based on individual and collective involvement in communities. Volunteering has therefore been seen as a key element of strategies to promote social participation and increase individual and collective citizenship, especially among young people (Social Exclusion Unit 1998, Home Office 1999, Attwood, Singh, Prime, and Creasey 2001; Kitchen, Michaelson, Wood, and John, 2005; Munton and Zurawan, 2003).

In some respects volunteering appears suitable for this function: there is broad parity in rates of formal and informal volunteering between males and females, and little significant difference in rates of formal and informal volunteering between UK born majority ethnic and minority ethnic communities (Kitchen, Michaelson, Wood, and John, 2005). However, differences have been evident in relation to socio-economic status and voluntary activity. The National Volunteering Survey showed that people employed in higher management and professional occupations were almost twice as likely as people in routine and semi-routine occupations to be involved in formal volunteering, and differences in rates of formal volunteering were also constant when measured against educational achievement and geographical indices of deprivation. Overall, these 'classed' patterns of voluntary activity suggest that participation in formal volunteering is more characteristic of the volunteering culture of people drawn from more affluent than lower-income neighbourhoods. There was much less of a gap in rates of informal volunteering between people drawn from a range of socio-economic groups. This was largely accounted for by a greater tendency and increasingly likelihood of people drawn from less affluent backgrounds to engage in less formalised networks of mutual aid and social support and to recognise this form of social participation within these terms.

The interplay of socio-demographic, interpersonal, perceptual and infrastructural factors can limit opportunities for participation in formal and informal volunteering. The Home Office Citizenship Surveys of 2001, 2003 and 2005 (Attwood, Singh,

Prime, and Creasey 2001; Kitchen, Michaelson, Wood, and John, 2005; Munton and Zurawan, 2003) identify lower levels of engagement in volunteering amongst groups which experience lower socio-economic status, income and educational attainment. Similarly, reduced patterns of engagement with volunteering are also evident across key indicators of social capital with reference to less neighbourhood satisfaction, trust, safety, length of residence and limited social networks. These findings strongly suggest that a lack of key social, cultural and material resources limit access to and participation in formalised volunteering in the UK.

Research exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion in the UK (Davis-Smith, Ellis, Howlett and O'Brien 2004) has shown the significance of psychological and perceptual barriers to formal volunteering amongst socially excluded groups. These include individuals' lack of confidence, self-esteem and personal value, and their sense that volunteering is perceived as an overly formal and limited activity undertaken primarily by and for mainstream groups in society. In some cases, these perceptions were rooted in local realities and negative experiences of volunteering in formalised settings on the part of marginalised groups. Other discouragements included previous experiences of volunteering as being poorly organised, overly difficult, and lacking enough flexibility and variety to maintain sufficient interest and sustained engagement; a tendency to feel unappreciated; and issues around the non-payment of out of pocket expenses were also felt particularly strongly by groups experiencing wider social exclusions. These more infrastructural challenges to the public image of volunteering and practical management of volunteers form a constant theme in UK policy and academic debates around voluntarism and social participation and have informed new initiatives designed to recruit and retain volunteers, especially young people.

Within this broader political context youth volunteering has taken on added resonance as a key element of social participation. In particular, youth volunteering has been seen as a mechanism for addressing a range of youth orientated policy concerns around physical health, education, crime and risk reduction, individual and collective citizenship and community cohesion. Since 1997 the New Labour government has sought to respond to increasing concerns over youth alienation and disaffection and has implemented a range of policy directives and initiatives designed to encourage greater levels of active citizenship amongst young people, with particular reference to civic engagement and social participation (Armstrong 2002, Catan 2002; Department for Education and Skills, 2003; National Centre for Social Research 2000). Whilst these policy concerns have considered some of the structural determinants of issues of crime, poverty and educational under-achievement, they have also been keen to encourage a shift in human agency amongst young people premised on notions of citizens rights and responsibilities and the maximising of individual potential. Such notions reflect New Labours civic communitarianism philosophical informants and a practical 'third way' approach to national governance (Giddens 1991).

Young people's participation in volunteering has not always matched the policy expectations laid upon it. In the UK there were a sharp declines in rates of youth volunteering between 1991 and 2001 and a small, but significant, upturn in rates of youth volunteering from 2003 onwards (Lynn and Davis Smith 1992, Davis Smith 1998, Attwood, Singh, Prime, and Creasey 2001; Kitchen, Michaelson, Wood, and John, 2005; Munton and Zurawan, 2003). The proportion of 16-24 year olds volunteering formally at least once in the previous 12 months fell from 55% in 1991 to 40% in 2001. Volunteer rates among 16-19 year olds subsequently rose from 41% in 2003 to 53% in 2005 although they remained fairly constant amongst 20-24 year olds (43% in 2003, 42% in 2005). Rates of formal youth volunteering are currently broadly

comparable to older, middle-aged, cohorts of volunteers, but it is notable that there is a marked drop off in levels of formal volunteering across the transition from youth to early adulthood. On the whole, young people are much more likely to engage in volunteering in relatively informal settings: 78% of 16-19 year olds had done so in 2005, and 75% of 20-24 year olds.

The sharp decline in youth volunteering throughout the 1990s led to a more general shift and re-branding of youth volunteering in the early 21st century. A key element was the 1999 launch of the Millennium Volunteers (MV) programme, designed to promote sustained volunteering amongst young people aged 16-24 years old. The MV programme aimed to increase the number and range of youth volunteering opportunities and to provide accreditation and recognition for young peoples voluntary efforts, engendering increased personal and professional development and encouraging wider community benefit. MV programmes have been administered through a range of local delivery agencies with a key interest in youth work and social care and have been organised around a series of key principles, including sustained personal commitment, community benefit, voluntary participation, inclusiveness, ownership by young people, variety, partnership, quality and recognition. In some locales, MV programmes have been used a targeted mechanism to re-engage socially excluded and 'at risk' young people and to help engender greater social cohesion and empower communities in economically deprived areas.

In this evaluation of the Millennium Volunteers project Davis Smith (2002) identified a range of personal, professional and community benefits arising from young people's involvement in organised voluntary activity. In this he echoed the work of Gaskin (1998) who identified a range of benefits and motivations among young people. Davis Smith found that volunteering contributed to young people's professional development through attainment of a range of 'hard-edged' vocational skills and qualifications which enhanced routes to permanent employment and improved access to further and higher education. Youth volunteering had also contributed to the parallel acquisition of a range of 'soft-edged' skills such as self-confidence, self-esteem, communication and organisation skills which and enhanced employability, especially amongst socially excluded groups of young people where these forms of personal growth had much wider ramifications and impact. Alongside these instrumental motivations, more altruistic views were in evidence, and the two often worked in tandem to shape young people's voluntary activity. Youth volunteering was seen as a key mechanism through which young people had become active members of local communities and their ongoing commitment to sustainable volunteering was perceived to be a measure of increased citizenship. Youth volunteering was also perceived to have made a significant contribution to the capacity of service providers to maintain and increase the delivery of services to a range of client groups, especially in the social sector. This increased human capacity had clear cost/benefits in terms of economic returns and had also enhanced the quality of life and experiences of, often vulnerable and socially excluded, service user groups. Improvements to the wider social and physical environment of communities were also cited as a benefit of targeted youth volunteering projects. Youth volunteering had also contributed to improvements in inter-generational relations and had helped break down negative stereotypes about young people held by older cohorts and had contributed to increased social capital indicators of improved trust, confidence and reciprocity.

In the opening years of the 21st century, youth volunteering in the UK therefore presented a mixed picture. While there was evidence that young people's individual motivation to volunteer was declining, or being compromised by competing demands, it was also apparent that structured programmes of volunteering could be effective

vehicles for engaging them. Those who did participate in such initiatives obtained multiple benefits and generated gains for their local communities. Adopting such approaches in sport, where youth were a primary policy concern and the dependency on a declining volunteer population was impacting community delivery, was timely.

The Step into Sport project

Step into Sport (SIS) was launched in 2002. The project operates nationally in England offering a framework of structured opportunities for young people to participate in volunteering and leadership training in sports. It aims to establish a clear pathway to progression designed to empower of participants with knowledge and experience to make a positive voluntary contribution to local sporting communities. The project has two key components. Firstly, it offers five programmes for young people aged 14-19 years, providing progressive training and experience in sports leadership and volunteering: Sport Education, Level One Sports Leadership, Top Link, Level Two Community Sports Leadership, and Community Volunteering. The programmes are facilitated by PE Teachers in schools within the national school sports partnership framework with the support of the Youth Sports Trust and Sports Leaders UK. Secondly, the project involves the development of capacity building networks involving school sports partnerships, local authorities, county sports partnerships, national governing bodies of sports and Sport England, to help strengthen local sports infrastructure and provide high quality volunteer placement opportunities for young volunteers.

Since 2002 the Institute of Youth Sport has been responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the Step into Sport programme. Phase One (2002-2004) of the SIS project was funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Home Office 'Active Communities' Unit and Phase Two (2004-2006) of the SIS project by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) alone. Step into Sport is managed and co-ordinated by Sport England, the Youth Sport Trust and Sports Leaders UK (formerly the British Sports Trust), building on the skills and expertise of these organisations' work in this important area. The evaluation has been wide-ranging in its evaluation of the measurable impact of Step into Sport upon active participants and the way in which the various components of the project link together in a co-ordinated and structured way to provide clear pathways of progression for young people as volunteers and sports leaders. The research has utilised quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation, including large-scale surveys of young participants, County Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, and former Community Volunteers, and interview-based research with County Sports Partnerships, School Sports Partnerships, Placement Providers, PE Teachers and former Community Volunteers.

In this chapter we are concentrating on the impact that direct experience of sports volunteering, delivered through Step into Sport, has on young people. Our focus is on the Community Volunteers element of the programme, designed for young people aged 16+, who are first trained in sports leadership, and then undertake placements as volunteers. During the placement element, young people are encouraged to achieve certain levels (amounts) of active volunteering experience, ranging from a target of 50 hours to achieve Bronze level to 100 for Silver and 200 for Gold. Placements may take place in young people's schools, where they may assist in either curricular or extra-curricular activities, and/or in local community sports clubs or other sports facilities. Young people's placements may take place at more than one venue/setting, involve one or more volunteer roles across single or multiple

sports, and may entail working with a variety of types of participants. The placements therefore provide a very direct experience of working with others, providing a resource of expertise and increased capacity that is of use to them, and through this has the potential to foster social connectedness. Alongside this, however, it offers a substantial training element that allows young people to enhance their skills and provide evidence on their CVs that they have done so. We are therefore mindful that engaging in volunteering can have instrumental as well as altruistic motives, and that both may be expected among Step into Sports' young participants.

The account given here draws on data collected between November 2005 – June 2006. Research with the Community Volunteers themselves comprised an initial self-completion 'tracking survey' of 160 volunteers who had first engaged with the CV programme in March and April 2003, and a follow-up set of in-depth interviews with a sample of respondents (n=10). The young people who participated had first taken part in the evaluation in the first year of Step into Sport, when the research team had carried out an initial questionnaire-based survey of young people attending either the CV four-day residential training camp and/or one of the CV one-day training camps held at a range of venues nationally. This first survey resulted in 631 completed questionnaires with home addresses provided by 613 (97%) participants. Sixteen months later, in August 2004, the IYS research team administered a questionnaire-based survey direct to the homes of those 613 pupils who had since been encouraged to complete up to 200 hours of 'Community Volunteering' in local sporting communities as part of their ongoing engagement with Step Five of the Step into Sport project. After a relatively sluggish initial response to our requests for information and following two further questionnaire mail-outs in October 2004 and December 2004, the IYS eventually received a total of 160 completed questionnaires from our target sample group, resulting in an acceptable 26% response rate for postal surveys of this kind. All questionnaires were completed fully by our respondent sample group and many respondents added more qualitative comments which illustrate further some of the key themes to emerge from the more statistical findings featured in this report. Subsequently a set of 10 in-depth interviews was conducted with a sub-group of these respondents to further illuminate these key themes.

Young people's experience of sports volunteering through the Step into Sport project

The survey of Community Volunteers sought wide-ranging information on the young people's socio-demographic and educational background, and their experiences of sport, volunteering, the Community Volunteering programme and the Step into Sport project overall. Here we concentrate on the data relating to the impact of the experience of the volunteer placement on the young people.

The parameters of participation
The results we report here are based on the returns from 160 young people who responded to the tracking survey. This represents a response rate of 26% which while adequate, suggests some caution is appropriate. The response rate was affected by changes in the circumstances of the young people who were aged 17 – 20 at the time of the survey. Many had left their parental home and entered work or further/higher education and were no longer contactable at their original address. In addition, we assume that as is usual with self-completion surveys, there is a level of selectivity among respondents, with those most interested and satisfied with their experiences of Community Volunteering being most likely to respond. In this respect we acknowledge that we are likely to be dealing with the most favourable accounts of

the Community Volunteers programme. This does not undermine the validity of those accounts for the individuals concerned, but we would be cautious about assuming that they would be more widely replicated.

Community Volunteers (CV) is aimed at young people 16+, and all respondents were aged between 17-20 years old at the time of the survey. Most respondents were female (65%), White British (92%), and from relatively affluent 'middle income' geographical locales: relatively few (<12%) respondents were from the 20% of wards classed as the most deprived nationally (ONS: 2004). There were few respondents from BME communities (n=13; 8%), and very few with self-reported physical disabilities, learning difficulties or a sensory impairment (n=3, 2%). At the time of the tracking survey many young people had completed their school education and 70% had moved on to continue their education elsewhere (50% to University and 20% to Further Education), while 16% were in full-time employment, 34% were employed part-time and 2% were unemployed.

The profile of the Community Volunteering respondents reflects the overall profile of participants in the Step into Sport programme, which in its opening years tended to be dominated by white, middle class young people with high educational aspirations. Pupils from poorer neighbourhoods, BME communities and pupils with lower educational achievement records were generally under-represented. This pattern reflects the issue often raised by analysts of social capital - that it may be those who already have capital that may be most likely to engage in opportunities for social connectedness, thus obtaining cumulative benefit. It also resonates with Coalter's reminder of the specifically non-inclusive tradition in organised sport (Coalter, 2007).

As might be expected with a voluntary, sports-based programme, most respondents had an established interest in sport and in sports leadership roles. Prior to their involvement in Step into Sport about four-fifths (81%) had taken sports leadership awards, half (52%) had obtained sports-specific coaching awards, and a third (34%) general sports coaching qualifications. A high proportion (79%) had also taken school-based academic qualifications in Physical Education, and a quarter of those currently at school/college (25%) intended to pursue a sports-related degree at university. Many young people therefore brought considerable knowledge and established interest to their sports volunteering placements. In addition, the great majority had also had previous experience of volunteering: again, around four-fifths had done so (80%) overall, and most of these (89%) in sport. Much of this volunteering was however relatively low-key, with most reporting it as an 'occasional' rather than 'regular' undertaking.

Volunteering through Step into Sport did not necessarily bring, therefore, a wholly new experience for all participants: most of the research respondents had been predisposed to volunteering prior to joining the Community Volunteers programme, and most had had some experience of doing so. In contrast to the more intermittent volunteering that young people had done previously, however, the Community Volunteers programme offered an opportunity to undertake a substantial, structured and continuous volunteer placement, to undergo the associated training, and, in some cases, to experience diverse roles in varied contexts. Perhaps most crucially from the perspective of social capital, the placement experience required young people to engage with 'others' - young sports participants with whom they had usually had little previous contact, and who in many cases had been wholly unknown to them. As earlier volunteer placements had mainly built on young people's existing networks, the CV placement had the potential to provide a better basis for developing a form of 'bridging' capital than young people may have obtained previously, through the new opportunities for social connectedness it offered.

The survey findings captured young people's diverse experiences during their CV placements, with regards to the scale of their volunteer activity, the contexts within which they operated, the roles they undertook, the sports they were involved in and the client groups with whom they worked. The structure of the Community Volunteer programme allowed participants to undertake up to 200 hours of volunteering. On average respondents had completed 113 volunteering hours, with 29% completing 200 hours of volunteering (SiS 'Gold Certificate' standard) and around one-third (34%) more than 100 hours of volunteering (Silver Certificate). Of the remainder, 18% had completed more than 50 hours of volunteering (Bronze Certificate) and a similar proportion (19%) fewer than 50 hours of volunteering.

Young people could obtain their volunteer hours by volunteering in more than one capacity and/or at more than one venue, local sports infrastructure permitting. Generally those who had undertaken higher hours of volunteering were most likely to have had the most diverse experiences. Among the research respondents as a whole, a slight majority (52%) had undertaken volunteer placements at more than one venue, most (78%) had volunteered in more than one sport, and most (56%) had also taken on more than one type of volunteer function. School-based volunteering was prominent, and most respondents (71%) had carried out at least some of their volunteering in school-based placements (covering both curricular and extra-curricular school-based sport); however, many had volunteered at sports clubs (53%), sports and leisure facilities (15%) and youth clubs (12%). During their placement the majority (94%) had undertaken sports leadership and/or coaching activities; almost three-quarters (73%) had officiated at games and tournaments; and smaller numbers had undertaken administrative support (20%), sports maintenance (15%), information technology (5%) or more general support (5%) activities. As volunteers they had worked with a range of client groups, including primary school children (82%), secondary school pupils (72%), people with learning difficulties (36%), physical disabilities (21%) or sensory impairments (8%), BME groups (18%), socially excluded groups (15%) young adults (26%), older adults (14%), and elderly groups (6%).

There was some indication that structural factors were impacting on patterns of placement activity. Some aspects of volunteering were differentiated by gender: on average males undertook more volunteer hours than females and all males had taken on leadership/coaching roles; although these were also widespread among females (89%), they were not universal. Types of sport were also differentiated along traditional gender lines with, for example, males featuring highly in football and cricket placements and females in those involving hockey and netball. More female volunteers (41%) than males (27%) had worked with people with learning difficulties, and also with those with physical disabilities (25% females, 13% males) and with sensory impairments (9% females, 7% males). We might tentatively suggest that there are some indications that males were more likely to volunteer within established sports contexts and females were more likely to volunteer outside them, but the small sub-sample sizes mean that such observations should remain purely speculative.

There was also some evidence of differentiation rooted in factors associated with privilege and disadvantage. Practical difficulties in undertaking placements – notably cost and travel - were most likely to be reported by respondents from less affluent areas; correspondingly, these respondents were less likely than those from more affluent neighbourhoods to travel to placements further from their homes. Probably as a consequence of this, respondents from more deprived areas were less likely to undertake their placements in community sports clubs and particularly likely to do so

in schools settings. Once again this resonates with the suggestions that those who are most materially and socially well-resourced may be best positioned to take up further opportunities to extend their social connectedness.

We are cautious, however, about couching such observations in overly critical terms. It is unrealistic to expect deep-rooted social structural processes to be over-turned by sports projects, and it is especially unrealistic to expect this of projects that are in their early years and whose impact will inevitably be strongly influenced by their close association with established educational institutions through which patterns of inequality are often sustained. The most striking impact of the Community Volunteers programme was that it gave a large number of young people opportunities to engage with others in a reciprocal relationship through the medium of sport. We now go on to consider how the young people who accessed these experiences were affected by them.

Being a sports volunteer: the impact on participants
Our analysis of the how young people were affected by their volunteer placements focuses on two themes. Firstly, like Gaskin (1998) we recognise that instrumental motives sit alongside altruistic concerns: volunteering can enhance employability and access to educational opportunities. For many young people, participation in the Community Volunteers programme was undoubtedly attractive because it gave the opportunity for significant skill development in a structured programme that could be formally recorded on CVs and application forms. We therefore recognised that one key set of benefits would be those surrounding the personal and skill development (human and sporting capital) that was a pre-requisite for equipping young people to be effective volunteers. Secondly, and more obviously connected to the issue of developing social capital, we focussed on the impact of the volunteer experience on the social connectedness of young people - how much it provided positive, and often new, experiences of working with and for others, with the possibility of engendering a longer-term sensitivity and commitment to 'community'. Both of these themes were strongly represented in the research findings, from both the 'tracking survey' and the subsequent series of in-depth interviews with 10 of the survey respondents.

Developing human and sporting capital: Personal and skill development through sport volunteering

The respondents to the tracking survey reported multiple impacts from their experience of their Community Volunteers placement(s), with benefits in personal skill development most widely reported. A large majority of respondents reported impacts such as improvements in leadership skills (88%), communication skills (80%) and organisational skills (65%). Many also reported increased confidence (85%) as a result of undertaking their CV placement.

- *Table 1 about here*

There were a number of indications that the greatest benefits were obtained by those who undertook most volunteering, and/or volunteered in diverse contexts. The respondents who were most likely to report personal development improvements were those who had volunteered for more than 100 hours, and/or had done so at more than one venue, and/or undertaken a variety of volunteer activities. Some findings were gendered: males were more likely than females to report improved organisational skills, communication skills and increased confidence, and females were more likely than males to report improved leadership skills.

The findings from the CV survey provided substantial evidence that volunteers obtained considerable benefits from their placement experience, and that many also developed a stronger orientation to active involvement in their community. Following the analysis of the survey data, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain more detailed explanations about how undertaking placements affected the volunteers in these ways. A sample of survey respondents was selected that provided a mix of male and female volunteers, from white and BME groups, and with varying levels Community Volunteering experience as measured in total hours undertaken.

In line with the survey findings, interviewees gave frequent accounts of personal and skill development. Improvements in sport-specific leadership skills were widely reported:

> *My coaching skills have definitely improved, for example, breaking up a skill, I couldn't do that when I first started, but as I went on I knew how to break it down to suit that person.* (Female, aged 20)

> *I definitely improved my teaching and coaching skills in general, like warm-ups and stretching and to pay more attention to that because when it's just you, you don't really bother, but when it's with the children I realised how important it was to warm-up properly. Also, I learnt the key basic skills to teaching PE really. (*Male, aged 20)

> *I did the course because I want to be a Primary School Teacher. It gave me the skills to be able to handle a sports day and doing the different parts of the organising and coaching. It helped me learn skills and [see] where my strengths and weaknesses lay as a Teacher.* (Female, aged 20)

Many respondents referred to improvements in more generic skills, especially increases in confidence and communication skills:

> *I got quite a bit of confidence in talking to younger age groups and learning that I could talk to people without getting speechless and things like that really* (Female, aged 20)

> *My confidence has gone up loads and loads. I used to be really nervous about planning a session and now it just seems like nothing. I don't get nervous at all anymore and I'm not worried about speaking in front of big groups of people, I just get on with it now whereas before I wouldn't even speak in front of 2 people! (*Female, aged 20)

Several also commented on the impact that volunteering had on how they organised themselves:

> *It improved my organisation skills and I now know that if I am going to be doing something I need to be organised and I need to know beforehand exactly what I am doing and what I am going to be saying.* (Female, aged 20)

In describing these benefits, many examples were given of *how* the experience of delivering sport opportunities through the CV placement had provided the opportunity for this development. Data of this sort are of particular value for the insight they give into the process through which engaging in sport – in this instance, as volunteers –

impacts on individuals. In the quotations below, the respondents describe a range of situations which engendered skill development:

> *It boosted my confidence because I was standing in front of a group of 30 children and they were listening to me and that feels quite good when they know your name, look up to you and have respect for you* (Female, aged 20)

> *I think I am more organised now, because I learnt that if you haven't organised everything that you are going to do from the start then it's not going to work because the kids know that you are not prepared to do it so they just mess about. If you come prepared the kids are willing to learn. I have learnt that for myself.* (Male, aged 20)

> *I used to do all the coaching techniques, all the coaching points that were part of the lesson plan, making sure the whole session goes smoothly. Making sure every aspect of the coaching was covered. I looked into coaching manuals and the internet and that gave me a different aspect on how coaches around the world teach sport. It really did open my eyes, how to teach things effectively and the kids really did follow it. It was brilliant. It really did help me.* (Male, aged 20)

For many interviewees, an important part of this development came from their progression during the placement, from an initial role as a helper/supporter role to one in which they had sole responsibility for aspects of organisation of the session.

> *We had to do risk assessments as well and the mentor would help me but as time went on and I grew in confidence I would do them myself and check the sports hall and outside areas as well. I would also get all the equipment out and basically get it all organised.* (Male, aged 20)

> *Because the Teacher could see that I was getting more confident with the children, she would feel more at ease with me leading things, so she would say 'can you think of things to do with this lot?' or to get me to have more of a role within the classes really. Rather than just demonstrating, I would chat to the children and help them a lot more so it became more of a teaching role rather than assisting role really.* (Female, aged 20)

In several cases volunteers progressed to lead the session themselves:

> *I was built-in to the lessons gradually, so at first I would just take a warm up at the beginning of the session and eventually I was taking the whole session and doing my own thing.* (Male, aged 20)

> *At first it was just observing and then progressing to giving the children some praise. It then progressed to taking parts of the session and then we eventually took the whole session but with the mentor overseeing it.* (Female, aged 20)

> *At first we were just training and then as it went on the teacher would give us the responsibility to take over the whole PE class and teach the children how to do the sports, how to warm-up properly and stretch. We started off as just basic volunteers and then later we got our own group of children that we had to work with.* (Female, aged 19)

I started off in the corner and for the first couple of weeks I just helped put the mats out and the equipment and I wasn't really sure what to do because everyone else around me seemed so confident. But at the end after a bit of encouragement I was leading the warm-ups and we had a massive games at the end, like an obstacle course thing, which I led on the last session. With everyone's support it just made me grow in confidence throughout the volunteering. (Female, aged 20)

Overall, young people's accounts of their experiences during the Community Volunteers programme indicated a high level of personal and skill development. This encompassed both 'hard', more technical-professional, skills, and 'soft' ones relating to personal development and social interaction. The combined impact of the programme's formal training elements coupled with the practical experience gained through of the placement had therefore equipped young people with the attributes they required to be effective volunteers – an important prerequisite for building social connectedness. In the next section we now consider whether the experience of actively undertaking sports volunteering did facilitate this.

Developing social capital: Building social connectedness through sports volunteering

One of the issues that was initially addressed through the tracking survey was the question of young people's 'community orientation'. While quantitative data can be limited in the insights it provides into such complex topics, it can be helpful in offering an initial departure point. The survey therefore sought information on whether the experience of taking part in the Community Volunteers programme, and the volunteering placement especially, had had an impact on participants' attitude to volunteering in future, and to their views on engaging with others. In this way we sought some indication of the impact the programme might have on social connectedness.

The survey data suggested that the Community Volunteers programme had a positive impact in this respect for several participants. Most respondents (60%) reported that the experience had encouraged them to think about being further involved in sport and more than one-third (36%) that it had made them want to do further volunteering in sports. A similar proportion (35%) wanted to obtain other sports leadership/volunteering awards as a result of their experience of doing CV 'hours'. Those who had volunteered at a local sports club or a sports and leisure facility were more likely to want to engage with sports in these ways than those who had volunteered in school settings.

The CV placement experience also had a broader impact on many respondents' (49%) interest in doing volunteer work with children and young people. There was also evidence that undertaking the placement had widened many participants' perspectives on a range of social issues, including almost one-half (49%) who felt that they now thought more about the various social groups in their community. Many interviewees expressed strong altruistic views towards volunteering and contributing to their community:

I think respect and confidence are important contributions to life and through volunteering and community work we can all help (Female, 17)

I think volunteering is of utmost importance in your community and you can learn more about yourself and influence the lives of others. (Male, 17)

Volunteering has helped me to learn and gain new skills. I have been able to use these skills to help others to develop their own abilities. (Male, 18)

Volunteering is a very worthwhile and rewarding activity. I see it as an opportunity to use my knowledge and skills to help others. (Female, 17)

My perception of volunteering is purely to contribute what you can towards society. The reward is the happiness you get from it. (Female, 16)

I feel that volunteering is the ultimate in self-less acts and person that takes part should be commended. My father once told me 'If you don't need help, help some-one who does'. (Male, 17)

The placement experience made a significant impact on many volunteers' attitudes to working with young people:

I felt a great sense of achievement, especially with younger children as I saw myself as a role model. (Female, aged 18)

Some friends thought I was silly doing it for free but they didn't realise the amount of fun and satisfaction I got out of seeing the children learn new things. (Female, aged 20)

I have thoroughly enjoyed all of my volunteer work to date and I think my enthusiasm has radiated to the children and my colleagues. As long as the children and myself are enjoying it I will continue doing it. (Male, aged 18)

Many of the young volunteers had evidently engaged closely with those they were working with and during the interviews they reflected on how they interacted with them and the experiences that their coaching had provided :

I thoroughly enjoyed the fact that I can help children take part in sports they may not have had the chance to do before. I also found it very rewarding to see children doing and improving in the activities that I have taught them. (Female, aged 19)

You get to know the children and their strengths and weakness and who needs help and who doesn't, [you learn that] if someone keeps doing something wrong you don't keep picking on them because they probably can't actually physically do it, so you learn things about individuals, about children. (Female, aged 20)

To introduce new sports and techniques to the kids was brilliant because you are giving them a positive experience on different sports and hopefully they are still doing them now. (Male, aged 20)

In several cases the experience of undertaking placements in schools made the CV volunteers more aware of the social dynamics involved, both between themselves and the pupils they were assisting, and in their relationships with school staff:

Because there wasn't so much an age gap between me and them [pupils], and their Teachers are much older than them so they could connect more with the younger volunteers. They also really enjoyed themselves and they had some-one that they could ask questions about High School too (Female, aged 20)

> *Our teacher had prepared us to be role models and told us how we should dress and how we should think about the things we are saying when we go in and how we should talk to the headmaster for example. The teachers said that the children looked up to me as a role model (Female, aged 19)*

Some particularly strong impacts were reported by those who had had the opportunity to work with youngsters with disabilities:

> *I really enjoyed working with children and that's what I'm doing now as a career. It showed me just how diverse children were and I really enjoyed it, especially working with the disabled children. It was amazing and is something that I would like to get into in my teaching (Female, aged 20)*

> *In one class, one child had a mental condition and we had to adapt the session. We did Gymnastics and …he was really excited and wanted to do it, he had a carer with him who helped him and he really enjoyed it. The carer said it was the first time anyone had involved him, which was a really good feeling. I spoke to his mother and she said how much he had enjoyed it and how much he would like to do it again, so we did some more sessions right up until the end of the summer term (Male, aged 20)*

One respondent summarised the all-round individual and community benefits she had experienced through her placement:

> *I really enjoyed volunteering at my placement, as there was such a variety in abilities, attitudes and activities. I was forever kept on my toes and always learning something new. My leadership skills and confidence have grown enormously in all areas and not just in the sporting environment. Step into Sport has given me the chance to grow as an individual whilst doing something good for the community* (*Female, aged 20*)

Conclusions

In this paper we set out to examine whether young people's involvement in a structured programme of sports volunteering empowered young people with skills, knowledge, experiences and commitment that appeared likely to contribute to the building of social capital. We did so in the context of the general prominence of social capital as a focus in UK social policy, and the wide-ranging deployment of sport to contribute to this and other social outcomes.

Our first consideration was whether the volunteering programme gave young people the opportunity for the personal and skill development that would allow them to better actively engage with their communities. In this sense we were concerned to consider the extent to which sports volunteering contributed to the development of sporting capital (sports-related technical skills and foundation knowledge) and human capital (transferable social skills and increased sense of self-worth) amongst young people. Respondents identified this occurring and explained the process through which such benefits, giving examples of how particular tasks (e.g. leading sports sessions) led to specific development (e.g. increased confidence in interacting with people). These accounts of causality explicitly identified how experiences of sports volunteering engendered a positive attitudinal and behavioural impact amongst young people and encouraged a greater tendency towards active citizenship and civic participation through the medium of voluntary sports engagement.

Our second concern was with the extent to which undertaking a volunteer placement facilitated 'social connectedness', both by providing opportunities for young people to engage with others in their communities, and by fostering a greater awareness of the needs of others and the positive experience to be gained from interacting with them. It was certainly the case that volunteer placements engendered increased interaction between young volunteers and a range of 'others' (young children, other pupils, teachers, club workers etc) in a largely productive capacity. Quantitative and qualitative responses also indicate that this increased interaction contributed to a greater sense of altruism and citizenship amongst many of the young people and helped maintain and extend sports provision within local school and community sports infrastructures.

The increased social connectedness brought about by volunteer placements was also effective in facilitating 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital, although these forms of capital formation were rarely singularly manifest or mutually exclusive, but, rather, were dependent on the relational 'habitus' of young volunteers and the contextual framework in which volunteering took place. For example, the majority of volunteer placements took place in geographically local sports venues or in schools where young volunteers were already involved as players or pupils and which provided a relatively familiar (and more sustainable) sporting environment in which to volunteer. However, within these relatively limited social networks, young volunteers were simultaneously likely to be involved in coaching, officiating and more general sports leadership activities with a more diffuse network of younger children, and, in many cases, with disabled groups, under the tutelage of older teachers, coaches or sports development professionals. In this respect, the sites and activities for sports volunteering and the social connections engendered through this process contributed to the maintenance of 'bonding' capital and the emergence of newer forms of 'bridging' capital within particular social milieu. In this sense, our study questions the 'like us/unlike us' dichotomy at the heart of Putnam's conceptual separation of 'bonding' and 'bridging' capital and offers empirical evidence which suggest these forms of capital are intrinsically linked across a range of different contexts and overlapping social networks.

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital, field and habitus provide a useful theoretical framework for making sense of the way in which our empirical findings relate to the issues of social connectedness outlined above, and, with particular respect to issues of pre-disposition, access and sustainability of youth volunteering. Bourdieu is concerned with the way in which differential access to social, material and symbolic resources shapes wider engagement with civil society and defines social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986) From this perspective, the tendency of Step into Sport to attract large numbers of young people with a prior disposition to and pre-existing active engagement in sports clubs as performers and volunteers, suggests that many were already favourably situated within formal social (sporting) networks or 'fields' through which to expand upon and further their existing social connectedness and social capital, than were other less 'connected' young people. Furthermore, the tendency for greater sustainability of volunteering amongst pre-placed youth volunteers further illustrates the link between the relational (and distributional) 'habitus' of youth sports volunteers and the increased potential for and realisation of human, sporting and social capital.

This latter point raises the question of how widely the benefits of social capital can be accessed through the specific form of sports engagement evaluated in this study.

Although stakeholders described the capacity of the programmes to attract some disaffected and challenging young people, in its early years participants from low income households, black and minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities have been under-represented in Step into Sport. These are groups whom policymakers often perceive as having some of the greatest needs for greater social cohesion and active citizenship. As Coalter has argued, such approaches derive from a community-deficit model and 'an analysis of the supposed inadequacies of socially excluded communities' (543: 2007) and ignore wider social and cultural changes which have informed the apparent reduction in social connectedness and social capital within Britain. Nonetheless, the material, structural and symbolic facets which underpin social and sporting exclusions seemed apparent within our study of youth sports volunteering and are mirrored by wider demographic patterns of participation in formalised volunteering nationally. This may be where the structural characteristics of projects can be seen to affect the response of participants. A schools-based sports leadership and volunteering project which targets young people engaged in the post-compulsory school-age education sector may have limited capacity to attract pupils disaffected from the school itself and has a limited resource pool of potential participants from (increasingly gendered) black and minority ethnic communities, or from disabled groups and young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Further, the role of sports development professionals and PE Teachers as 'cultural intermediaries' in shaping the 'feel' of the project and the conscious selection of 'appropriate' young people to engage in volunteer placements might further limit opportunities in sports participation of this kind amongst more disengaged young people. This does not negate the impact that sports volunteering can have, but does point to the greater challenge of stimulating participation among groups who may have most potential to benefit from their involvement.

We have mixed conclusions. On the one hand we are persuaded that the study yielded sufficient evidence to show that for many young people, sports volunteering can 'work' as a mechanism for fostering human and sporting capital and encourage the practical, emotional and intellectual connectedness which underpins the idea of social capital. When it does, the benefits experienced are clearly identifiable and this study suggests they can be causally attributed. In this respect, we argue that sports researchers may be able to be less tentative in some of their claims about whether sport can yield social benefits. Nonetheless, on the other hand, we make no claims as to the permanence of such causality. Rather, we remain acutely aware that the capacity of youth sports volunteering to engender social capital in its various forms is shaped by a range of personal and structural factors, not least of all, the capacity of individuals to possess and utilise the material and symbolic resources to access and negotiate those social networks through which social capital might be best realised. In turn, the benefits of youth sports volunteering to social capital formation will also be informed by the capacity of social (sporting) networks to exhibit a greater egalitarianism and inclusivity in dealing with and valuing the contribution made by young people from a range of socio-economic, racialised and differently abled backgrounds.

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