

“There’s just something about this club. It’s been my family.” An analysis of the experiences of youth in a South African sport-for-development programme

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Abstract

This article describes a study of a soccer and life skills programme for youth in South Africa: Buffalo City Soccer School (BCSS). The study aimed to provide insight into the programme's mechanisms, and evaluate participants' perceptions of the programme's impact. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 male BCSS participants. Interview data were analysed for thematic content, and the theoretical perspectives of Witt and Crompton ((1997) *The protective factors framework: A key to programming for benefits and evaluating for results. Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 15: 1–18), Gambone and Arbretton ((1997) *Safe Havens: The Contributions of Youth Organizations to Healthy Adolescent Development*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures) and Pawson ((2006) *Evidence-Based Policy: A Realist Perspective*. London: SAGE) were used to interpret these themes. These perspectives highlighted key processes and mechanisms within the BCSS programme that have led to positive personal impacts: a sense of family and a sense of safety and belonging. Bandura's ((1986) *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall) concepts of perceived self-efficacy and agency in adolescent development (Bandura A (2006) *Adolescent development from an agentic perspective*. In: Pajares F and Urdan T (eds) *Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Adolescents*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, pp. 1–43) help make sense of these personal impacts. This study contributes to the identification of the mechanisms through which sport can provide a context for the development of youth.

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Keywords

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The increasing popularity of sport-for-development initiatives, particularly in Africa, has been documented by Burnett (2009), although she has argued that growth in this field has lacked coordination and has been driven by donors, both governmental and corporate (Burnett, 2009). Burnett describes sport-for-development as a “contested social construct” (Burnett, 2009: 1193) that encompasses a broad array of activities that are implemented in a range of different social contexts and with varying degrees of institutionalization (Burnett, 2009). Within this range of activities, sport is widely perceived to be a valuable tool for bringing about positive personal and social development in youth (Gould and Carson, 2008; Morris et al., 2003; Sandford et al., 2006), including the development of life skills (Gould and Carson, 2008). Other authors have argued for the social impact of sport (Burnett, 2009) and its contribution to the development of social capital amongst youth (Kay and Bradbury, 2009; Spaaij, 2012). Evaluations of sport-based interventions have reported improved social and communication skills, teamwork and self-confidence (Gould et al., 2012; Kay, 2009; Spaaij, 2012). This type of research is, however, relatively limited and generalized claims around sport’s developmental capabilities and its role in reducing crime and social deviance are not always supported by robust evidence (Cameron and MacDougall, 2000; Coalter, 2007; Crabbe, 2000; Gould and Carson, 2008; Morris et al., 2003; Nichols, 1997).

Some have criticized the “deficit model” implicit in most sport-for-development programmes, which assumes that youth from disadvantaged settings are uniformly deficient and in need of personal development (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2013) – although systematic diagnosis before programme implementation is rare. Many have called for more rigorous evaluation of these sport-for-development programmes (Bailey, 2005; Cameron and MacDougall, 2000; Coalter, 2007, 2013; Morris et al., 2003; Nichols and Crow, 2004; Sandford et al., 2006). Sport-for-development programmes have also been criticized for a lack of clarity on outcomes and their measurement (Bailey, 2005; Crabbe, 2000; Nichols and Crow, 2004), and inadequate consideration of the relationship between necessary and sufficient conditions for their effectiveness (Cameron and MacDougall, 2000; Coalter, 2007; Sandford et al., 2006).

The reference to sufficient conditions indicates a need for greater clarity regarding the mechanisms through which sports programmes can contribute to personal development, as well as the context in which this development is likely to take place, and with whom it would occur (Coalter, 2007; Nichols and Crow, 2004; Sandford et al., 2006). Sandford et al. (2006) recommend a focus on the “optimal combinations of individuals, activities and contexts” when evaluating the mechanisms and impact of sport programmes. One of the key mechanisms is social relationships, and Sandford et al. (2006: 262) assert that these “are the most significant factor in effecting behavioural change” in physical activity programmes. The important role of supportive and caring staff within sports programmes has also been emphasized (Gould et al., 2012; Kay, 2009; Spaaij, 2012).

Coakley (1998) maintains that sport does not cause socialization outcomes, but can provide a context for socialization experiences. Similarly, Spaaij, in his evaluation of a sport-based intervention programme, described sport as a “vehicle for delivering” certain programme outcomes (Spaaij, 2012: 91), and Kay (2009) highlighted the valuable role of sport in establishing an environment conducive to the achievement of programme outcomes. These perspectives align with Coalter’s (2007) definition of *sports-plus* programmes, where sport is seen as the context for changes in values, attitudes and behaviour, which are often achieved via non-sporting mechanisms. These arguments point towards the non-sport components of sport programmes that contribute to development outcomes and, according to Hartmann (2003), the strength of these non-sport components largely determines the success of sport-based social interventions.

Because there is a dearth of relevant process-oriented research in sport-for-development, the more mature area of youth work literature was drawn on for relevant analytical frameworks for addressing issues of social relationships and non-sporting components. The authors drawn on were Witt and Crompton (1997), who derived their framework from an analysis of youth work literature, Gambone and Arbreton (1997), highly experienced researchers in the area of the contribution of youth organizations to adolescent development, and Pawson (2006), who undertook a realist evaluation of extensive research of youth mentoring. While each framework has unique features, there is a high level of unanimity about the nature of components and participant experiences underpinning successful youth work programmes, providing us with a degree of confidence about the analytical utility of the broad framework.

Witt and Crompton’s (1997) protective factors framework for the structure and design of youth programmes is based on an analysis of factors that have assisted youth to avoid the negative consequences of the risks in their environments. This framework emphasizes the importance of the development of protective factors in the promotion of resilience and personal development among youth in risky environments, rather than focusing on the risks themselves. The factors that they suggest should be present in programmes for at-risk youth are interested and caring adults, the development of a sense of acceptance and belonging, models for conventional behaviour, like/perceived competence at a particular activity, value placed on achievement, high controls against deviant behaviour, the development of positive attitudes to the future, the development of an ability to work with others, and ability to work out conflicts.

Similarly, Gambone and Arbreton (1997) identified various, broadly similar, programme elements that enhance resilience in youth: opportunities that enable youth to develop a sense of safety; challenging and interesting activities, settings and experiences that help youth develop a sense of belonging; social support from adults; opportunities for input and decision-making; opportunities to develop leadership skills; and opportunities to undertake volunteer and community service activities. Both the perspectives of Witt and Crompton (1997) and Gambone and Arbreton (1997) provide insight into the role of programme providers in creating environments for young people to develop, and fostering the type of relationships that promote resilience and aspects of personal development.

Pawson (2006) has also explored the nature of these types of relationships between adult mentors and youth. From a realist evaluation of published research on mentoring

programmes for at-risk youth, he identified four stages through which the mentor/mentee relationship progresses:

1. befriending: creating bonds of trust and overcoming potential initial antagonism;
2. direction setting: promoting self-reflection and the reconsideration of values, loyalties and ambitions;
3. coaching: coaxing and cajoling mentees into acquiring the skills, assets, credentials required to enter the mainstream;
4. sponsoring: advocating and networking on behalf of the mentee to gain requisite contacts and opportunities.

It could be argued that the above perspectives describe factors and processes that seek to develop young people's perceived self-efficacy. The concept of perceived self-efficacy, which is central to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), provides further understanding of the mechanisms enabling personal development within youth programmes. The intended impacts of these sport-for-development programmes, especially sports-plus programmes, often relate to this concept and to the concept of human agency (Bandura, 2006). An individual's sense of agency refers to their belief in their ability to exercise some control of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Pajares, 2002). Perceived self-efficacy is a key mechanism of human agency and underpins learning (Bandura, 2006), and can be defined as "people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986: 391). An individual's perceived self-efficacy influences their thought patterns and emotions, as well as the effort they will make for a particular activity, the extent to which they will persevere when facing obstacles and their resilience when facing adversity (Pajares, 2002).

Importantly, Bandura (2006) applied the concept of human agency to adolescent development, and this perspective is relevant to programmes that promote the attainment of life skills. From this perspective, adolescents can be conceptualized as "self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are contributors to their life circumstances not just products of them. To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances" (Bandura, 2006: 3). Bandura (2006: 3) goes on to describe some of the main features of human agency:

One such feature is intentionality. People form intentions that include action plans and strategies for realizing them. The second feature involves the temporal extension of agency through forethought. This includes more than future-directed plans. People set themselves goals and anticipate likely outcomes of prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts anticipatorily.

Several researchers in sport-for-development have recognized the importance of the development of perceived self-efficacy – especially as a theoretical "bridge" between knowledge about HIV/AIDS and subsequent safe sex behaviour (Botcheva and Huffman, 2004; Jeanes, 2013; Maro et al., 2009; Mwaanga, 2010). However, there is a wide

variation in the definition and measurement of the concept, limiting any cumulative understanding of its relevance to understanding sport-for-development programmes. Furthermore, perceived self-efficacy is necessary but rarely sufficient for behaviour change in the context of these programmes intending to influence safe sex behaviour.

Research aim

The aims of this study were therefore (1) to provide insight into the mechanisms of a soccer and life skills programme for youth: Buffalo City Soccer School (BCSS), and (2) to explore respondents' perceptions of the impact of the BCSS.

The environment

BCSS is located in Buffalo Flats, in East London, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, and receives funding from the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. Despite improvements on some measures of socioeconomic development, the Eastern Cape tends to fare poorly in comparison to the rest of the country, and has shown a downward trend in the Human Development Index and in the inequality of income distribution. An estimated 57% of the province's population live in poverty and 27.8% are unemployed (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2012). The infant mortality rate, although declining in the province, was 61 per 1000 live births, and life expectancy was 48 years in 2007 (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2009). These do not compare favourably with the national estimates for infant mortality (41.7 per 1000 live births) and life expectancy (59.6) (Statistics South Africa, 2013).

Buffalo Flats is a community of low-income families, scarce employment opportunities and limited infrastructure, such as health facilities, law enforcement and basic amenities (Buffalo City Municipality, 2001). The deprivation is easily observed in poorly maintained roads, property and buildings, uncollected refuse littering streets and pavements and the groups of children, youth and adults that appear not to be engaged in education or employment during the day.

In contrast to such surroundings, the primary school at which BCSS operates is well maintained, and includes a large soccer field that is secured by a high fence, particularly to prevent community members from using it as a thoroughfare and damaging the property. The primary school principal and various teachers play key supportive roles within BCSS, and many BCSS participants are recruited from this primary school. Overseas volunteers, who are based at the school for a period of three to six months, assist with the many extramural activities at the school, such as dance, choir and sport. In this context, BCSS aims to provide a positive alternative to the risk behaviours to which male youth are exposed, many of which are exacerbated in such a deprived environment.

The programme

BCSS was started in 2001 as a programme to combine soccer and the teaching of life skills. The majority of staff and volunteers on the programme are men in their 40s or 50s, and have lived in Buffalo Flats at some point. While BCSS does offer some activities and

Table 1. Themes to be addressed in life skills sessions.

Leadership	Time management
Problem solving	Conflict management
Health education	Interpersonal skills
Team work	Decision-making
Goal setting	Self-confidence
Values	Prioritizing
Self-awareness	Optimizing education

events for girls, the majority of programme participants are boys and all participants in the soccer and life skills programme are boys. The soccer component of BCSS involves teams, from under-11 to under-21, who compete in the local soccer league. Soccer training takes place three times per week, with matches on Saturdays. According to BCSS staff, soccer is the “hook” for the life skills sessions, which are delivered twice per week by trained life skills facilitators in interactive group sessions. While soccer coaches and life skills facilitators have clearly defined roles within the BCSS programme, they have a shared investment in the programme’s success. These individuals work collaboratively via regular discussion regarding the progress of the participants to achieve the overarching goals of the programme.

In 2008, a South African faith-based curriculum – the Ubabalo eAfrica Whole Life Coaching curriculum – was introduced to provide more structure to the life skills component of the programme, and this links various life skills topics with soccer skills. For example, in a session titled “Live with courage – YES GO!”, participants first learn the soccer skill of tackling. After this in the “Cross-over to life skill coaching” they are reminded that when regaining possession of the soccer ball, they need to do so with conviction and courage. The purpose of the life skill component of the session is “To encourage players to be much more intentional in life”, and the specific life skill highlighted is “To live courageously with your convictions”. The sessions are designed to help players to (1) choose two or three sound basic principles for life and (2) be bold with the principles they have chosen. In addition to participation in the soccer league and the life skills sessions, BCSS hosts community sporting events, where talks are sometimes given by community members, for example a policeman speaking about safety in the community.

A number of themes, listed in Table 1, are addressed in the life skills sessions. While these themes were not theoretically derived for the programme, it is possible to align them with Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), and particularly with the concepts of human agency and perceived self-efficacy.

Regarding the soccer component of BCSS, it is possible that some of these life skills themes may have been indirectly addressed, or reinforced, although this was not clearly articulated by BCSS staff. The extent of the integration of the soccer and life skills components of the programme is not evident, although it does seem that both form important parts of the whole, and that the life skills component is not perceived by BCSS staff as merely an “add on” to the soccer. BCSS could therefore be characterized as a *sports-plus* programme, as mentioned earlier (Coalter, 2007).

Methods

Data collection

The semi-structured interviews took place with 10 males between the ages of 11 and 20 at the school where BCSS is based. The interviewees were recruited by BCSS staff and volunteers and the majority had been part of the BCSS programme for between three and eight years. Interview respondents were purposefully selected based on their willingness to be interviewed and their familiarity with the programme. All participants were Black African or "Coloured", which in South Africa refers to mixed ancestry. Although they were fluent in English, this may have been their second language. Interviews were conducted in English by the researcher and were approximately 15 minutes in length. The aim was to obtain respondents' experience of the BCSS programme, and their perceptions of the impact of participation and factors influencing programme effectiveness, in order to gain some insight into the programme's mechanisms. Guide questions were used in the interviews and covered topics such as participants' impressions of what they learnt from the programme; how they felt the programme had helped them to grow and develop; changes in their attitudes, behaviours and relationships as a result of the programme; how these changes have occurred; and factors contributing to the perceived impacts of the programme.

The main limitation of this study was the relatively short interviews with respondents, and although all respondents were fluent in and responded in English, this may have been their second language. However, lengthy interviews with these participants may not have been feasible or preferable for male teenagers. A shorter interview time allowed them to focus on a limited number of theoretical issues. Another possible limitation was that the interviewer (first author) is a white woman from a different ethnic group, which may have introduced some race and gender dynamics to the interview setting. These dynamics are often unavoidable when conducting research in South Africa, particular in community settings. However, this was addressed in discussions prior to data collection with BCSS staff, and they were confident that these dynamics would not be a significant barrier. More generally, the interviewer observed that some respondents had difficulty articulating their responses to more in-depth or nuanced questions regarding the BCSS programme and their feelings about this programme. Nevertheless, this research provided these young people with the opportunity to express their opinions and explain the significance of their experiences of the programme. The small sample could be perceived as a limitation of this study. However, in line with the well-known qualitative research phenomenon "saturation point" (Gratton and Jones, 2004), we believe that no significant new themes would have emerged in the analysis had further interviews been conducted.

Qualitative data analysis

The interviews were audio recorded and recordings were transcribed verbatim by a third party. Interview transcripts were read through initially to obtain a general sense of the issues raised by respondents. A coding framework of themes and sub-themes was developed based on the guide questions and refined in light of any additional

issues that emerged in the interviews. Using this coding framework transcripts were coded according to thematic content, in order to identify “repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun and Clarke, 2006), that is, the main themes and sub-themes. Atlas.ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software (Scientific Software Development GmbH, Berlin, Germany) was used to assist with the data analysis. Once the transcripts had been coded, quotes for each code were grouped together and summarized, and specific quotes were chosen that best represented the sub-themes and themes outlined in the coding framework. The theoretical perspectives of Witt and Crompton (1997), Gambone and Arbretton (1997) and Pawson (2006) were then used to provide an interpretation of these themes. It should be noted, however, that while these authors do not take full account of respondents’ experiences of, or reactions to, these components, this paper is presenting an application of these components from the perspective of respondents.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Cape Town, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC REF: 510/2012). Written assent and parental consent were obtained from all respondents.

Results

In their interview responses, respondents sometimes referred to the BCSS programme as a whole (soccer and life skills components), and at other times referred to distinct programme components. References to coaches infer a reference to the soccer component, since coaches are not involved with the life skills component. In some instances it is not clear whether they were referring to a specific component, or the programme as a whole. What follows in this section are some overall perceptions of the programme, as well as an interpretation of the data according to the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier.

Overall perceptions of BCSS

All respondents were positive about BCSS and their experience of the programme. A number of them mentioned that BCSS differed from other soccer clubs because it offered life skills, as well as camps and other opportunities to visit new and different places. Challenging and interesting activities, such as life skills and opportunities to travel, are one of the programme elements that may enhance resilience, as proposed by Gambone and Arbretton (1997). Liking a particular activity is also identified as a protective factor that is necessary, but not sufficient, for the promotion of resilience by Witt and Crompton (1997).

I think it’s a very good thing because it’s different to other teams. The things we do, I don’t hear other teams do. Like the programme we had last week, like we went to a camp and we had life skills...Let’s take [club name] for example. [Club name] is a good club but their management isn’t so good because every time they come to the field the players don’t come. They don’t have life skills, they don’t have like camps like we do. Even their coaches, they are very rude and stuff like that. They are not like our coaches. (Interviewee 7, 15 years old)

Perceptions of personal impact

All respondents made some reference to personal growth, development or learning as a result of the programme. Some suggested in a more general sense that the programme had helped them to be “a better person”.

Buffalo City Programme for me, it's helping me because we have life skills...I have learnt to become a better person...I am learning a lot in the life skills. I've learnt a lot. (Interviewee 3, 18 years old)

Others indicated that the programme helped to change the nature of external social relationships. An example of this was being equipped to be a better role model or leader in their community, or within the programme itself.

...there's a lot of like my brother's children, my sister's children they look up to me now. They seeing the road I'm walking now compared to my brothers...way they were before. Now they're looking up to me now which I love that. I want to be the best in their lives. (Interviewee 10, 17 years old)

Perceived self-efficacy

A number of respondents spoke about improving self-discipline, confidence, self-belief, self-esteem and security in their identity as a result of the programme. Self-discipline could be seen as an element of perceived self-efficacy, since this relates to belief in one's ability to plan and perform a task (Coalter, 2013). Reflecting the desired impacts of BCSS staff, some respondents also referred to confidence, and believed that their confidence had increased as a result of the programme. Bandura (1997) has criticized the notion of confidence as being one that lacks theoretical grounding and specificity. For respondents, confidence seemed to relate to a mixture of perceived self-efficacy and self-esteem. For some it was in reference to their perceived self-efficacy in social contexts, which is a form of social efficacy. Specifically, a number of respondents expressed a greater capability to communicate with others and an ability to overcome challenges they may experience when communicating with others.

For me, what I've learnt in the life skills...is discipline and being myself. I believe in myself, but I needed like somebody just to tell me that. That you can be a better person if you just think out of the box. So life skills taught me that...I can say I am more confident...because one thing I've learnt is confidence takes you far. If I have the heart to speak with you, I can have the heart to speak with anybody and Buffalo City taught me that...I've learnt to communicate with other people, no matter what colour you are, it doesn't matter because I can communicate with anyone... (Interviewee 3, 18 years old)

Witt and Crompton's (1997) factor of positive attitudes to the future is reflected in respondents' comments regarding a greater sense of direction, vision or destiny, looking forward to the future, and learning about making the right decisions. This relates to two of the key features of agency according to Bandura (2006: 3): intentionality, and

the “temporal extension of agency through forethought”, and hence to perceived self-efficacy.

...this club has really shown me which direction I really want to go. Not only on the field but off the field and they have learnt [sic] me a lot...Actually it does apply at home too. (Interviewee 4, 17 years old)

Linked to these features of agency, respondents mentioned aspects of self-discipline such as determination, dedication and motivation that they developed in the programme. These relate to Pawson’s (2006) second stage of direction setting, which involves the “reconsideration of values, loyalties and ambitions”, as well as to effort and persistence, which are encompassed in perceived self-efficacy.

...dedication and determination...You might fail but don’t give up. Don’t ever give up. That’s what I’ve learnt. I’ve failed a lot...That’s what I implement everyday in my life, don’t give up no matter what goes on. (Interviewee 3, 18 years old)

Goal setting is integral to the second feature of agency: extension of agency (Bandura, 2006). It is also relevant to Pawson’s (2006) third stage of coaching, where mentors are preparing mentees to “enter the mainstream” (Pawson, 2006: 125). Most respondents spoke of how the programme had highlighted the importance of goal setting for them and had helped them to understand that they can and should set goals. Furthermore, the programme was believed to have enlightened them on how to achieve their goals and, in some cases, had helped them to achieve these goals.

...what options I have and the goals I can set for myself...Like goal planning, planning your goals. What the limits are, which goals you should set for yourself. Long-terms goals, short-terms goals and intermediate goals... (Interviewee 4, 17 years old)

One participant’s comment highlighted the link between intentionality, goal setting and perceived self-efficacy.

Buffalo City soccer’s good. It help me to be a better person and to achieve my goals one day.

Q: And what are some of those goals that you’d like to achieve?

A: I would like to be a soccer player one day...I’m going about to getting that goal to respect...First I have to respect and never give up to my goals. And to trust my abilities. (Interviewee 2, 11 years old)

While his aspiration could be viewed as quite typical of an 11-year-old boy, he identifies goal setting as a positive impact of the programme, is able to articulate an intention to achieve that goal, and specify what he needs to do to achieve it, part of which relates to his belief in his abilities.

Prioritizing and time management could be viewed as skills necessary for respondents to “enter the mainstream”, and many respondents suggested that the programme had helped them to develop these skills. This was often discussed in the context of

prioritizing their schoolwork or studies over soccer and other social activities. Respondents' comments regarding these skills refer to intentionality and the "action plans and strategies" required to achieve these intentions (Bandura, 2006), as well as components of perceived self-efficacy (effort and persistence).

They've always taught me to be organized with anything, any decision I make that's where the life skills came in...It's difficult, but I'm coping because you have to like put your studies first before you like put practises, put soccer. Your schoolwork comes first... (Interviewee 4, 17 years old)

Further evidence of the development of perceived self-efficacy was respondents' comments about being able to persevere through challenges, especially resisting peer pressure. Awareness of choices, mentioned by some, suggests a sense of agency to enable them to resist simply being a product of their environment (Bandura, 2006).

Peer pressure. I think they have helped me to say no to most things that I've been exposed to...My parents also taught me, whenever you do in a situation where you have a choice...I feel that when I'm within a situation like that I should save my authority and say no. (Interviewee 4, 17 years old)

A sense of family and belonging

According to respondents, the main factor contributing to their learning and development was the sense of family within the programme. This relates to Gambone and Arbretton's (1997) element of settings and experiences that help youth to develop a sense of belonging, Witt and Crompton's (1997) sense of acceptance and belonging and Pawson's (2006) first stage of befriending. This perceived sense of family also supports Sandford et al.'s (2006) emphasis on the role of social relationships in changing behaviour.

Almost all respondents made some reference to this sense of family and home and the bond that exists between players, volunteers and staff of BCSS. For some this was expressed as a feeling of being accepted and belonging, while others mentioned things such as "being able to be open", to share what they have and to depend on one another, which could be characterized as features of a healthy family environment.

So it's like a family to me because I can be open. I can say whatever I want to say...anything just to encourage the players. So you see, I love them...If I feel like I'm lonely and stuff like that, I just go to my coach, talk to him, he'll tell me advice and so on...like I said it's like a family to me you see. (Interviewee 3, 18 years old)

There's just something about this club. It's been my family. I haven't actually told anyone this, but I feel a connection with the players. I feel like we are connected somehow. I have had many offers...but I turned them down, but I couldn't explain to them why I turned them down. And now I understand now why I did. (Interviewee 6, 18 years old)

Witt and Crompton's (1997) factors of interested and caring adults acting as models for conventional behaviour, Gambone and Arbretton's (1997) social support from adults and Pawson's (2006) befriending are reflected in respondents' perceptions of the BCSS

coaches and life skills facilitators. These all help to facilitate the sense of family. Furthermore, coaches were described by respondents as “passionate”, “encouraging” and “supportive”; some respondents went so far as to describe coaches as “fathers”. They believed that the coaches cared about the well-being and development of each player, that they built relationships with and mentored players, taught them how to behave and stay on the right track, and sacrificed their time and often their finances for players.

...the first thing the coach does, he first makes a bond with each player. I don't know how to explain it. You know you won't know someone and he's your coach but you make that bond that you can tell him anything. He will help you with it, if you need help with anything... (Interviewee 6, 18 years old)

Because every coach we ever had was like fathers. The staff was like our higher authority. We always look up to them and they always there and they helping and if you doing wrong, they put us in the right track...That's how we feel about our staff, that they are like our mentors. (Interviewee 4, 17 years old)

BCSS life skills facilitators were also referred to in a positive light by some respondents, and can be seen to contribute to programme impact. Facilitators were described variously as understanding, kind, open, wise, respectful and inspirational.

They're very open and they're very kind...and they tell you exactly what you need to know about life and they understand like our youth and everything. They are very wise, they people you could listen to. (Interviewee 7, 15 years old)

Coaches and life skills facilitators were also described as respectful, and most respondents mentioned that the programme had taught them to have respect for others, which included their peers, elders and coaches.

...life skills is great because we learn about soccer and how to respect, to obey and all that stuffs...I'm going about to getting that goal to respect first of all. First I have to respect and never give up to my goals. And to trust my abilities... It help me to respect my parents... (Interviewee 2, 11 years old)

Coalter (2013) emphasized the centrality of respect, trust and reciprocity in changing attitudes and behaviours in youth programmes, such as BCSS. Having developed respect for the coaches and life skills facilitators, respondents are able to create bonds of trust (Pawson, 2006) and build close relationships with these individuals, who are then more able to influence the values, attitudes and behaviour of participants. A sense of reciprocity may then be cultivated as participants do not want to disappoint their leaders, and this could lead to behaviour change to conform to the mentors' expectations. One participant's response to a question about what could be improved within BCSS hints at this sense of reciprocity:

For me, I don't see anything wrong with it because we getting opportunities that other teams don't provide for their players. So if I must go to my coach and say “Coach, I don't like the

team that we camping there, you must change this and do this and that and that". It will sound so wrong because they are going out of their way, time everything to be with us and starting a team and building it. (Interviewee 3, 18 years old)

Feeling safe

The provision of opportunities that enable youth to develop a sense of safety is one of Gambone and Arbreton's (1997) programme elements and it is likely that this contributes to respondents' feelings of acceptance and belonging and their sense of family (Witt and Crompton, 1997). Many of them described BCSS as a safe place, as it kept them busy and "off the streets" (particularly on weekends), and therefore away from negative influences and activities in their communities, such as gangsterism, drugs and alcohol.

And also it keeps me away from the negative things because mostly weekends I am here or I am with the guys playing a match. Some days like we are here for life skills and at gym.... (Interviewee 7, 15 years old)

Players as friends

A number of respondents spoke about the nature of the friendships between BCSS players and the development of mutual trust. It was clear that these relationships also help to reinforce this sense of family and the "bond" amongst players.

The bond amongst us... I mean we don't see each other that much. There is a time during the week, like the training that's the only time we see each other...on a daily basis. When we're together, we're just like...we're family here, the other guys, like you said, a bond, it's remarkable...I'd say it's up to the individual themselves. (Interviewee 5, 20 years old)

Reference group theory (Merton, 2011: 532), which maintains that individuals "take the standards of significant others as a basis for self-appraisal and evaluation", provides some explanation not only of the respect and trust that developed for the coaches, but also the way in which respondents compared the "wrong friends" they had before joining the programme, with their new BCSS peers, whom they described as exerting a positive influence. This indicates that since joining BCSS they began to evaluate themselves and their behaviour against the standards set by those in the programme – their "significant others" changed (Merton, 2011: 532). Linked to this, one participant's quotes support Pawson's (2006: 148) view that programmes may be most effective for respondents who join a programme with "in-built resilience and with aspirations about moving away from their present status".

I've actually met quite a lot of people because of the soccer and my coaches...because before I was with wrong friends. I really can say that word, wrong friends, doing the wrong things but I thought to myself this is not the life I want so I met one of my friends...also played for Buffalo City. And since I joined here my whole life has changed. (Interviewee 10, 17 years old)

'Beyond the touchline'

The notion of going 'beyond the touchline' refers to the developmental impacts of the programme impacts leading to outcomes outside of the boundaries of the programme (Coalter, 2013). In this regard and related to the sense of family, many respondents commented on the fact that BCSS staff were interested in their character development more than their contribution as a soccer player, and some respondents stated that BCSS is not primarily a soccer club. They also felt that BCSS cared about their families and about their communities.

I feel that this is...it's not a soccer club. The focus is not mainly soccer, it's more, its' beyond... it's getting us involved with the community, stuff like that. More about building character and stuff, not mainly focusing on your soccer skills and your ability...Coach [name], he tells us all the time that this is not a soccer club...soccer...it's something we have in common so we play soccer. We enter competitions and stuff. But the main focus is not that. It's more about building our character, building individuals... (Interviewee 5, 20 years old)

Linked to this are comments from some respondents that indicated how coaches promote the value of education and, significantly, that schoolwork and studies should be prioritized over soccer. Valuing educational attainment clearly indicates the value being placed on a broader definition of achievement (Witt and Crompton, 1997).

...the senior teams and the under 17s practise every Tuesday. But I don't have a choice to come because coach says school comes first, then soccer. (Interviewee 1, 13 years old)

Further evidence of going 'beyond the touchline' were provided by respondents' comments about being able to apply what they have learnt from the BCSS programme to settings outside of the programme, such as their schoolwork, home environment and with their peers. Respect for parents mentioned earlier is another example of the impact of BCSS extending beyond the programme to their home environment.

I just apply it as I go. Just apply it...when I come to life skills every Friday, I learn something new. I go home and tell my family, I tell my peers. If you learn, did you hear on that, did you hear on that? Do you know that, do you know that? And they were like where did you get that? My soccer team. (Interviewee 3, 18 years old)

Discussion

Respondents were generally positive about BCSS, their experiences of the programme and its perceived impact on their personal development. Most of their perceptions about the aspects of the programme that supported positive developments reflected the perspectives of Witt and Crompton (1997), Gambone and Arbretton (1997), Pawson (2006) Sandford et al. (2006) and Spaaij (2012) – a sense of family and the associated sense of safety and belonging, facilitated by respondents' positive social relationships with the BCSS coaches and life skills facilitators and the friendships developed with other players in the programme. Furthermore, respondents' comments suggested that the impacts of

the programme were strengthened because BCSS staff support went 'beyond the touch-line' via their insistence on helping to prioritize education over soccer skills and even showing concern for players' families and communities. The positive impact of the facilitators and coaches can be understood within Coalter's (2013) proposed mechanisms of participants' growing sense of respect, trust and reciprocity in their relationships with coaches and leaders.

Within this context, respondents' comments indicated that they experienced improvements in terms of aspects of perceived self-efficacy and a sense of agency – which Bandura (1986, 2006) views as central to adolescent development. In addition, they claimed to have developed the ability to establish priorities and manage their time more productively.

These findings in a South African context provide support for previous research regarding sport as a *context* for personal development (Coakley, 1998; Coalter, 2007). They also indicate the characteristics of a *sports-plus* programme (Coalter, 2007), where sport, in this case soccer, is viewed as the *context* for seeking to change values, attitudes and behaviour, which might be achieved via various non-sporting mechanisms.

These findings do not provide an unequivocal answer to the *relative* importance of the sport and non-sport components of the BCSS programme. They do, however, suggest that the non-sport components are integral to the perceived positive impacts of the programme (sufficient conditions), although the soccer would appear to increase the programme's appeal for youth (necessary condition). This aligns with Hartmann's (2003) assertion that the strength of non-sport components largely determines the success of sport-based social interventions. It could be concluded that these components should be emphasized in the design and delivery of programmes such as BCSS, as well as in the training of those who deliver such programmes.

Despite some admitted methodological limitations, this South African study adds to the existing limited body of research on the evaluation of sport-for-development programmes. The findings of this study contribute to the identification of the mechanisms through which sport can provide a context for the development of youth and has major implications for the design, delivery and evaluation of such programmes.

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