An Independent Review of Sport and Physical Activity in the Youth Estate: Findings and Good Practice Examples

Association of YOT Managers, Rugby: 5th June 2019

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A Sporting Chance
An Independent Review of Sport in Youth and Adult Prisons
Professor Rosie Meek
August 2018

2nd Chance Project
The Role of Sport in Promoting Desistance from Crime
An Evaluation of the 2nd Chance Project Rugby and Football Academies at Portland Young Offender Institution
DR ROSIE MEEK

Sport in Prison
Exploring the role of physical activity in correctional settings
Rosie Meek
The perceived function of physical activity in the secure estate...

- Has evolved in line with associated fluctuations in policy and societal perceptions of the primary purpose of imprisonment
- Sport as *punishment* (‘treadmill’) versus Sport as *rehabilitation*
- Strong history of ‘Physical Education Instructors’ in the Prison Service
- PEIs / sports & games officers / PE teachers (education provider)

NB: NHS guidelines recommend that young people should engage in 1 hr of moderate to rigorous exercise each day, and that on three days each week these activities should involve muscle strengthening exercises (such as resistance exercises) and exercises to strengthen bones (such as running)
Promoting desistance from future offending (2012, Forensic Update)

- Using sport as a ‘hook’ for change
- Facilitating constructive relationships, engagement in therapeutic interactions and peer support opportunities
- Promoting alternative identities
- Opportunities for maintaining support in both prison and community settings
- Encouraging trust in professionals
Education (Meek, Champion & Klier, 2012)

- Engaging reluctant learners
- Increasing aspirations for higher-level learning
- Embedding employability skills
- Meeting the workforce needs of the sports and fitness sectors
The process of undertaking *A Sporting Chance*, 2017-2018

- Visits to and audits of 11 juvenile establishments and 10 adult / young adult establishments in England and Wales
- Interviews with 74 youth and adult gym users from the above establishments
- Written consultations with a further 65 young people from YOI Feltham
- Online public consultation (230 partial, 87 full responses)
- Focus group discussions with practitioners and stakeholders
• **Recommendation 1:** Prisons should devise an integrated physical activity and wellbeing strategy

• **Recommendation 2:** Commissioners and education providers should develop a flexible education contract which enables collaborations and creative delivery

• **Recommendation 3:** Prisons should offer nutritional advice as part of their physical activity and wellbeing provision, and promote a readily-available range of healthy eating options

• **Recommendation 4:** HM Prison and Probation Service should revise *keep apart* list policies and establishments should include gym staff in *keep apart* decision making

• **Recommendation 5:** Sport provision needs to be responsive to individual needs, with a focus on health, wellbeing and rehabilitation at the heart of practice

• **Recommendation 6:** The Ministry of Justice should develop a physical activity strategy for women and girls in prison
• **Recommendation 7:** The Ministry of Justice should re-consider the national martial arts / boxing policy and introduce targeted programmes which draw on boxing exercises, qualifications and associated activities

• **Recommendation 8:** Prison governors and the Ministry of Justice need to monitor physical activity participation and outcomes according to ethnicity, and ensure that any disproportionality is addressed

• **Recommendation 9:** Senior managers need to encourage partnerships between prisons, communities, sporting groups and bodies

• **Recommendation 10:** The Ministry of Justice should review Release on Temporary Licence, Mobility and related policies to facilitate meaningful sports-based learning, team-building activities, placements and training

• **Recommendation 11:** The Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service and senior managers need to provide the leadership, staffing, training and facilities required to support a wide-reaching and high-quality sport and physical activity provision

• **Recommendation 12:** HM Prison and Probation Service should create and implement a dedicated physical activity monitoring and evaluation strategy
1. Prison sport should be part of an integrated physical activity and wellbeing strategy

**Good practice example:** Offering annual or occasional events aligned with national / international sporting events (Wimbledon tennis, the Olympics, the football and rugby World Cup competitions, etc.) and fundraising initiatives (for example Sport Relief, Children in Need). The reach and impact of these events is reported as being greatest when based on collaborations between the gym and other departments, particularly education and healthcare.

**Good practice example:** Psychology staff have created individual and group sessions in the gym in order to develop a better rapport with their clients, while using sporting examples to deliver therapeutic messages and promote behaviour change.

**Good practice example:** Some prisons refer to their sports facilities as a ‘Sports College’, emphasising the educational potential of the gym and their commitment to sports-based learning.
3. Prisons should offer nutritional advice as part of their physical activity and wellbeing provision, and promote a readily-available range of healthy eating options

- Although catered meals are provided by an establishment (and are required to meet basic nutritional guidelines), additional items can be purchased, giving individuals some freedom in their food choices, funds permitting.

- Healthy items are not routinely offered for purchase (or when they are, cost is often a barrier, as is poor health literacy) and the resulting choices contribute to the high fat and sugar intake found among prisoners.

- Opportunities to promote dietary advice through physical activity tend to be missed, despite evidence that nutrition has an important role to play in promoting health and wellbeing in secure settings (Curd et al., 2013).

- There is also a direct link between nutrition and antisocial behaviour in prison (Gesch et al., 2002).

**Good practice example:**
Some prisons offer nutritional advice and training in preparing healthy meals in the education classes, delivered as a partnership between education staff and gym staff.
3. Prisons should offer nutritional advice as part of their physical activity and wellbeing provision, and promote a readily-available range of healthy eating options

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**Good practice example:**
Some prisons offer nutritional advice and training in preparing healthy meals in the education classes, delivered as a partnership between education staff and gym staff.
4: Bringing prisoners together for sport can resolve conflict. Governors should revise *keep apart* list policies and establishments should include gym staff in *keep apart* decision making.

- The use of *keep apart* lists dramatically undermines the regime of establishments - particularly those holding children and young people. Too often these lists, rather than individual ability, are determining a young person’s access to education.

- Keep apart lists are a major barrier to sport and physical activity provision, and fail to reflect a real-world or sustainable response to conflict.

**Good practice examples:**

- HMYOI Wetherby has a Conflict Resolution team who carry out mediation with young people who have non-associates. They have also identified a member of the Reducing Reoffending team who works closely with Residential unit managers to solve issues between young people to ensure they can engage in education.

- In HMYOI Brinsford, football freestyler Richard Braithwaite’s football skills workshops have been used to promote team-building and pre-empt conflict in newly formed groups, which has led to improved completion of the establishment’s Offender Behaviour Programmes.
5. Sport provision needs to be responsive to individual needs, with a focus on health, wellbeing and rehabilitation

• Our prisons contain **diverse populations** and provision needs to reflect that
• Research suggests that the type of activity may be less relevant than the positive relationships and connections that develop as a result of the activity. But offering a diverse range of activities is important in promoting initial engagement (the ‘hook’)

**Good practice example:** Barton Moss Secure Children’s Home pride themselves in offering a creative, dynamic sport and physical activity offering which is recognised as having a positive impact on the wider culture of the establishment, leading to a more settled population and better educational outcomes. Activities that are offered throughout the year include non-contact versions of rugby and American football, archery, trampoline, boxercise, street dance, tennis and cricket.
6. Don’t forget women and girls

• A national strategy on physical activity for women and girls in prison is required to guide practice and target resource. For a number of reasons women and girls in custody do not engage in physical activity to the same extent as men and boys and as a result they are not benefiting from the social, physical and psychological benefits of doing so.

• There is a strong case for the role of physical activity in meeting the particularly complex and unique needs of women and girls in custody. There is a need to continue to develop a female-centred approach which reflects an understanding of gendered barriers to participation and exercise.

• As part of this understanding, establishments should be guided by a policy which takes into account the high levels of trauma that women entering custody are likely to have experienced.
9. Senior managers need to encourage partnerships between prisons, communities, sporting groups and bodies

- Working in partnership can clearly facilitate innovation, offer resource savings and demonstrate wide-reaching impact: within custodial settings, as part of a temporary release scheme and after a prison sentence is completed.

- Since its inception in 2015, the Alliance of Sport has grown to a membership of over 300 organisations, clubs and individuals. The Alliance’s stated purpose is ‘To lead, co-ordinate and evidence the power of sport in crime prevention and criminal justice.’ See: www.allianceofsport.org

- HMPPS have rolled out the prisons – football club twinning programme, and adopted my recommendations to reinstate senior gym managers in each prison and to add ‘community liaison’ to the job description.
• Although there is already evidence of the benefit of running for people in prison (Meijers et al., 2015), 2017 saw HMP Haverigg become the first prison site for parkrun, which has been credited with motivating numerous individuals and families to start – and maintain – running and walking.

• As well as motivating young people and staff to engage in physical activity, given that the initiative mirrors provision in the community it is also a unique way of promoting the principle of normality which is recognised as an important way to promote the rehabilitative culture of a prison.
What challenges remain?

1. **Collaborations** between establishments/YOTs and sporting groups and bodies, underpinned by a mutual understanding of each other

2. **Create** meaningful and accessible sporting **communities** which permeate prison walls and postcodes

3. **Collate** and share *good quality* evidence of what works, when and with whom

Sport in Prison. Abingdon: Routledge

Promoting well-being and desistance through sport and physical activity: the opportunities and barriers experienced by women in prison. Women and Criminal Justice

The impact of a sports initiative for young men in prison: staff and participant perspectives. Journal of Sport and Social Issues


Sport, physical activity and youth imprisonment. In Parker (Ed.) Youth Sport, Physical Activity and Play. London: Routledge

Sport and physical education across the secure estate: an exploration of policy and practice. Criminal Justice Matters

The role of sport in reducing reoffending among young men in prison: Assessing the evidence base. Forensic Update

The role of sport in promoting prisoner health. International Journal of Prisoner Health


Short film: Search ‘Fit for release’ on YouTube