

Summer programme

Sheffield City Trust's community delivery is led by three full time members of staff within the community team Rob Womack, Uri Rennie, and Dale Dennett. The team has spent years creating strong relationships with local communities. Through listening and engaging, the SCT community team support communities with their most basic needs. In 2022, the community asked for free, hyper-local activities and food for children. Based on the insight derived the SCT community team worked with local people to develop the 'sports van' concept. The van was used as the core delivery method for the Summer Programme and provide young people and their families with a regular fixture of sports and physical activity, family activities, and food and drink. The community team are supported by six casual Summer Programme officers who were employed throughout the summer holidays. They ran a six-week programme of activities in various parks and communities within Sheffield.

"The community didn't come up with the 'sports van', but they did say they wanted free activities for kids during the holidays outside, right where they lived and they did talk about safety and food. We took all of that feedback, as well as observing the communities closely by immersing ourselves, and came up with a way to deliver what communities were asking for."
– Rob Womack, SCT.

Over the six weeks of delivery, the community team delivered 23 summer sessions per week (130+ sessions) using the sports van across 19 targeted areas within the City. The Summer Programme engaged with more than 1,600 individuals generating a total of 5,325 visits / engagements with the sessions, with over 290 hours of activity delivered. Due to the community engagement work, the programme was extremely successful in engaging participants and families from ethnic minority backgrounds (with 62% from ethnic minority groups). The sessions attracted more males than females overall (with 68% of participants male). There was significant variance in attendance by site, ranging from 43 attendances at one site over the six-week period, to 814 at another – with the peak attendance at a single session reaching 120 people (and the lowest attendance being one person). There are likely to be many diverse reasons for this variance including: location, size, timing, existing activity, weather etc.

SCT's Community Team approach

Planning phase

Central to the ethos of the community team at SCT is the desire for all activities and projects to be community led. By this, the community team mean *"understanding the needs of communities and the things people are interested in."* – Rob Womack, SCT. In the run up to the delivery of the summer programme using the sports vans, the SCT community team immersed themselves in the communities they were targeting. Drawing upon existing connections and relationships built up over time, members of the team visited communities and spoke and listened to community leaders, as well as aiming to engage with people who they described as 'disenfranchised'. Community engagement was a crucial part of the community team's approach. Their aim was to go into the heart of communities within Sheffield and to hear the voices of people not normally heard. This kind of relationship building takes time and patience but is essential to ensure trust is established.

"It is acknowledged that many communities in Sheffield have been on the wrong end of resource allocation in recent history. This has bred distrust and cynicism of organisations and initiatives that are not led by and/or developed in the (and by the) community. This was context we could not ignore and had to contend with whilst being as positive as possible. Our approach was to really listen to communities and develop relationships with them. We had

to be able to act on what they wanted where possible, and be open and transparent where this wasn't. Our approach was completely bottom up, moving at the pace of communities.” – Rob Womack, SCT.

Another crucial element of the SCT community team's approach was the emphasis on insight and engagement, rather than more traditional methods looking at numbers, throughput and targets or being KPI driven. Instead, the focus was on the needs of the community, being flexible in their approach and simply delivering what the community asked for.

“What was positive to see from the very start was we wasn't attendance driven and it wasn't about people playing sport...It was about people just doing something a bit different and getting out of their norm because six weeks holiday, kids do get bored after a couple of weeks, so it was giving them something to do.” - Dale Dennett, SCT.

Approach

The SCT community team have kept the dialogue with the community open, ensuring they are there as a trusted partner to help the communities and support them with what they need. Building these strong community relationships is an ongoing process, especially if they are to grow and develop into something which can be sustained and lead into projects / areas of work which are built 'by the community, for the community'.

“We are genuinely interested in developing each community. So, we told the coaches ‘you're not just going in and leaving after two hours and you don't care. You're investing time in each community and celebrating how each area is different in its own right’.” - Dale Dennett, SCT.

To run the summer programme successfully, resource was needed in the form of casual staff. A significant investment of time was dedicated to the recruitment process to identify a team that was from a diverse and representative background, with an emphasis on protected characteristics if feasible. It was essential that the team were able to engage well with young people over and above sports coaching abilities (as sport was the tool not the end goal). Staff were identified via the links that the community team already had with community groups such as Reach Up Youth. The community team ensured that the casual staff were trained up to deliver engaging and quality sessions but also to understand what the community team were there for, their goals, and the route to achieving this.

“The main role of a sports van officer was basically delivering the food and delivering the sessions, ‘being empathetic and not sympathetic’ was one of the training statements we wanted to get out there.” - Dale Dennett, SCT.

Promotion

The SCT community team was wary of how they were perceived by the community, they didn't want to be seen as an organisation who came in to deliver activities, provide food and drink and then never be seen again. They also didn't want the community to think they were there for promotional reasons, and just to be seen to be doing a good thing. SCT's community team wanted to build trust and meaningful relationships with the communities they were serving. To achieve this, they needed to be present and be seen as an impartial partner, without any preconceived ideas of who the SCT are or why they are there. Perceptions of the community team are important, and the team are keen to keep a close eye on this in the future. The work has been done in partnership with the community and is for the community, it is not a promotional tool for the SCT, so they don't want to be seen as promoting themselves via this.

“You're [community team / sports van officers] there to support. We're not there to be a charity because it can be looked at in a wrong way if you're going round an area and giving out food hampers and saying go on, take it, take it, take it. [Local people may think] 'that's great but what's your motive here? Are you wanting publicity?' We were very careful, we didn't want to have pictures taken every two seconds, saying 'oh look at us, how good we're doing' because there is a level of trust. You don't want to ruin that.” - Dale Dennett, SCT.

“I think obviously it is good PR and good to put your name on it, and say like look Sheffield City Trust is doing this, but it was very important not to go overboard and think if someone from Burngreave for example says 'oh they are just using us for a newspaper article' that's where you lose your trust completely, so it's being aware of that and understanding all those parts of it, from everyone's point of view.” - Dale Dennett, SCT.

Despite the SCT community teams desire to be seen as an impartial partner, the work was funded by SCT via the Charitable Purposes Committee and delivered by SCT staff and the use of SCT branding and name gives the community team a sense of credibility in the communities they engaged with. Leaflets with the SCT branding were dropped around schools in targeted areas to promote the sessions. In addition, branded vans, uniform, and equipment provided the team with a real sense of visibility in the parks they visited. In some areas with reasonably high park traffic (e.g. Stannington), members of the community noted how they had stumbled upon the van and saw people playing or participating in activities. They subsequently joined in and many then planned to return the following week.

Delivery

The running and delivery of summer programme activities via the sports vans was purposefully ad hoc – the sessions were designed and developed by the community on the day. This level of flexibility and ability to adapt by the community team was crucial to the effective running of the sessions. Not having a rigid, structured plan with set activities provided the freedom to tailor activities to the environment and those who were present on the day. This approach ensured that the activities met the needs and preferences of the participants.

To try to engage and involve with as many people as possible, a variety of activities were provided ranging from arts and crafts, puzzles, skipping ropes to sporting activities such as football, cricket, basketball. This range of activities enabled the community to try new and different activities which they may not have taken part in before. It also helped to promote inclusivity by providing activities for all to enjoy, such as games and items which encourage play e.g. hula hoops, bean bags.

To engage with the community in a non-threatening / welcoming way, the community team would unload the van at the start of the session, so people knew what activities were on offer and pick and choose as they wanted. The food and drink were handed out by the sports van staff to ensure this was distributed fairly amongst the community. This also gave the SCT community team an opportunity to converse with the community openly and in an informal way. The relaxed, informal approach helped the community to open up and be honest with the community team which has helped to build strong and lasting connections with the SCT team.

The summer holiday period creates additional challenge for families and young people who are reliant on free school meals during term time. The rising cost of living results in already stretched families having to dig deeper to find something to do and pay for food and drink. The community team wanted to support the community and act on this need and did so by feeding and providing activities within the most deprived areas of Sheffield.

Impacts of the programme

The quotes below highlight what the summer programme has meant to the young people, families and community who attended. It may seem like a small offer that the SCT community team have provided, but for an individual or their family it can mean a lot. It could be a person's only activity during a week, or the one social interaction that they have. As described by some parents': *"There's nowt to do around here for the kids"* so the summer programme and vans provided an experience that was really valued as described in the quotes below.

"The most consistent or the most recurring comment was quite simply how refreshing it was for the parents to see that somebody was giving the kids something to do, which perhaps to say out loud, sounds like a low bar, but it means something, doesn't it? And they kept saying it... we did keep seeing the same people come back again. So that message definitely had action behind it as well, it wasn't just people saying it cause we were there and it sounded like the right thing to say." - Summer Programme Officer

"In some parks there would be parents and they can't play with their kids in certain sports, you would have parents coming up to you afterwards and saying 'thank you for playing with my kid.' They would come up to us and tell us that they would normally be in the house and doing nothing and this has given them a chance to come outside with their parents, because they can come to us and have some snacks and relax. Their kids are playing with us and they know they are safe with us. It shows you what you are doing is really having an impact. Regular families would keep coming and they'd arrive early before us and be waiting for us to arrive." - Summer Programme Officer.

In addition, new opportunities were provided to children who hadn't previously been involved but who showed an interest in particular sports, in the hope this would lead on to more regular activity and enjoyment from them.

"There was a family at Deer Park where two young lads came out and showed a real interest in the basketball stuff that we were doing so we offered them some free sessions which they ended up absolutely loving and kept going too which was not something they felt they could access before." - Summer Programme Officer

In other examples, families and young people were signposted to other activities for children and their families to get involved in at SCT venues or via SCT approved providers / coaches throughout the year. One example of this is when a family from Iraq stumbled upon the sports van at the summer sessions in Ponderosa Park, in the middle of Sheffield. This gave them a positive connection to the SCT community team within their first week of living in the UK.

"We just got talking, 'What's life like there and what made you move over?' But the main point of conversation was 'My child's interested in the sport' so just getting them in touch with football teams, things like that. I think he was interested in Taekwondo sessions as well, so it was interesting to see how someone who has come from Iraq and then their first experience of sport in Sheffield is probably walking into Ponderosa and thinking wow, what's that? Ponderosa can be a bit daunting as well as we had like over 100 people out a lot of the time, but it is just nice to connect them with sports in the area that we could help them with." - Dale Dennett, SCT.

There were also examples of diverse communities who, at the start of the sessions, were distant from each other but by the end were coming together, socialising and learning about each other and their different cultures and backgrounds.

“When we started coming you could see that within one community it was very diverse, so we did have a range of cultures, backgrounds and everything. It wasn’t really a community dynamic I would say. There were a lot of people at the parks within the communities but they weren’t really engaging well together. As the six weeks went on and when we came to all of the different parks and experienced all of the different cultural things and how they are different, we did see how there was progress within their own communities. They were more open to each other within that community and everyone was engaging well and there were a lot more happy faces and enjoyment and the word did get spread around by a lot of parents.”

- Summer Programme officer

Other communities found the sessions as a social catalyst, staying after the Summer Programme session had finished and using it as an excuse to get together, socialise and have fun in their local community with their neighbours.

“[At] Skye Edge they brought a BBQ down, they brought a Gazebo, used our blankets, so they let the kids go and play for a couple hours and then we come back, they stayed till about 5:00 o'clock but we'd left at 2:00 o'clock. They came back next week, saying yeah, we stayed for about 7 hours having a BBQ. I'm not saying that's because of us, but they knew that session was there, so they used that as like an excuse to get together. Wickfield was similar in Birley ward, we gave them equipment from Week 4 onwards and they said on Week 5-6 oh yeah, we stay until about 6:00 o'clock every evening now playing cricket, we play about 3 or 4 times a week now. So, it's things like that, the long-lasting impacts do you know rather than just going for four weeks then never to be seen again.” - Dale Dennett, SCT.

As the community team were bringing activities to their doorstep, it was also an opportunity for the parents to get to know each other and to socialise within their local environment.

“It's not just about the kids playing sport. The mums and dads are coming together and sitting down for a couple hours and talking to people that they might not have talked to before.” - Dale Dennett, SCT.

The connections of staff within the SCT community team led to exceptional opportunities for the local community to meet people they wouldn't normally meet. For example, a visit from Tommy Frank, British Boxing Champion, which resulted in the local communities feeling valued and the young people being inspired by him.

Another example was in Skye Edge where a local councillor attended the session. The councillor saw this as an opportunity to speak to their constituency who they may not ordinarily hear from in an informal way (out in the local park instead of in a meeting room with a strict agenda). The community were able to speak to them and tell them what they wanted and what they could do to change that. This led to the councillor setting up a trip to Skegness for people in the local community.

The community team's approach was purposefully serendipitous, allowing things to develop over time and organically. Many of the community at some of the parks, Kashmir Gardens in particular, found out about the sessions via a local WhatsApp group. The community team know how important it is to engage with these types of people in the community, being able to spread the word in this way shows the power of the community in bringing people together, sharing ideas and local insight. Creating

connections with these community leaders enables the community team to reach out to a much wider audience and therefore helps support more people in these communities in new and different ways.

Impacts on the staff

The Summer Programme staff reported how engaging and rewarding their experience had been. Feedback included describing the power of the programme to connect people through understanding different areas and bringing diverse groups of people together. The enjoyment experienced by young people and their parents, and the positive feedback that they gave, further motivated the staff to deliver fun and exciting sessions.

“When I started the job, I thought it would just be us playing and then that’s it, but it was way more than that. I actually look forward to going to work because it was fun and enjoyable and positive to see all these kids wanting to come back and wanted you to be there so you could see that it was actually making a change and they actually wanted you to do your job. It was really satisfying and really fun.” - Summer Programme Officer

“Personally, I got a better understanding of different backgrounds and how different places interact, especially with the sporting situation as well. I was able to see how the children dealt with different situations within the community and how I made an impact within that community and how I made them enjoy sport and try new things...and I developed a lot of communication skills.” - Summer Programme Officer

“It really felt like we got somewhere with the small communities we were dealing with. To an extent those final sessions on the last week, I did actually feel like I would miss some of the kids that were coming, which I wasn’t necessarily expecting to experience.” - Summer Programme Officer

Developing the sessions / format in the future

Through the process of visiting sessions and talking to participants and parents, and interviewing staff, the Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) research team provided the following suggestions relating to potential areas of development and / or improvement for the future:

- The food provided was not suitable for everyone due to dietary requirements and religious / cultural beliefs. The community team acknowledged this and flagged it as an area for improvement in the future. Additionally, the sports vans’ distribution of food was limited to snacks and drinks. Consideration of whether this is sufficient is needed, along with ensuring that the provisions are suitable for different cultures.
- There was some evidence of a lack of joined-up communication between the community team, venue staff and marketing/communications teams. The casual staff reported some tensions and confusion with regards to this.
- The system for operating the summer programme using casual staff limits the ability of SCT to build on and develop the connections made. Individual relationships are vital to establishing connections and facilitating the process of building trust. Whilst positive associations with SCT and / or the community team may remain, the personal connection and trust with individuals will be lost. Therefore, there is a need for some consistency in personnel where possible.

The community team want to build on the established connections, relationships, and partnerships in the future to ensure they can keep delivering and prioritising what the community want in a co-produced, sustainable manner. They are consistent and open with their communication to ensure they

can best support the communities by delivering what each individual community wants and being flexible in their approach to ensure they are positively affecting the lives of the local people.

*"I was making a conscious effort to say, we are still here, we're listening, we want to know what you want from us in the future because it is not going to be perfect, we've not done it for three years. We have built up quite a good connection with quite a few areas now, we've got good local contacts who will help build the programme in the future but definitely the **engagement** is something."* - Dale Dennett, SCT.

"I do feel we did make an impact in different areas, because we treated them as individual, different areas. Manor wants to be Manor, Arbourthorne wants to be Arbourthorne....Our community led approach bringing in some interesting and non-traditional partners has given communities not only something that they needed and wanted, but something that was fun and has given them new aspirations. We have developed trust, delivered a programme that upends the 'usual suspects' outputs from other major programmes and generated quality brand awareness in communities across Sheffield. The Community Team is seen as a strong leader in delivering authentic community led activity by decision makers within the city." - Dale Dennett, SCT.