

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2023-05-YO17	Opportunity Sports Foundation
Visit Date	Visited By
19 th July 2023	Victoria Southwell (Zoom)
Overall aim of the funding	
To employ male and female Senior Youth Workers who will provide outreach, mentoring and specialised support to 60 young men and 20 young women offenders aged 15-24, so that they can reach their social, educational and employment potential.	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Opportunity Sports Foundation (OSF) is a registered charity that was established in 2011 by a retired professional footballer and his son who describes himself as a 'failed' professional footballer. The CEO is one of the founders and runs the organisation with the support of a team of 18 youth workers and 16 volunteers. Many of the volunteers and paid staff have been through the programme and want to give something back.</p> <p>A Board of three Trustees work with the CEO and there is also a Steering Group that is made up of between 5-6 young people who feed back to the board on a quarterly basis. They also provide local intel and raise awareness about issues affecting local young people. The three Trustees meet four times a year, three of these meetings happen over Zoom with the fourth face to face. The Trustees bring expertise in young people, the criminal justice system, the prison service and running charities. There is a plan to increase the number of trustees to bring in some additional skills. A recent Lloyds Foundation grant was made on the condition that this happened and recruiting a further three people is planned.</p> <p>OSF has a strategy that runs from April 2023 for three years. It describes how OSF want to move forward, and the actions and resources needed to support the strategy. There are four strategic goals; 1, To consolidate on OSF's progress to date and to continue to offer programmes that makes a difference to the most vulnerable people, 2, To develop a strong organisation that demonstrates best practice throughout and delivers lasting outcomes, 3, To work in partnerships and collaboration with others, and 4, To build a sound and sustainable organisation with a strong trustee board, diversified business model, visible profile, and skilled staff team. The support of the Cranfield Trust through the Spark programme would link extremely well to developing and delivering this strategy and add significant value to the organisation.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>At the assessment I met with Andrew Bell (CEO/Founder) and Shirley Banks (Trustee).</p> <p>Andrew established OSF with his father as both had worked in children's homes and as part of Youth Offending Teams after their football careers ended and quickly realised that children and young people opened up when doing an activity. This alongside the recognition that sport opportunities in the local area were significantly reduced for children and young people without resources led to the formation of the charity. Andrew says that the disappointment of not becoming a professional footballer helped him to develop resilience and understand the important factors linked to overcoming adversity and achieving positive outcomes.</p>	

Shirley has been a Trustee since the organisation was set up and works for Connexions. She has deep knowledge of the needs of young people and is clearly committed to both OSF and to providing Andrew with high levels of support.

Aims and Activities

OSF's mission is; "To advance in life and help especially, but not exclusively, disadvantaged young people". OSF intends to do this through the following aims and objectives:

- a) Provide provision of sporting, recreational, and leisure time activities, provided in the interest of social welfare, designed to improve young people's conditions of life.
- b) Providing support and activities which help develop young people's skills, capacities and capabilities in order to positively participate in society as mature and responsible individuals.
- c) Acting as a resource for young people up to the age of 25 by providing programmes of physical, educational and other activities as a means of distraction to reduce; youth offending, drug and alcohol misuse, anti-social behaviour and crime in communities and unemployment.
- d) Signpost as many young people as possible via multi- agency working to further education, training and employment opportunities.
- e) To advance racial and religious harmony and equity and diversity among young people by arranging activities to encourage shared experiences and interest without reference to race, religious belief, sex, disability, nationality, ethnic or national origin or social background.

Safeguarding

OSF has a comprehensive safeguarding policy that was developed with support and training from Lloyds Bank Foundation. The CEO and a Trustee are the named Protection Liaison Officers in the policy.

All staff receive induction training on child protection and safeguarding and this is refreshed annually. Regular discussions about any concerns take part with the team of youth workers and risk assessments are undertaken for all projects and sessions. To date one concern has needed to be escalated externally but OSF have been asked to be a part of several investigations due to concerns that other agencies have had about young people that OSF have been working with. Safeguarding is a standing agenda item at each Trustee meeting.

Finances

Receipts and payments accounts for the year ending 31st March 2022 show income of £96,669 against expenditure of £82,262 resulting in a surplus of £18,501. OSF has unrestricted reserves of £32,908. OSF's reserves policy is to aim to hold 6 months annual expenditure. Currently this sits at around a third of annual expenditure.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show a planned growth of income for the period that links to the expansion outlined in the strategy. Income for the current financial year has increased to around £200,000 and this level of expenditure is pretty much secured for the period of the proposed grant. The additional growth income is being applied for but is very much in a pipeline phase. Main funding comes from Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Council, Sport England, Children in Need and Lloyds Bank Foundation.

Good financial systems are in place. Day to day management is undertaken by the CEO and an external book keeper produces quarterly management accounts that show finances by each project that is running. The Treasurer has a basic financial background, and this is one the areas that OSF is looking to strengthen through

recruiting new Trustees. A bid writer works on a freelance basis to identify and submit funding proposals.

Current Situation and need

In over 12 years of working with YP who have offended, OSF are still hearing the same disturbing life experiences, such as early trauma and/or abuse, unstable care placements, or being bullied & joining gangs to “feel safe”. These experiences mean that initially young people struggle to trust youth workers, feel unmotivated, socially isolated, & disengaged from support. These young people often rely on maladaptive coping strategies such as drug use or self-harming. In addition, structural social issues add yet another level of complexity to young people’s ability to resettle in the community after serving a custodial sentence. For instance: 90% are care-experienced and living in poverty. Nearly half are couch-surfing or homeless. 60% have no formal educational qualifications, 100% are NEET at referral and their criminal records are a barrier to securing employment. 90% have unmet mental health needs, putting them at risk of reoffending. 25% of young people currently worked with are young women who feel excluded from support mechanisms which tend to favour male-oriented resettlement projects.

After release, many of the young people OSF work with move into extremely deprived areas, where crime levels are above average and drugs are readily available, increasing their risk of reoffending. Recent research from South Ribble Borough Council (2021) highlights widespread cannabis & Benzodiazepine use, and how young people in the area are at increased risk of county lines violence and exploitation to deal drugs for Manchester & Liverpool organised crime syndicates.

A young person’s offending behaviour is often a tragic consequence of systemic failures to deliver safeguarding interventions at key points in their development or guarantee protective social factors (Youth Justice Board, 2005). These encompass areas outlined by the Sport for Development Coalition (2014), such as achievement, behaviour, societal integration and social support, that young people need to reach their potential. As the Commission on Young Lives (COYL, 2022) observes, young people, like the ones OSF work with, have consistently fallen through gaps in support, only to land in the hands of those who would sexually or criminally exploit them. OSF’s close work with young people has helped to jointly identify their needs and solutions. For instance, receiving support from organisations other than the police is top on their list of solutions. However, resources and expertise beyond statutory support, which young people view as stigmatising, is lacking.

Sport as an intervention is well received, but needs a youth-work focus with purposeful design to deliver sustainable outcomes (Youth Endowment Fund, 2021). Unfortunately, the local area OSF works in lacks such provisions. OSF is the only organisation in Lancashire bridging the gaps for wrap-around support in a sports context that is purposefully designed to support young people’s complex needs. Young people often tell OSF that they are the first people to ever “really listen”. The proposed project is seen to be urgently needed to reduce young people’s ongoing exposure to risks, whilst building their resilience, capacities & capabilities to transition to responsible adulthood.

To address these needs OSF plans to launch the ‘Reform Sport’ project which will work with 80 young people, referred internally or via partners such as the Youth Offending Team, Lancaster Farms Prison, Nightsafe, Anderton Centre sports and Child Action North West. The project will deliver a structured resettlement programme that will include evening delivery as this when the risk of offending is highest. Activities will include: Co-creating & monitoring individualised ‘Game Plans’ to help young people, through sport, identify & achieve their personal & professional development

goals. Weekly sports-coaching with a youth-worker who has lived experience of the criminal justice system. This will include Crossfit training, 1:1 mentoring/key-working, drop-in sessions, regular 1:1 outreach to ensure engagement and that basic needs, such as housing, are being met and group-work to support mental & emotional well-being and social connections. A key focus of the project will be to develop healthy coping strategies, addressing substance misuse and mitigate the risk-of-reoffending.

Education support will be a key focus to enable young people to achieve qualifications in maths & English, ASDAN qualifications and accredited sports leader/coaching qualifications. They will also be able to access wider professional qualifications, such as the Personal Trainer Qualification for ex-offenders at Active Lancashire and participate in work experience and placements via existing OSF partners.

Female-only activities will be run that include sports training and group mentoring to address young women's specific needs and guarantee that their safeguarding needs are met. OSF already run a separate project for girls at risk of sexual exploitation so can refer internally for additional support. OSF wish to employ a part time male and female youth worker to lead this project.

Expected changes in Year 1

Social Impact Area 1

Individual Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved managing emotions • Improved resilience • Improved social skills
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Social Impact Area 2

Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved mental wellbeing • Positive health behaviour • Improved ability to avoid negative relationships
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Social Impact Area 3

Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to education • Fewer discipline problems • Improved educational attainment and achieving qualifications
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Request and Budget

OSF is requesting **£59,280** over 2 years for the salary costs of two part time Youth Workers and project costs.

£29,640 in year 1 - £21,000 (salaries), £3,080 (venue hire), £2,600 (project oversight), £1,000 (materials), £1,000 (overheads), £960 (sports qualifications).

£29,640 in year 2 - £21,000 (salaries), £3,080 (venue hire), £2,600 (project oversight), £1,000 (materials), £1,000 (overheads), £960 (sports qualifications).

Conclusion

Opportunity Sports Foundation are a sport for development charity who use sport and activities to achieve a wide range of social impacts for the people that they work with. They have a straightforward approach that is rooted in a deep commitment to understanding the needs of the young people they work with. OSF operates a model that is more sophisticated than it realised. Whilst clearly using a sport for development approach this wasn't an intentional intervention when the organisation was set up. The backgrounds of the founders led them to using sport to connect with the young people they were working with as they could see that this was an effective way of building relationships of trust against a background of trauma and abuse. They were naturally

using a methodology that they didn't realise had a 'name' and was a formal thing until several years later when knowledge of their work was spreading. At this point they then grew links with other sport focused organisations which has enabled them to build and develop their model. The core of what they do has remained unchanged though and they are absolutely an organisation who is using sport as a vehicle for change rather than for the sake of doing sport or to promote sporting excellence.

This proposal is underpinned by OSF's existing experience of working with young people who have been caught up in the criminal justice system and have served custodial sentences. Through a background in working within the care system and also supporting young people who have left care, the team have a strong understanding of many of the linked issues that lead a young person towards offending behaviour. They are also acutely aware of the need to build strong relationships of trust before support can be fully accessed by a young person. This led to an early change in their approach. Initially sports coaches had been employed to run sessions and work with the young people on the project but then was quickly changed to youth workers being employed who had sports backgrounds and then underwent sports coaching training. This change reflected the fact that the focus was on supporting and developing the young person and not their sporting ability.

This project is much needed in the local area and the previous work OSF has done has built a strong framework to build on. They have strong links with local referral agencies and other support agencies who will be able to meet the needs of young people that OSF are not equipped to deal with. The female worker who they have in mind to lead the work with young women has herself been in the criminal justice system and is a strong, inspiring and relatable woman who will no doubt be a role model to the young women who join the programme. This will be a real strength of the programme as working with young women can be a challenge. We have seen few projects that have proposed working with both young men and young women and who genuinely seem to have the expertise to do this. But OSF seem to have a good understanding of the needs of young women and throughout the assessment also demonstrated a good understanding of trauma informed approaches.

I was very impressed by the proposal and have a lot of confidence that the team will deliver a strong project. I did think that the beneficiary numbers being proposed were ambitious and it did make me question how deep the intervention would be. When discussed though it was clear that the number of young people who would ultimately stay on for the whole programme would be less than the total number who would have some engagement in the programme and that a dropout rate that recognised the complex nature of the individuals being worked with had been built in to the figures.

This has the potential to be a really strong project that will gain from being part of a wider cohort delivering this kind of work. Therefore, I would recommend support with a grant as requested.

Recommended Priority Rating		
Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High