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# Sports Unites Case Study: Peace Ballers Academy Peace Ballers



**inFocus**

Author: Kelly Crawshaw  
inFocus Consulting Ltd  
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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Peace Ballers was founded to overcome youth crime in London. They use sport, mentoring and enterprise to engage young people and empower them to disengage from crime and fulfil their potential. The organisation seek to create a fairer world of football and use sport as a mechanism to develop soft skills in young people within the London Borough of Southwark. The project was delivered to young people between the ages of 11-16 in Peckham.

The project involved a combination of football activities and off-pitch classroom sessions, which both focused around key themes including discipline, resilience and confidence.

The purpose of this case study is to outline the outcomes of the project, inform the future direction of the Sport Unites investment programme, and give insight to other community sport organisations running similar activities.

### Context

Peace Ballers is based in the London Borough of Southwark, and the project took part at a local secondary school, Harris Academy Peckham.

The project was established by Peace Ballers to reduce youth crime and violence in the borough through providing opportunities for young people to develop social and employability skills through the means of football, mentoring and enterprise.

For more information about Peace Ballers and their mission, [click here](#).

### Mechanism

The Peace Ballers Academy sessions were delivered to students in Year 7 through to Year 11.

Participants who face behaviour challenges were referred to the project through school staff.

Activities were led by trained Peace Ballers coaches who delivered both classroom-based and on-pitch football sessions. The classroom sessions focused on participants expressing their opinions and developing social and enterprise skills, and the football activities were used to put the skills participants had learnt into practical use and acted as an opportunity to provide teachable moments for the specific theme they were working on.

In-person project delivery was stopped during the Covid-19 lockdowns; however outside sessions were partially reintroduced where restrictions allowed. Online video calls were introduced during lockdown periods, and Whatsapp groups were created for each age group for the participants to keep in contact. Peace Ballers also developed an app called 'Evoe', which was used to live stream sessions in HD, as a visually appealing way for participants to be involved in the project from home.

### Methodology

Data collection was carried out by inFocus and Peace Ballers staff and consisted of baseline and endline surveys, a focus group and interviews. The methods produced both qualitative and quantitative data which was analysed by the inFocus team.

### Key findings

- ▶ 100% of the Year 8 and under respondents and 93% of Year 9 and over participants reported that the level of support, instruction and guidance they received from staff was "good" or "excellent".
- ▶ 64% of participants reported that they have a better ability to seek out employment, education or training opportunities that might interest them since starting the project.
- ▶ Respondents level of stress reportedly decreased between the baseline and endline reporting.

## Conclusions

There was evidence to suggest that young people developed their social and employability skills as a result of opportunities provided by Peace Ballers staff, and the environment created during the activities.

Participants felt an increased level of trust with people from their local area and described everyone on the project as being a community.

The environment and activities facilitated by Peace Ballers staff supported participants to increase their confidence and self-esteem, by providing opportunities to voice their thoughts and opinions.

## Recommendations

Grantee:

- ▶ Peace Ballers could involve other local schools to expand the group of young participants it works with on this particular project. This may broaden the social interactions between young people by giving them opportunities to build relationships with others outside of their school.
- ▶ Peace Ballers should continue to create strategies and initiatives to increase the numbers of girls participating in the project.

Sport Unites:

- ▶ This case study has outlined the need for projects to be observing the mental wellbeing of young people during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, even if it is not one of the core outcomes of the project, with a specific focus on levels of isolation.
- ▶ Future projects should consider providing both sporting and non-sporting opportunities to develop the prospects and career goals of young Londoners. These opportunities should be used to inspire young people and help them develop an understanding for the requirements of the workplace.
- ▶ Projects working with under 16's should think about partnering with schools or organisations who have access to this specific target group, and who can refer the right participants to ensure projects are reaching who they are aimed for.





## 1 Introduction

Peace Ballers was established in 2019 and is based in the London Borough of Southwark. The organisation uses football to engage young people to develop social and life skills and improve their future career prospects. The Peace Ballers Academy project is based in Harris Academy Peckham, where all of the participants go to school. Alongside this funded project, Peace Ballers also aims to create a fairer world of football by giving more young people the opportunity to showcase their talent and get signed by local clubs.

For more information about Peace Ballers and their mission, [click here](#).

The project initially started in 2019 as a pilot funded by the Mayor of London's Community Sport team. A five-week summer programme was delivered. Subsequently, the project was funded again in December 2019 for an extended three months, and for a third time in 2020.

The 2020 'Peace Ballers Academy' project received £49,200 from the Young Londoners Summer Activity Fund grant stream of the Mayor of London's Sport Unites investment programme. The Sport Unites investment programme was established to support community sport programmes in London to bring people from diverse

communities and backgrounds together to create a sense of cohesiveness and belonging, whilst increasing activity levels.

The principal activities of Peace Ballers involve using football, mentoring and enterprise (creating pitches and delivering presentations) to develop key soft skills such as discipline, resilience, and confidence in young people to support them in reaching their own potential, and career success.

This case study will predominantly focus on the period of September 2020 to February 2021, although draws on the previous, associated activities funded by Sport Unites which took place before the Covid-19 restrictions were implemented.

The purpose of this case study is to outline the impact and insight developed through Peace Ballers Academy. The findings will support the GLA to examine how the Sport Unites investment programme has generated outcomes to date and inform decisions about its future direction. In addition, it will offer insight to the wider community sport sector delivering similar activities. Peace Ballers has expressed an interest to continue iterations of this project in the future.



## 2 Context

Peace Ballers was established in 2019 and aimed to provide young people with opportunities to advance in football and develop life skills.

In 2019 Peace Ballers was awarded a grant by the Young Londoners Fund as part of the Summer Activities Programme, to deliver a pilot project which encompassed both football and business entrepreneurship sessions. The project was granted funding again in late 2019 and in 2020 to build upon their work. The last iteration of the project ran between September 2020 and February 2021.

The project was hosted at Harris Academy Peckham, which is where all participants attend school. Sessions during the project were open to participants from Year 7 to Year 11 (11–16-year-olds), with most participants referred to Peace Ballers by school staff. The main considerations for referral included student's behaviour and attitude.

Once students leave the school, they are given the opportunity to become 'ambassadors', which involves participants then learning coaching skills and working with Peace Ballers.

The overarching aim of this project was to reduce serious youth violence in the borough of Southwark. The main aims for this project were:

- ▶ for young people to develop their life and employability skills;
- ▶ for young people to build social interactions and a social network; and
- ▶ to prepare participants for life after school.

### 2.1 Broader context

Sport Unites is the Mayor of London's flagship community sport investment programme, supporting the aspiration and long-term vision of making London the most active and socially integrated city in the world. The Sport Unites programme funds community sport projects in London via several themes and grant streams.

Launched in 2018, the Young Londoners Fund tackles serious youth violence by supporting organisations using sport and physical activity to develop life and employability skills and enhance the social support of Londoners.

### 2.2 Theory of Change

Figure 1 outlines the wider Sport Unites Common theory of change which was developed to outline what the investment programmes set out to achieve. Grantees can use the different outcome pathways to design their projects and activities. They have access to the Sport Unites Toolkit which outlined data collection tools and methods to support outcome related measurement. inFocus worked with Peace Ballers to develop a project specific theory of change (Figure 2) which outlined how the Peace Ballers Academy project activities intend to lead to short, medium, and long-term outcomes. The project focused on increasing social support, improving life and employability skills and increasing social connectedness. The final impact the project is working towards is to reduce serious youth violence/crime.

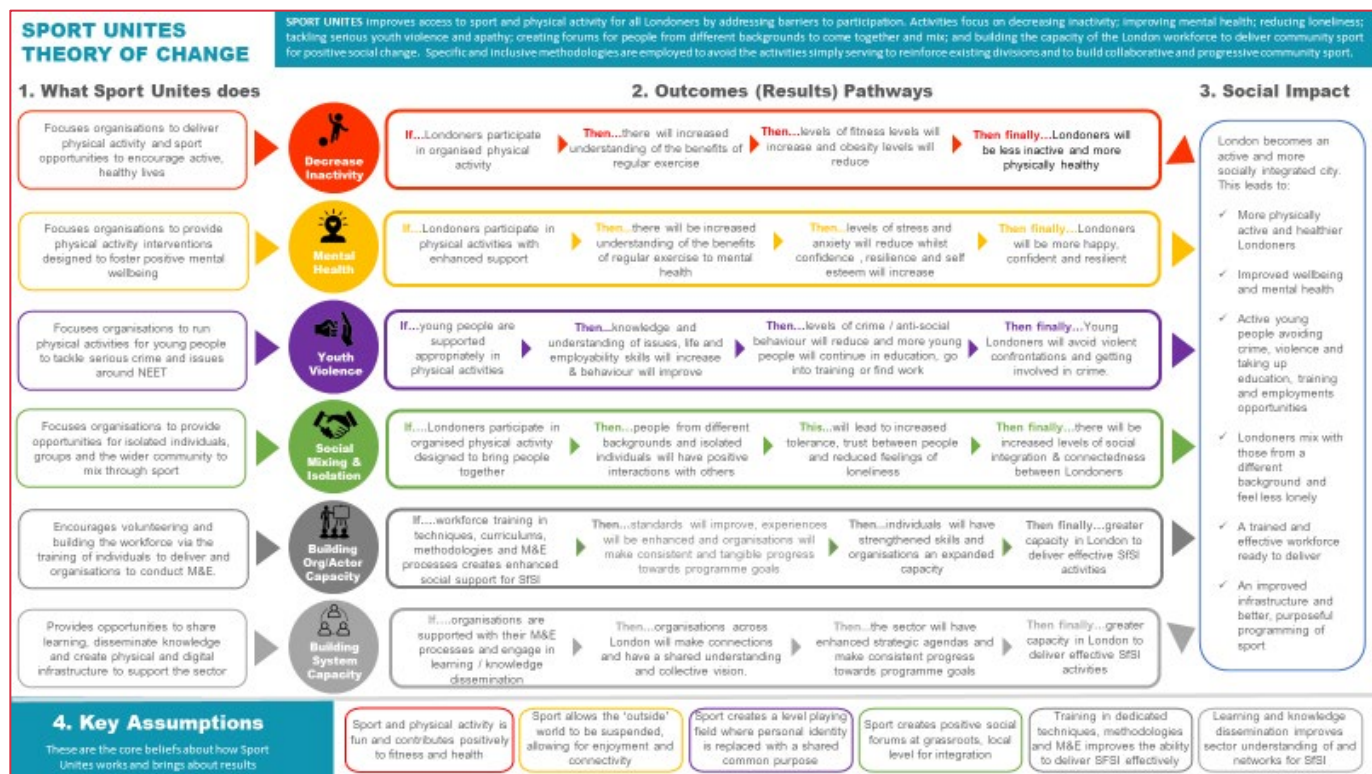


Figure 1: Sport Unites Common Theory of Change

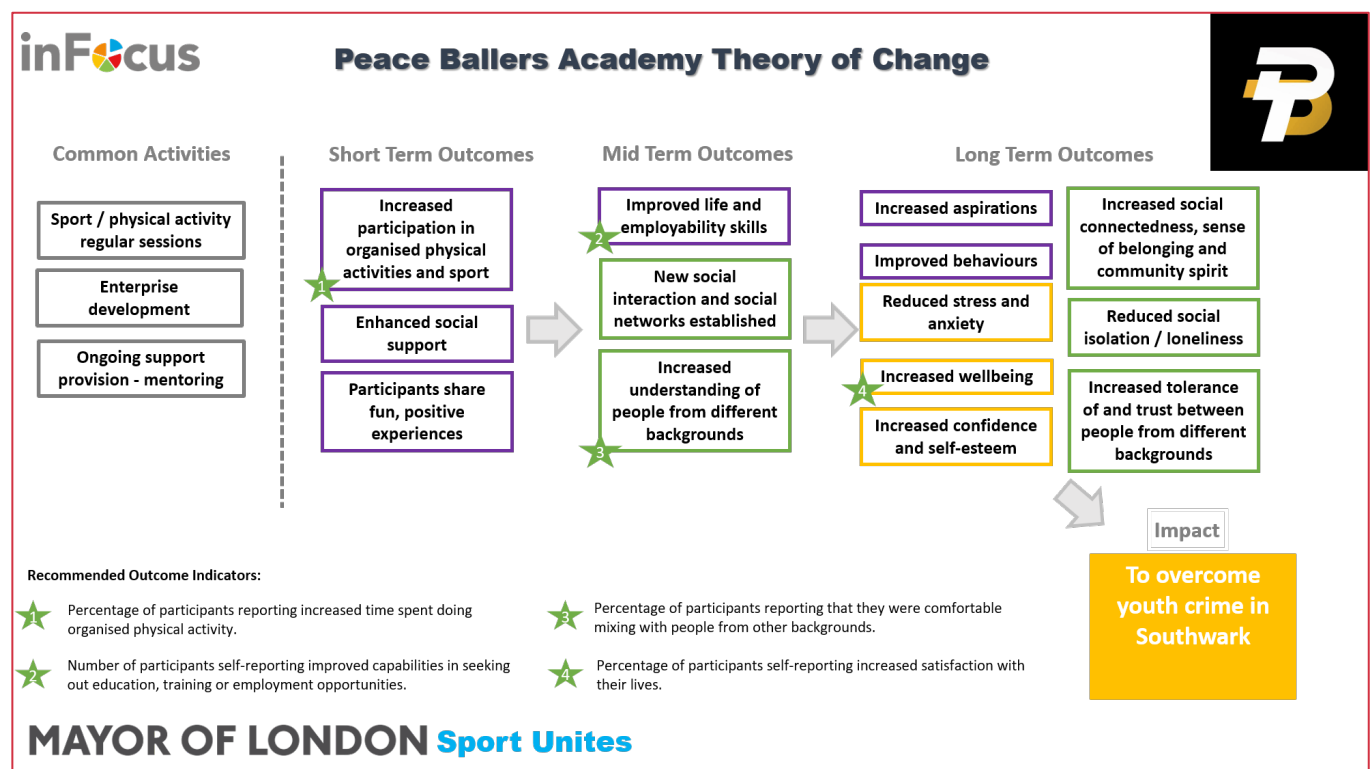


Figure 2: Peace Ballers Project Theory of Change.



### 3 Mechanism

The Peace Ballers Academy sessions were delivered to students in Year 7 through to Year 11 at Harris Academy, Peckham. Participants were referred to the Peace Ballers sessions via school staff. The programme was mixed gendered, and was aimed at young people under 16 from Southwark with behavioural challenges.

Activities were led by trained Peace Ballers coaches who delivered both classroom-based and on-pitch football sessions. The classroom-based activities focused on developing key life and employability skills as well as providing opportunities for young people to express their own opinions and feelings about their lives and the Peace Ballers sessions. Each term focused on a specific theme, for example 'discipline' and 'destiny' and this was then worked on both in the classroom sessions, and the on-pitch activities. Additionally, the classroom sessions involved the students having mentors who helped the participants develop long term goals to achieve and discuss future ambitions. The classroom-based activities were halted during Covid-19 lockdowns and tiered restrictions to ensure the appropriate safety guidance was followed.

The on-pitch football activities were used to put the skills participants had learnt into practical use and acted as an opportunity to provide teachable moments for the specific theme they were working on. Coaches implemented strategies to encourage participants to interact with different peers.

In addition to the above, Peace Ballers staff also organised external trips, for example to The Shard, to provide opportunities for the young people to experience real-life business environments. While this trip went ahead as part of previous YLF funding, these types of activities could not take place during the period of September 2020-February 2021 due to COVID-19 restrictions in London.

Sessions took place after school to encourage participants to stay off the streets in the evenings and be doing something productive in a safe space.

On-pitch sessions were stopped during the Covid-19 lockdowns; however, they were partially reintroduced where restrictions allowed. Online video calls were introduced during lockdown periods, and Whatsapp groups were created for each age group for the participants to keep in contact. Peace Ballers also developed an app called 'Evoe', which was used to live stream, sessions in HD, as a more visually appealing way for participants to be involved in comparison to other video conferencing software.

To find out more about the Peace Ballers Academy project, please watch their documentary [here](#).





## 4 Methodology

The evaluation design was formulated by inFocus then shared and further refined with Peace Ballers to ensure the tasks could be undertaken. The evaluation design and data collection tools developed were adapted from common evaluation toolkits designed by inFocus for data collection across all Sport Unites projects.

The evaluation toolkits were formulated using the common theory of change pathways designed to enable delivery organisations to select and adapt data collection tools aligned with the outcomes they identified in the development of their project specific theory of change.

### 4.1 Data Collection Methods

A mixed approach using qualitative and quantitative methods was taken to evaluate the project. Data

collection took place in November 2020, then at the end of the project in March 2021.

Coaches compiled attendance, demographic and baseline data from registration forms which were shared with inFocus for analysis. Baseline and endline surveys were completed by 25 participants online at the beginning and end of the project. Due to the appropriateness of the wellbeing questions used, two versions of the survey were created: one for year 8's and under; and one for year 9 and over. Key informant interviews with coaches and a focus group with participants took place to ensure that any reflections were also captured. inFocus staff undertook all data collection to limit bias. All inFocus staff received training in the data collection tools before data collection commenced. The table below outlines the methods used.

Method	Subject	Conducted by	Context
Demographic data	Participants	Peace Ballers staff	Coaches kept track of the age, gender, and ethnic heritage of participants from school year groups 7-11.
Baseline survey	Participants	inFocus	At the start of the project, participants took part in a baseline survey using the online tool SurveyMonkey.
Endline survey	Participants	inFocus	At the end of the project, participants took part in an endline survey using the online tool SurveyMonkey.
Focus group	Participants	inFocus	A focus group took place online with three participants.
Grantee Interviews	Grantee coaches	inFocus	Two coaches were interviewed about their involvement in the project and its influence on participants and the local community.

### 4.2 Analysis

The qualitative and quantitative analysis were completed separately, and the findings were grouped together by outcome to see the inter-connections between the two.

Quantitative: The results of the survey and anonymised register information were placed into an excel document by inFocus staff. Analysis was then conducted by inFocus to produce quantitative findings.

Qualitative: Audio recorded interviews and focus groups was transcribed and coded against the intended outcomes to reveal any other themes that may have led to unintended outcomes – either positively or negatively.

### 4.3 Limitations

Due to Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, no interviews or focus groups could be conducted face to face. As a result of this, participants may have felt unable to share as much

information as it is more difficult for a rapport and level of trust to be built between the participant and interviewer.

However, all interviews and the focus group were conducted on a video call through Zoom to recreate an in-person environment, and to help the interviewer build trust with the participants to gain more detailed information.



## 5 Findings

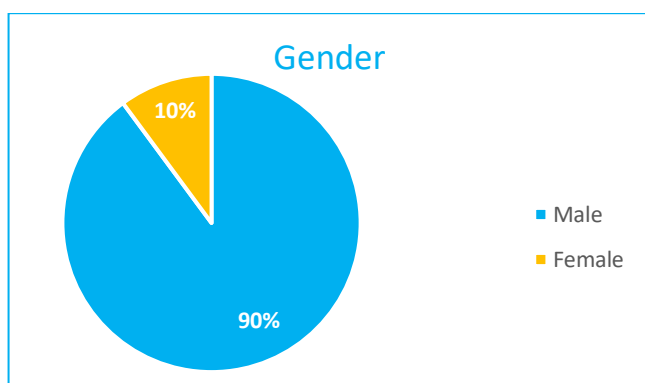
Presented by outcome area, this section brings together both the qualitative and quantitative findings from all elements of the evaluation.

### 5.1 Outputs Summary

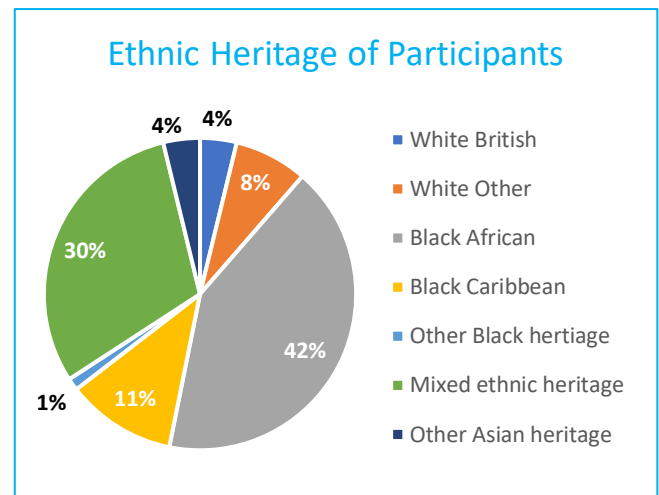
- ▶ 89 sessions took place between September 2020 and February 2021. Lockdown measures meant that in-person sessions were stopped between January 2021- February 2021. During tiered restrictions, only outside sessions took place, which meant the classroom-based mentoring sessions were halted.
- ▶ 79 participants across five school year groups took part in the Peace Ballers sessions. Although during lockdowns, only the Year 8 and Year 11 groups continued.

Due to the nature of the project being school based, all participants fell into the 16 years and under category. Most participants (48%) were aged 14 to 16 (Year 10 and 11).

All participants identified as either male (90%) or female (10%). Strategies were being put in place to increase the number of females taking part in the future.

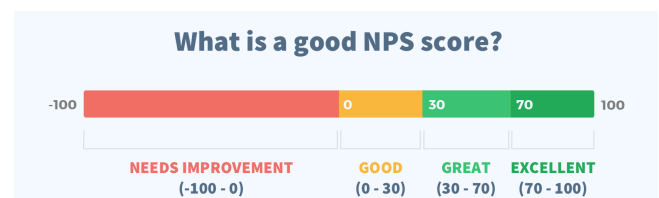


The project involved individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds and ethnicities, Participants from non-white backgrounds constituted 88% of all young people, with a significant percentage coming from the Black African community (42%).



From the data received, no participant reported that they had a registered disability.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS) that survey respondents assigned to the project was **44** which is **great**. NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of your detractors (participants that score you 0-6) from your percentage of your promoters (participants that score you a 9 or 10). Companies consider achieving a score of 0-30 as a good NPS score. Additionally, 80% of respondents from the Year 8 and under survey scored the project a 9 or 10.





Considering your experience of Peace Ballers Academy, on a scale of 0 (least likely) to 10 (most likely), how likely are you to recommend the project to friends or family?

Peace Ballers Academy NPS



## 5.2 Reduce serious youth violence

### Increased time participating in organised sport and physical activity

As part of the surveys, participants were asked how many days on average they had completed a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity in the week previous to taking part in the survey. The average number of days being active reduced in both age groups. Year 8 and under decreased from 4.6 days a week to 1.4 days a week by the end of the project. For year 9 and over group reduced from 4 days a week to 3.5 days. It is important to note that the end of the project came during the second national lockdown.

During the focus group, two of the participants highlighted that they had a passion for football, and they were able to develop and improve their skills, without needing to be part of a club.

### Improved life and employability skills

Questions relating to employment were only posed to the Year 9 and over group.

64% of participants reported that they have a better ability to seek out employment, education or training opportunities that might interest them since starting the project. 29% of participants that this applied to them “sometimes” (with one respondent answering “no”).

*“I understand how work can sharpen my life.”*

**Male participant**

50% of participants also feel like they now have a better understanding of what work entails and its place in their day-to-day life, while the other 50% reported they were “unsure”. One survey participant also mentioned they had learnt about how the skills they have can help in the workplace *“Because teamwork helps you get along with people”*. This was also echoed during the focus group where a male participant aged 16 noted *“there were some lessons that I learnt there that I don’t think I would’ve learnt somewhere else.”*

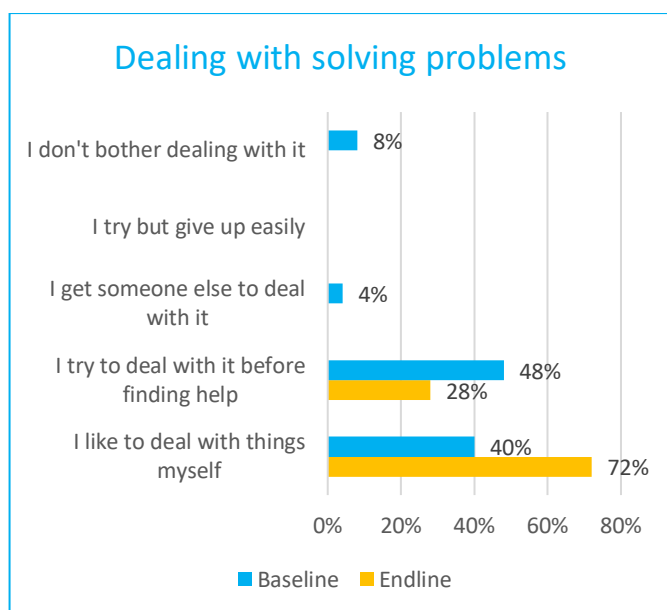
*“One lesson I learnt there – we were playing football and I would say the teams were not fair but then they taught us that things in life are not always fair and that you need to take what you have and just go with it and try to do the best with it that you can. I think this was one of the best lessons because it really changed me now because whatever happens I just take it and move on, I don’t let it affect me whether that was the past, future or present.”*

**Male participant, aged 16**

During a coach interview, it was found that the classroom sessions led by Peace Ballers staff involved students having a mentor who would discuss and develop long term goals for each participant. Moreover, the opportunities that Peace Ballers provided gave young people real-life experiences of what to expect when working in different industries. One female participant mentioned *“Peace Ballers do introduce to you a lot of things so when we went to Canary Wharf and I saw how everything was presented, how everything was so organised, how the*

*adults all acted there, it showed me how if I want to get into that industry how it is, and how it should be."*

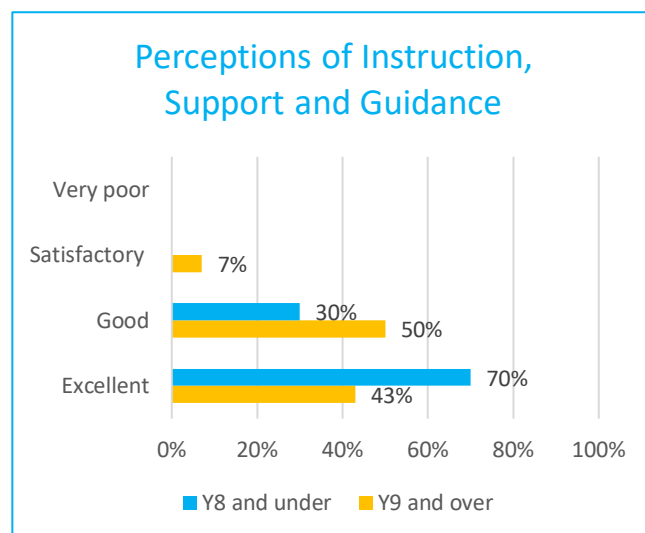
In relation to employability and life skills, participants were asked about how they deal with solving problems. Results found that the number of participants dealing with things themselves increased from 40% to 72% from the baseline to the end of the project. By the endline reporting, there were no participants in either age group stating that when solving a problem they "don't bother dealing with it" or getting "someone else to deal with it".



### Enhanced social support

All of the Year 9 and over survey, and 90% of the Year 8 and under respondents stated that they "always" or "often" enjoyed themselves at the Peace Ballers Academy activities.

In relation to the perceptions of instruction, support and guidance given by Peace Ballers staff, 70% of the Year 8 and under group and 43% of the Year 9 and over respondents found this "excellent". Half of the Year 9 and over and 30% of the Year 8 and under respondents stated this was "good", with one participant from the Year 9 group reporting this was "satisfactory".



*"Also the staff are really helpful. They teach you a lot of new things and they are there to help you when you need it."*

**Female participant, aged 15**

As part of an interview with the head coach at Peace Ballers, it was stated that the recruitment process of involving other coaches is one of the main factors in developing trust between the staff and young people. He reported:

*"The main way we do this is through the recruitment process where we are selecting people who are personable and often have lived experience of some of the things that the young people have lived with and they have overcome it."*

Other factors mentioned by the head coach in building relationships is through having coaches in a similar age bracket to the participants who understand their social environment, which was also referred to as a *"Tik Tok culture"*. The head coach mentioned that through having similar interests, the young people can feel related to.

During an interview with a coach, it was additionally highlighted that students have the same mentor throughout their journey with Peace Ballers. They stated that this ensured a trusting relationship could be built,

which encouraged students to be open and share their opinions and feelings.

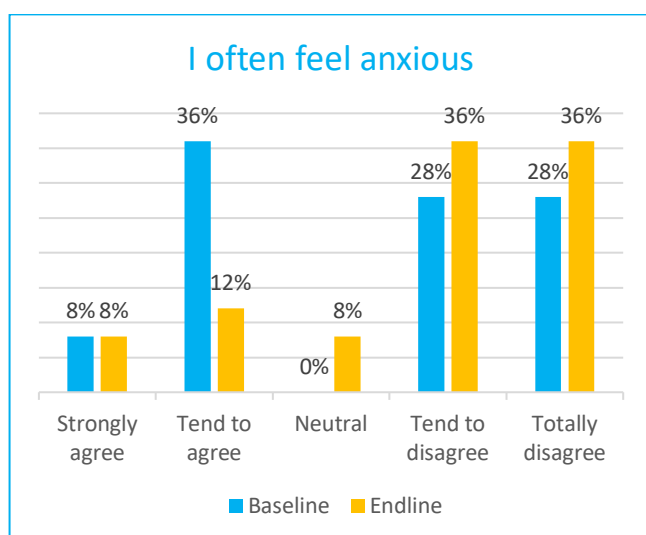
### 5.3 Improve mental health and wellbeing

#### Reduced stress and anxiety

In the baseline and endline surveys, participants were asked the extent to which they agree with statements about stress, anxiety and their ability to manage their mental health.

In response to the statement 'I feel stressed in my day-to-day life', 43% of the year 8 and under participants reported they strongly or tended to agree. This percentage reduced to 27% on the endline survey. For the Year 9 and over group, there was not a significant change in the findings, with levels of participants agreeing to the statement reducing from 55% to 50% between baseline and endline data collection.

Levels of anxiety reportedly decreased between the baseline and endline surveys. 44% of participants reported that they strongly agreed or agreed with 'often' feeling anxious. This reduced to 20% by the end of the project.



#### Increased mental wellbeing

Younger participants (Year 8 and under) were rated on the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (SCWS) and older participants (Year 9 and over) were rated on the

Warwick / Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Score (WEMWBS).

Prior to the pandemic, the UK mean average score of the Stirling Scale was 44 with 50% of all scores within the range of 39 and 48<sup>1</sup>. The younger (Year 8 and under) participants at Peace Ballers Academy had a higher score than the UK average both pre and post project. The average score from this age group increased 6.3 points from 58.6 to 64.9 between baseline and endline reporting. The highest score increased from 64 to 70, although the lowest score dropped from 56 to 53.

Prior to lockdown, the UK average scores of the Edinburgh / Warwick Scale were that the bottom 15% scored 14-42 and the top 15% scored 60-70<sup>2</sup>. The top 15% of older Peace Ballers participants (Year 9 and above) scored between 64-66 post project whilst the bottom 15% between 39-41. Both these results are within the national average. The total average score of the respondents increased 1.3 points from 49.7 to 51 between baseline and endline reporting. The lowest score increased 12 points from 27 to 39, although the highest score decreased slightly from 69 to 66.

In response to the statement 'I feel confident about my ability to manage my mental health appropriately', the number of participants who reported they strongly agreed increased between the baseline and endline surveys. Within the Year 8 and under group, this percentage increased from 29% to 64%, with one person tending to disagree. For the Year 9 and over group, the number of those agreeing to being confident regarding managing their mental health increased from 44% at baseline to 50% at endline, with one person tending to disagree.

Moreover, 91% of the Year 8 and under respondents stated they were more satisfied with their lives than they were before starting the project with one participant responding they felt 'about the same - I was satisfied with my life'. From the Year 9 and over participants, 50% reported they were more satisfied with their life, with 43% feeling 'about the same - I was satisfied with my life', and one respondent answering, 'don't know'.



<sup>1</sup><https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/4891/the-stirling-childrens-wellbeing-scale.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/howto/>

### Increased confidence and self-esteem

During the focus group, two participants highlighted that Peace Ballers Academy gives young people who are 'shy' and 'struggle to speak out loud' an opportunity to have a voice. One male participant, aged 16 stated *"they give you the opportunity to stand up, express yourself, and speak out which actually did build up my confidence."* This was also echoed by a coach in an interview who reported that the classroom sessions are built for young people to be able to voice their own opinions.

Another factor to achieving increased confidence and self-esteem that was outlined in the focus group was the environment created by the Peace Ballers coaches and other participants. Focus group participants reported that they could share ideas without being judged which was one aspect that they enjoyed the most about the project.

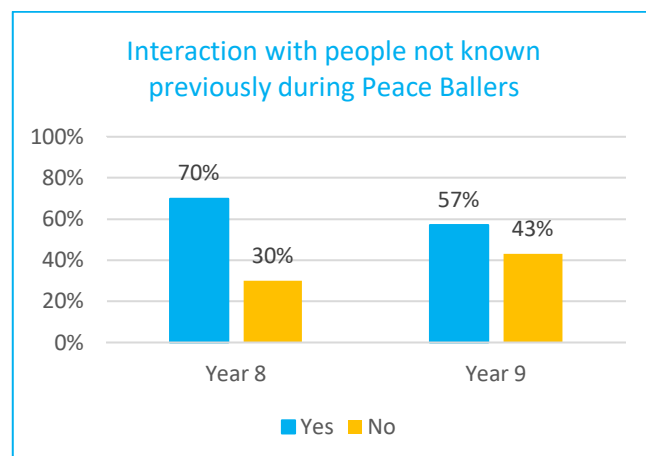
*"I feel more confident from joining the peace baller academy and am ready to learn to more form the peace baller academy."*

**Female participant, aged 15**

## 5.4 Increase social mixing

### New social interactions and social networks established

70% of the Year 8 and under respondents and 57% of the Year 9 and over group reported that they interacted with someone on the project that they didn't know previously. 60% of the Year 8 and under participants, and 64% of the Year 9 and over respondents stated that these interactions were positive. One participant in the Year 8 and under survey reported their interaction was negative with the rest of the groups stating they didn't interact with anyone new.



When asked if they made any new friends whilst being part of Peace Ballers Academy, 59% of all survey participants reported "yes". Although the participants went to the same school, one focus group participant mentioned: *"I feel closer to a lot of people. We do go to the same school but sometimes you see someone and just say hi and keep walking but when we went to Peace Ballers it was like one big happy family."*

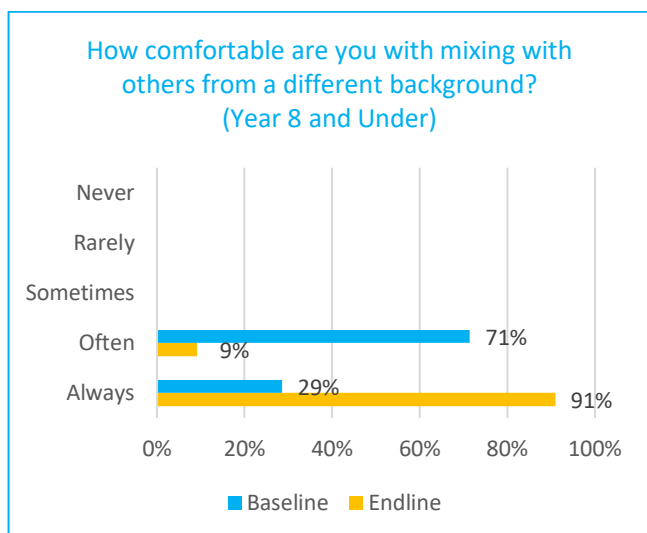
*"Peace Ballers made everyone closer to each other. Before we weren't like that but I think now we're in year 11 and going to different schools, Peace Ballers made us feel closer together and have fun together."*

**Male participant, aged 16**

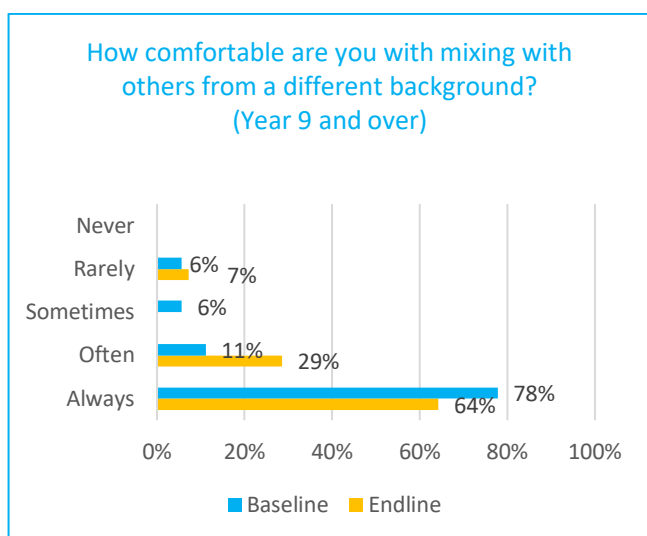
During the focus group, one female participant highlighted that she would like there to be other schools and young people involved to expand the group so she could meet new people.

### Increased understanding of people from different backgrounds

The baseline survey found that 29% of the year 8 and under group 'always' felt comfortable mixing with people from other backgrounds to their own. By the end of the project, this increased to 91% of the group reporting that they 'always' felt comfortable.



In comparison, the year 9 and over survey found a broader range of responses. In the baseline survey, 78% of respondents reported they were 'always' comfortable mixing with other backgrounds. This reduced to 64% in the endline survey.

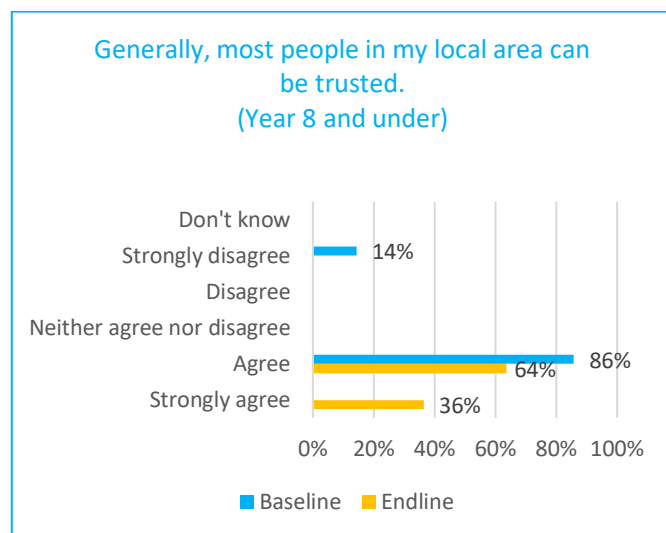


During an interview with the head coach, it was found that many of the participants in the older age group were from the same ethnic heritage. Therefore, some participants may have perceived that the project provided limited opportunities for them to mix with people from other backgrounds. The interpretation of the older age group to what 'comfortable' meant may have also been altered because of social distance restrictions.

### Increased social connectedness, sense of belonging and community spirit

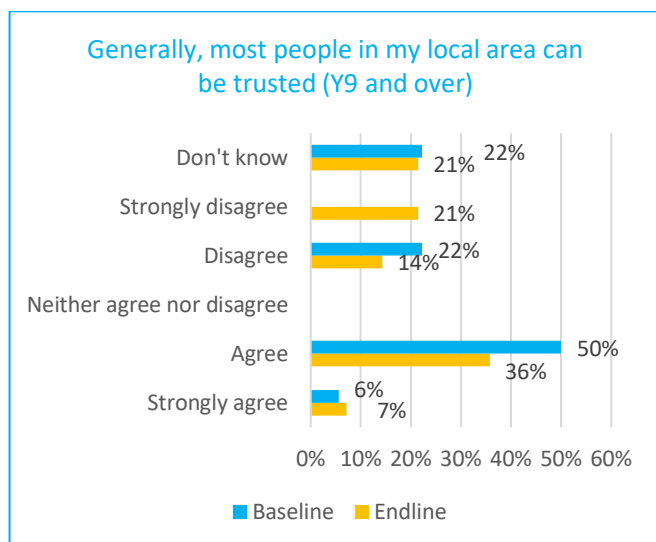
All the year 8 and under survey respondents stated that they 'strongly agreed' to feeling supported by their community since starting Peace Ballers Academy. From the Year 9 and over survey, 85% of participants either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed'. One participant 'strongly disagreed', and one person stated, 'don't know'.

For the questions relating to levels of trust and help provided by people within the local area, findings varied between the two groups. In the baseline survey 86% of the Year 8 and under respondents 'agreed' to the statement 'generally people in my local area can be trusted'. This increased at the endline to 100% of the participants either 'strongly agreeing' or 'agreeing' to this statement.

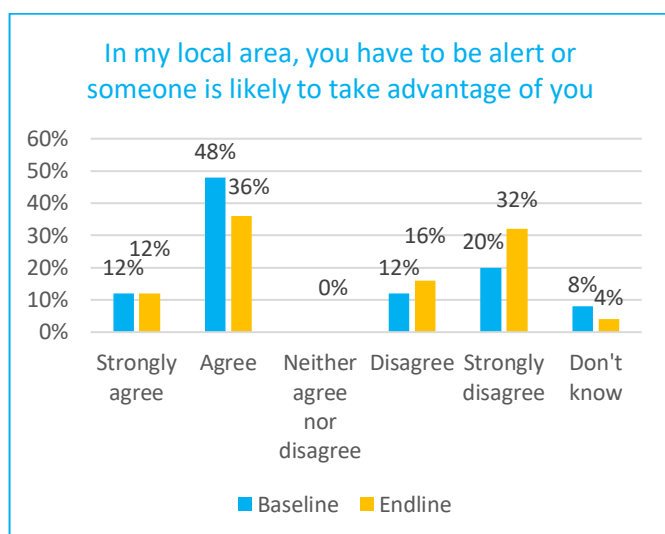


However, the results from the older group were more diverse, with levels of trust decreasing slightly between baseline and endline reporting. The baseline survey found that 56% of respondents agreed to some extent that people in their local area can be trusted. This decreased to 43% in the endline reporting. 22% of participants disagreed with the statement in the baseline survey, with this percentage increasing to 35% by the end of the project. A Peace Ballers staff member clarified that the younger group were supervised when completing the survey, and interpreted that the local area involved people within their circle including neighbourhoods and other individuals they know,

whereas the older group were not supervised, and interpreted the questions independently. This could account of the variation in results between the two groups.



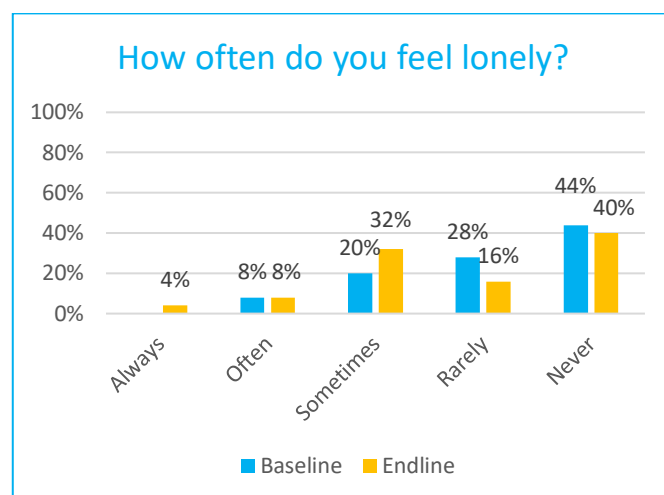
In response to someone taking advantage in the local area, there were diverse responses from all respondents in the baseline and endline surveys. There was an increase in participants 'strongly disagreeing' (from 20% to 32%) and disagreeing (12% to 16%) with this statement. The percentage of those that 'strongly agreed' remained the same. It was highlighted by a staff member that responses to this question were reflective of a perception of the area versus actual lived experiences among local social circles.



During the focus group, the participants also agreed that they felt like they were part of a community at Peace Ballers Academy. One participant highlighted *"I did feel like I was part of something in a way, like a community"*.

### Reduced social isolation and loneliness

Survey responses found that levels of loneliness increased slightly from the baseline to the end of the project. While there were no participants stating they 'always' felt lonely on the baseline survey, there was one participant from the Year 9 and over group who answered this in the endline reporting. Additionally, the level of participants reporting that they 'sometimes' felt lonely increased from 20%-32% from baseline to endline. A contributing factor is that the endline coincided with the second national lockdown and live sessions were disrupted for all participants.



One female participant during the focus group also reported that Peace Ballers gave them something to do during the summer, rather than staying alone at home, *"during summer I felt very enclosed, I would just stay at home and watch movies but Peace Ballers made me come out and sometimes we would eat after"*.

During the focus group participants were asked about the support they received from Peace Ballers staff and coaches during the Covid-19 lockdowns. It was found that coaches stayed in contact with the participants via Whatsapp. One male participant highlighted that for *"for people who feel lonely, it can help them to feel loved and appreciated."*



## 6 Conclusions

This section outlines the conclusions from the evaluation of 'Peace Ballers Academy' project. The findings showed participants did experience outcomes outlined in the theory of change and aligned with Sport Unites aims.

### 6.1 Outputs:

- ▶ It was intended that both in-person football and classroom activities would take place between September 2020- February 2021, however due to interruptions from Covid-19 classroom-based activities were limited, and at times sessions had to be moved online. It should also be noted that during lockdown restrictions, only the Year 8 and 11 groups continued.
- ▶ There was a diverse range of participants from different backgrounds and ethnicities, with 88% of young people coming from non-white communities.
- ▶ The net promoter score of the number of participants who would recommend the project was 44 which is considered great.

### 6.2 Outcomes:

There was a large amount of positive data collected which demonstrated how Peace Ballers Academy met the intended outcomes which contribute to the collective impact of the Sport Unites investment programme.

There were many external factors which influenced the findings from the outcomes, the primary factor being the second national lockdown and restrictions implemented in the United Kingdom due to Covid-19. The predominant outcomes this may have negatively influenced were increased involvement in organised sport and physical activity (as in-person activities were halted), increased mental health and wellbeing (due to social isolation being a highlighted issue) and those outcomes associated with increased social mixing (as the social restrictions prohibited people from mixing in person).

Whilst this case study found that participants mental wellbeing had improved throughout the project, it was evident that there were some conflicting results when it came to levels of loneliness. As the baseline study was conducted in November 2020, a time where most national restrictions regarding social distancing had been lifted, young people were able to go to school, and participate in organised in-person Peace Ballers activities. When the endline survey was conducted in March 2021, whilst many young people were attending school, a national lockdown was in place, which limited the amount of social interactions and extracurricular activities occurring. Despite this, participants reported they were more satisfied with their lives after the project took place.

There was evidence to suggest that participants had increased their employability and life skills through the classroom-based activities and opportunities provided by Peace Ballers for example the participants' visit to the Shard during the previous funding period. Additionally, further evidence showed that participants developed problem solving skills by taking on challenges themselves.

Participants reported that they had experienced new social interactions and made friends on the project, however it was evident that this could be expanded if young people outside of the school could also participate.

There was significant evidence to suggest that the Peace Ballers staff provided a high level of support, instruction, and provision to young people.

Finally, there was evidence to suggest that participants trusted others in their local community more by the end of the project. Furthermore, young people felt like a community had also been built within the project itself.

## 7 Recommendations

In this section, suggestions from the respondents in the evaluation are combined with recommendations from the inFocus evaluation team across two areas; changes to the project which are relevant to the grantee (Peace Ballers) and changes which are relevant to the Sport Unites funding programme.

### Grantee

- ▶ Peace Ballers could look to involve other local schools to expand the group of young participants it works with on this project. This may broaden the social interactions between young people by giving them opportunities to build relationships with others outside of their school.
- ▶ Peace Ballers should continue to create strategies and initiatives to increase the numbers of girls participating in the project. This may include diversifying and including sporting activities that the girls at targeted schools are participating and competing in. Whilst football is now played by all genders, it is segregated within competitive school sport and is traditionally viewed as a male sport. It is rare for females to play alongside males.

### Sport Unites

- ▶ This case study has outlined the need for grantees to be observing the mental wellbeing of young people during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes where mental health and wellbeing are not one of the core outcome areas of their activities, projects similar to Peace Ballers do offer children and young people opportunities to not be isolated, to

interact and feel better about themselves and their lives.

- ▶ Future grantees should consider providing both sporting and non-sporting opportunities to develop the prospects and career goals of young Londoners. These opportunities should be used to inspire young people and help them develop an understanding for the requirements of the workplace. Peace Ballers were successful in modifying the way they coached football sessions by linking sporting skills and values to both personal and working lives. This continued in off pitch sessions so that participants could easily make connections. This approach ultimately helps the children and young people build resilience and understand what is needed in the workplace and how to conduct themselves throughout life.
- ▶ Grantees intending to work with children and young people should think about partnering with schools or organisations who have access to this specific target group. There are multiple benefits: schools can refer the right participants to ensure projects are reaching their intended audience; schools' benefit from any positive impact on the participants; and strong relationships can be formed between different organisations and schools which can be utilised effectively in times of crisis to support children and young people.
- ▶ The Peace Ballers Academy project is a good example of how a community sport organisation is working with a school (Harris Academy, Peckham) and utilising the physical activity spaces and classrooms after school hours for the benefit of students and the wider community.