



# MENTORING - THE COACH SUPPORT OFFICER ROLE 2013 - A PILOT STUDY INTERIM EVALUATION

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By Philippe Crisp

Senior Lecturer in Community Sports Coaching, University of Chichester



<b>CONTENTS</b>	Page
Acknowledgements	2
Foreword	2
Section 1 Introduction	3
Section 2 Findings	4
Section 3 Conclusions and Recommendations	7

# Sportivate

## **Acknowledgements –**

*Thanks go to Gemma Finlay, Sports Development Manager for Active Sussex, and Anthony Statham, the Coaching Development Manager for Active Sussex, both of whom have helped develop and oversee a coach mentoring scheme for Sportivate projects within Sussex. Additional thanks also go to the Coach Support Officers (CSO) and the project leads and coaches who contributed towards helping more young people engage in physical activity in Sussex.*

## **Foreword –**

This document is by title and definition an Interim Evaluation. With the project completed and, at first glance, apparently successful, the project has been extended for a further two rounds of Sportivate projects. This success has been measured because of the fact that the gathering of the data and feedback ran concurrently through a number of inductions and review meetings that the project leads and the CSOs took part in. And it is this data that this Interim Evaluation seeks to present before the delivery of the second round of the CSO scheme starts. In effect then, the document intends to allow the reader to see the benefits of the CSO pilot study scheme, but what it does not do, however, is offer a comprehensive review. This, instead, will be developed through explaining the 'story' of the feedback, project reports, review meeting notes, and case studies. All of these are examples of how the initial delivery of the CSO role has delivered a wide range of data - and a 'story' within which there are concepts that can be pulled out and explained in a future, final, evaluation.

Gold tier partners working with Active Sussex;



## **Introduction:**

Started in 2011 and with funding assured until at least 2017, Sportivate is a Lottery funded project that forms part of the Olympic Legacy and looks to offer new and exciting sport activities for young people aged 14-25. Funded by Sport England, and distributed by the county sports partnership network, individual projects are typically run over 6-8 week coaching blocks.

One of the things that Active Sussex wanted to do was to look to support both the coaches and organisers of projects that successfully bid for Sportivate funding in Sussex. Because of this, Gemma Finlay, Sports Development Manager for Active Sussex, and Anthony Statham, the Coaching Development Manager for Active Sussex, looked to work with me in my role as a Senior Lecturer from the University of Chichester in order to help develop and oversee a coach mentoring scheme for Sportivate projects within Sussex.

Really, what we looked to develop as the Coach Support Officer (CSO) role was one that was part of a broader 'mentoring' project. And it would be fair to say that what we wanted to do were two things. Firstly, to see if we could help any of the projects in terms of delivery, and secondly, to see if we could collate any evidence of best practice which we could pass on to others.

With a number of highly experienced coaches successfully recruited to the CSO roles, a number of projects were allocated to each of them. Each CSO then contacted and met with the individual project leads and a number of site visits were undertaken from which feedback could be given. The CSOs themselves also met up with myself, Anthony, and Gemma to ensure that consistent monitoring and evaluation had taken place. For a brief overview of the dates of the training that occurred, see below:

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### CSO timeline

**05/02/2013 - Coach Support Officer Training – welcome and induction**

**25/02/2013 - Coach Support Officer Training – mentoring workshop**

**19/03/2013 - Sportivate projects induction – CSO meet up.**

**21/05/2013 - CSO Review Meeting & Update**

**31/07/2013 - CSO Review Meeting End of quarter reflections**

## Findings:

Perhaps much of the reason for the CSO scheme being set up was based on the idea that it is always coaching at the heart of the success of projects. Coaching in terms of how the sessions are run, how the participants respond to those sessions, and somewhat crucially given the context within which Sportivate is operating – that is to say, one where retained figures of participants frame the idea of how successful a project has been – whether those participants enjoy the sessions enough to keep on coming back. And thankfully, much of the coaching that was observed by the CSOs was reported as being of a good calibre and suitable to the needs of the participants. But whilst by the first review meeting it was clear that this idea of how the CSOs might support coaches by giving tips on getting the best out of the sessions that were run was 'working' to some extent, it also became apparent that the CSOs needed to also give more support to some of the projects by giving advice on more 'project' related matters.

So in fact, whilst the premise of reflecting and giving advice as to what constitutes good coaching still took place, although not necessarily at what might have been considered the expected amount, a secondary, and less expected area that was commented upon frequently was a wider range of areas that needed attention. And it is these areas that project leads were supported by our new CSOs.

These areas that needed attention and that were helped with included ones such as: marketing, publicity, developing partnerships, sourcing specific coaching related equipment, and actually finding participants. And helping with all of these or some of them led to, it would be fair to say, a higher chance of those supported projects succeeding. In effect then, the goal of helping participation was rather more easily facilitated for the supported projects by having someone give advice on a number of areas – not necessarily just coaching related ones.

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### CSOs helped with:

- **Supporting network links**
  - **Advice on publicity**
  - **'Vetting' & access**
  - **Discussing exit routes**
  - **Providing equipment**
  - **Giving 'specific'/specialised coaching advice (i.e. disability)**
  - **Planning sessions**
  - **Advising on requirements**
  - **Finding participants**
  - **Mentoring coaches**
  - **Helping projects start**
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As a numerical guide to how successful the projects were it is interesting to compare those projects that were mentored, and their rate of success (measured, in this instance by taking place) against those that were not mentored. In total 42 projects for delivery were approved across Quarter 1 but

only 27 (delivering a total of 70 blocks of 6-8 weeks of activity) actually took place during April to June (or in to July/Aug give or take). Of the 13 projects identified for mentoring, only 4 projects didn't go ahead. And there were good reasons for two of these not to take place. One project not starting was out of the hands of the deliverer because of a number of issues that arose because it was to be held in an offender's institute, and the other project was deferred to take place at a later date (Quarter 3). Moreover, the last of these three projects that did not actually take place had not signed the terms and agreements; so in effect should perhaps not be counted.

So this gives us a success rate (again, measured in terms of projects taking place) for the mentored projects of 9 out of 13 projects, compared to the 18 out of 29 that were not mentored. These are rates of approximately 70% and 62% respectively. Now, using statistics is sometimes an easy way to manipulate figures, but, and without taking into consideration the fact that one of the 13 projects to be mentored had, effectively, no chance, and the other was deferred, these numbers for the mentored projects could just as easily have been 10 out of 12 – making a percentage of 83%. Add in the fact that we could just as easily not count the project that had not signed their terms and agreements and the figure might have become 10 out of 11 – giving an increased percentage score of 91% in terms of success. And lastly, but not least, what has not been mentioned so far is that one of the projects actually consisted of four blocks of delivery, with two mentored by one of the CSOs. So based on just the numbers of project 'blocks' that the CSOs mentored, and subtracting the one project that could not go ahead because of external issues that could not be solved, and the one project that had not signed terms and agreements, and we are left with a figure of 11 out of 12 – making a 92% success rate measured in terms of projects taking place. And let's not forget that the other '8%' was deferred till the final quarter. Which, it would be fair to say, is hard to call a failure.

So any way that you look at it, there is a difference in figures between those projects that were supported by the CSO scheme and those that were not. And if we are to try and summarise the scheme, it does seem that the pilot study has had some demonstrable, quantifiable success as measured in terms of projects taking place. Although, as a caveat, it would be fair to say that we cannot, as of this time, wholly rely on these figures as proof. Instead, a longitudinal, combined evaluation of this project and any future delivery will need to be made in order to make a more informed comment on this area.

*For note – the retention/engagement figures against targets will be visited in the final evaluation.*

However, despite this perceived success there were also a number of project issues. Among them and in no particular order were a variety of perceived project weaknesses. Whilst, of course, not applicable to all of the projects, they were enough of a number to be considered a more common theme – and certainly a theme strong enough to be detailed as an area that needed addressing. These 'weaknesses' were such things as a lack of awareness of Sportivate branding/funding. In this instance the CSOs felt that at times, the projects sometimes seemed to run just as 'coaching sessions', as opposed to Sportivate sessions. Without this idea of a Sportivate session, then outside of some of the terms and conditions of the service agreements stating that

publicity and marketing needed to be explicitly shown as Sportivate funded, there were still some negative impacts on monitoring and evaluation, exit routes, and any possible publicity.

In fact, the idea that the participants were actually participating in Sportivate sessions would have been helped significantly at times by increasing general awareness. Overall, the CSO consensus was that there was a lack of marketing – at times no signage, posters, nor photos taken.

Another thing that the CSOs reflected upon and that can be considered an area to think about in future was the apparent reticence on the part of some coaches in receiving feedback. Considering that knowledge of coaching skills, being observed, and receiving feedback and analysis are thought of as tremendously important in improving coaching overall, this was somewhat of a worry and one that needs attention.

But when the CSOs were asked what they saw as the as the most important area to consider in order to improve the project, perhaps the most frequent answer given was how best to establish coach contacts and effective communication. There were a number of reports of how difficult it had been to make arrangements to visit.

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### **CSO Pilot study – identified weaknesses (Interim Evaluation):**

- **Communication – overly complicated (who is in charge? Who runs the sessions?)**
- **Bureaucracy – administrators ----- coaches (who deals with what – do the coaches know what they should be promoting?)**
- **'Instructors' vs. 'coaches' (quality of 'coaching' – sailing instruction)**
- **Project planning (marketing, posters, information, signposting etc.)**
- **Age of participants (many over age on disability projects, some underage)**

### **In Focus: CSO help**

*CSO 1 - effecting change through asking a project about exit routes. At the time of asking/feeding back they were not in place. By the next week the provider was happy to report that they had found a club as an exit route.*

*CSO 2 – coaching suggestions of simplifying language for disability participants were taken on and proved to be successful – schools developed visual aids*

## **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

Whilst the 'mentoring' project is still in its infancy, the initial feedback is that it has been very helpful in increasing the success of a number of projects. And additionally, because of the fact that the mentoring scheme looks to highlight and focus upon a number of minimum standards (such as safeguarding) and work in a quality assurance manner, the CPSU have covered the project as a good practice example - <https://thecpsu.org.uk/resource-library/2013/active-sussex-sportivate-coach-mentor-scheme/>

### ***Improvements for 3rd quarter:***

- Definitive dates of project visits to be established.
- Directness of communication to be determined and followed. In particular the identification of coaches responsible for delivering the sessions.
- Two specific site visits per project to enable the CSOs an opportunity to demonstrate a positive impact upon coach behaviour. This will be evaluated through whether suggested action points (in roughly weeks three or four) might impact on coaching practice (in week seven).
- Promotion of the scheme to projects and the wider network. The basis of which will start with the information collated in quarter 1 and the final report.



**The 2013-14 CSO team**