



Case Study: Lead in HMP YOI Polmont, staff reflections

The Sports and Dance Leadership programmes delivered by Youth Scotland in HMP YOI Polmont provide opportunities for young people to develop their skills, confidence and experience, thereby increasing their ability to secure employment and reduce the likelihood of re-offending. Activity to divert young people from criminal behavior and improve their life chances is an important aspect of the Generation CashBack programme.¹

A previous case study highlighted the impact of the Sports Leadership award on two young men at HMP YOI Polmont; this example explores the wider impacts of this programme, including organisational learning, adding value to existing resources and staff development. It is based on anonymous interviews with staff from HMP YOI Polmont (SPS) and Youth Scotland (YS).

“It allows us to look at a youth work approach rather than a prison approach” (SPS)

The partnership

Historically we have a relationship with the Scottish Prison Service dating back to previous work in Corton Vale with young female offenders... when it closed for refurbishment a huge proportion of the female population was rehoused over in HMPYOI so a lot of the staff members we had worked with in Corton Vale also went there too. That gave Youth Scotland the opportunity to work with a wider group of young offenders, both male and female. (YS)

Our work in HMP YOI remains a partnership in a front-line sense between the youth development staff and the physical education instructors (PEIs). PEIs generate interest – they’re in there every day, we’re not, so they’re able to say what’s coming up, tell people the benefits of getting involved... we rely on the instructors to make sure that what is being offered through the CashBack Lead work

is attractive, that young people understand the qualifications attached to it and have the availability to take part. (YS)

The Lead resource has had a massive impact on what we’re trying to do. We’ve used the budget to involve young people in other sports such as boxing, dance, we’ve had yoga... we did a week with Stenhouse Muir football, a week with Sparta Boxing, we’ve had yoga instructors and dance instructors up which again would just have been impossible for us previously. It provides access to different sports that they can continue to access to in the community. It helps get them interested in their physical health. The budget to buy T-shirts, water bottles and stuff like that, prisoners love them and it gives us a reason to set them physical challenges. (SPS)

Youth Scotland decide what we’re going to do with young people, when we’re going to do it, what level of support is coming in, staffing levels, and particular targets in terms of age or gender to meet.



“The SPS vision is to have [young people] take ownership, then take responsibility to make their own decisions, learning from their mistakes, reflect on their behaviour.”

Sometimes it's administrative support where we're registering courses and booking things, and providing publicity and marketing materials. Other times we're providing resources for freelancers and all the things needed for qualifications such as workbooks, logbooks and that kind of thing. (YS)

“Youth Scotland's input is really us putting the programme together.”
(YS)

Effective ways of working with young people in prison settings

Before what I would have done is to say “right this week we're running volleyball, or circuits”, it would be my choice. But now I'll put the ethos on the prisoners to then say right, what do you want to do? We're giving them control, finding out their interests, running focus groups and looking at what they actually want, as opposed to me telling them what they are doing. (SPS)

Some never went to school but with Lead they are doing a college course. Doing that while in custody is time used constructively, and if we never had the support from Youth Scotland, Barnardo's, Duke of Edinburgh, a lot of the outside agencies, you wouldn't have these opportunities. (SPS)

With the ethos of giving them responsibility, young people are trained up to provide induction with us. If the induction came from a young person on the same level, using the same sort of terminology and language. It's a bit more informal and it puts the young people at ease. That makes a difference – young people obviously want to come back to the gym. It's great having that support and link,

it's a great resource for us. That's the biggest thing I would say. (SPS)

“It's an easier and definitely more rewarding way of working with young people.” (SPS)

Physical activity & well-being activities form an important part of the regime within Polmont and provides high quality purposeful activities and meaningful positive engagement with the young people in our care. The PEIs provide a valuable contribution as role models and enablers to the overall wellbeing of the young people temporarily in our care. The partnership has been a great opportunity to enhance existing skills and unlock potential for those engaged in the programme and hopefully those leaving our care become good future citizens. (SPS)

Once you're increasing their physical activity you are increasing their mental wellbeing, which is then making our guys healthier, more likely to engage with other partnership workers, more motivated, more likely to keep house, more likely to get a family contact, so the benefits are actually massive to organisations in terms of what we're trying to achieve. (SPS)

The Year of Young People

From a staff point of view, in this environment, there's limited choice for what the young people can do. Everything's controlled by somebody else, but the opportunity for them to take responsibility, take ownership, accountability, make their own decisions, ties in with Year of Young People. (SPS)

Added value

It's kick-started a lot of initiatives. You're actually starting to get a balance between guys who just want to come down to the gym and train ... and those who want to learn, too. Management are starting to think about the value of that chance for recognition, the opportunity to gain accreditation. (SPS)

A lot of the work that goes on, the majority of it happens when [Youth Scotland] is not here because [we're] not a full-time member of staff in this prison. It's the officers that do the work, the PEIs that are doing the work alongside the peer mentors, the passmen, the general population of young people that use the gym facility. (YS)

Hopefully the young role models influence how other folk behave, “I want to be like them, I want to behave like them, look what they've done, look what they've achieved”. ... In other areas, staff have not got the same time to spend, and it would make such a difference if they had. (SPS)

It's becoming embedded...if we never had that input to begin with it would have been status quo. The guys wouldn't have had the opportunity. And then they're looking for the next level, they don't just want level one, they want level two. (SPS)

“With young folk you've got the opportunity here to try and mould. You've still got a wee chance when they go back into the community.” (SPS)

Changing the culture among young people in HMP YOI Polmont

It even [affects] the culture of the jail. When guys see a female prisoner walking through the hall, [instead of] shouting... they're actually starting to speak to them because they know them from the Dance Leadership Award. It helps the environment. ... it did break down a lot of the barriers. (SPS)

Tailored opportunities for accreditation

We also encounter... quite noticeable difficulties with literacy, due to chaotic backgrounds and low level of attendance and attainment at formal education at school. The targets might look low for what we're doing but when you think about how many people coming out of prison have these additional skills and additional qualifications now, and the range of barriers they face to achieving qualifications, it does make it worthwhile. (YS)

"Qualifications are not necessarily designed for people with a range of barriers". (SPS)

Staff development

It's making my job more interesting because previously the gym has been bums in seats, getting the boys into the gym, letting them train hard, and you recorded activity hours, but it wasn't constructive activity hours. You were in there, you were supervising, you weren't really coaching, you weren't teaching, you weren't delivering any recognised qualification. It's helped kick-start us as well, like thinking, let's look at some SVQ work, so now we're looking at starting to get the assessors to deliver SVQs in the gym, again to complement what we already offer. (SPS)

"It's trying to upskill our role. There might come a time when we're asked, what does your gym deliver? ... It's providing weight, evidence for the value of the work we do..." (SPS)

Sometimes you feel as if you're sort of giving away your responsibility. And that's a big thing in the prison... staff, need to be in control. When you're giving a young person ownership and responsibility and choices to make decisions, [it can feel] uncomfortable. But

that's what young people need, because they're going to be going back out. They have to make their own decisions, make their own mistakes, learn from them. ... To have a different approach with different individuals. (SPS)

With Dance Leaders – we never had females before so that, even to me that was a brand-new initiative. It's giving staff additional experience on their CVs, working with females. It's enhanced the regime, there's been a gap there in provision that's been identified, that's been targeted. (SPS)

Next steps

Generation CashBack is a three-year programme. This case study was produced in the first quarter of Year 2. In years 2 and 3, Lead will continue to provide access to Leadership Courses, formal qualifications, personal development training, peer mentor opportunities and events organisation. Young people will also be offered the opportunity to build on Year 1 qualifications e.g. those who have achieved a Sports Leaders Level 4 certificate will progress to level 5. This year there is also an intention to introduce the Level 2 Gym Instructor Qualification (SCQF L5) within HMP YOI Polmont.

1 It links to Outcome 8, young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement in the Criminal Justice system.

"Lead means we have an opportunity to give that wee bit more, give that bit extra, make it a bit more resource-heavy, to put two workers in instead of one". (YS)

