

Flyerz Hockey

Final Evaluation Report

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1. Introduction

Flyerz hockey was developed as part of Access Sport's successful Disability Inclusion Programme and is supported by Spirit of 2012 for the period 2018-2021. There are more than 50 Flyerz sections in England, Wales and Scotland which provide inclusive hockey for disabled people.

Through the Flyerz programme, Access Sport works in partnership with existing hockey clubs and national governing bodies to demonstrate that inclusive club sport is both achievable and rewarding, and to capture learnings to further develop disability inclusion in hockey and in other sports. The intended outcomes of the programme were:

- People's mental wellbeing increases through participation and volunteering
- Positive change in the perception of what disabled people can achieve (by both disabled and non-disabled people)
- Beneficiaries feel more socially connected and experience reduced social isolation
- Empowering young people: improved life prospects for young people living in disadvantaged areas through increased confidence and skills
- Increased participation in sport and physical activity
- People being inspired and motivated to get involved in Flyerz hockey as beneficiaries and spectators
- Delivering Whole-System Change

This report presents findings from the final year of the programme undertaken by Loughborough University. The last 12-18 months of the programme has coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic which has inevitably impacted on the delivery of the programme because of the restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic.

2. Methodology

The external evaluation was conducted using a qualitative approach. Due to restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the data collection was undertaken via online interviews with delivery staff and volunteers (n=8) and with parents of participants in Flyerz (n=8).

The evaluation this year has examined:

- How Flyerz delivery was adapted in response to the COVID-19 restrictions.
- The success of Flyerz programme in achieving the intended outcomes.

3. Evaluation Findings

Prior to examining the success of the programme in achieving the intended outcomes this section provides an insight into the adaptations that were made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. It then presents the findings for each of the intended programme outcomes.

3.1 Adapted Delivery in Response to COVID-19

The restrictions that arose from the pandemic necessarily resulted in clubs halting in-person delivery of Flyerz sessions which was particularly challenging for newer clubs that had not had the opportunity to fully establish themselves prior to the restrictions being imposed. The restrictions inevitably made it very difficult to maintain consistent delivery:

‘So been going probably for about a year, but with lock downs and things. It's been a bit stop, start’ (Club manager)

Interviewees indicated that because the young people involved in Flyerz have a range of disabilities and needs, engaging some participants through online delivery was very challenging:

‘We cannot shy away from that, because for a number of them [Flyerz], in particular with some of the learning difficulties or autism, that sort of thing. The online, it's very difficult to maintain that on an online basis.’ (Club manager)

Some beneficiaries engaged in Flyerz have needs which were being met prior to the pandemic but which were not possible to meet within the context of the pandemic. An example of this was a young woman who is visually impaired and who is usually supported by a guide whilst participating. It had not been possible to find a volunteer able to support her due to the costs of implementing the health and safety guidance imposed on hockey clubs arising from COVID testing. The player was therefore only likely to be able to return once she and the volunteers had been fully immunised.

Where clubs were able to use online delivery methods, interviewees indicated that delivery staff and volunteers exerted considerable efforts to engage beneficiaries virtually whilst acknowledging that Flyerz delivery was very different online. Engaging beneficiaries involved utilising a range of different activities including non-hockey-based activities such as pantomimes helped to keep disabled young people and their families engaged and connected through Flyerz during the pandemic:

‘We know that for some of them, you know, they need to be outside, cross video discussion is not the ideal forum... We came up with some things to help them albeit that we couldn't offer the same to everybody ... if we can benefit 18 out of 22 of our players, that's better than saying, we'll do nothing, just because we're not able to help those four’ (Club manager)

‘I talked to the parents ... about what their children needed, and what the children liked and what they would engage with ... I listened ... to what they wanted, and what they needed. And then, then between us, we had a lot of fun, albeit quite a lot of hard work’ (Club manager)

Some clubs were able to provide an ambitious Flyerz delivery programme involving a range of different contributors which has strengthened the relationships between all those involved in Flyerz as shown by the following example:

‘We ran those [Zoom] sessions every week, on a on a Sunday, at a normal time, exactly same time, as we would have had a Flyerz session... We had some fabulous guests, we've had news readers, actors, musicians, then of course, Basil Brush, international rugby players. We've had probably about eight or ten of the Great Britain [hockey] squad participating at various times and joined in. They always involved a mixture of some exercise and interaction with the youngsters ... We've then discovered that some of them are fantastic cooks, some of them are fantastic gardeners, some of them can draw very well, some of them love singing, there's just so much talent and abilities that we've learned so much more about each other in this last 12 months’ (Club manager)

In addition to some clubs being able to continue to engage families in Flyerz, some interviewees reported that they had actually been able to engage more families in the programme:

‘Through that adversity has come this incredible opportunity to get more kids involved’ (Club manager)

‘We've we picked up a couple of new players even during lockdown ... I think we picked up six new players in the last year’ (Club manager)

An interviewee also described that the online delivery on the programme had resulted in the club being involved in filming a ten-week hockey programme for SEND schools to be accessed by schools across the country thereby increasing the reach of Flyerz beyond the area local to the club.

Club deliverers described how they had changed their Flyerz delivery in order provide engagement activities for young people in recognition of the value of the sessions within the context of the pandemic:

‘We immediately moved to virtual and ... the head coach set up zoom calls in the same frequency as ... normal club meetings. And so every other week, and then, as time went on, I think he realised that people were struggling a little bit and, you know, in their own mental health and just being locked in and do some stuff so he increased the frequency to weekly. So, that was really good. That gave [name] something to sort of lock on to every week, every Sunday morning. They did all kinds of amazing things. They did karaoke and everything involves exercise’ (Parent)

'In the lockdown, we just did sessions on zoom. Because we just wanted to keep them [Flyerz] all together. And yeah, they loved that as well' (Club manager)

'Main reason to keep going was just to keep everyone together. Really, I think it was a tough time for a lot of them, everyone really not being in contact with people and keeping them active as well' (Club manager)

'Do you know what, [name], who runs the Flyerz group responded really quickly, and was just really warm and welcoming from the word go. Actually, I wasn't really expecting, given that we were in COVID I expected it not to be running. So I wasn't really expecting him to reply and be as lovely and as welcoming as he was' (Parent)

Interviewees described how being able to maintain the Flyerz sessions had been beneficial for both young participants and for their families too:

'Yeah, it was tough. But I have to say, even for us as parents, it gave us something as well to look forward to every week' (Parent)

Some parents indicated that the pandemic had impacted negatively on their children's mental health and that the loss of activities such as Flyerz had compounded these mental health challenges:

'I can't comment fully on everybody ... the mental health of all the players but [name] has been pretty low, during the whole of lockdown. She had two football sessions she would go to with slightly different groups cancelled, the hockey cancelled. It's been very difficult' (Parent)

Despite the success of the online provision the return of in-person Flyerz sessions was highly valued by families:

'We were allowed to restart quite soon. And that was brilliant. And the kids love being back together. And of course, the coach and the club, you know, maintained all the normal social distancing process, and really enforced that quite rigorously. And yeah, just seeing the kids with the smiles on their faces and being back with their mates.' (Parent)

3.2 People's mental wellbeing increases through participation and volunteering

The Flyerz programme has a strong ethos of fun and enjoyment which interviewees believe impacts positively on the mental wellbeing of all those involved in the programme as indicated by the following comments by delivery staff and by parents:

'The two words that most often come out are fun and enjoyment. So it's as simple as that' (Club manager)

‘The coaches and volunteers is actually quite easy, for people like me and for and for all of us, you get a huge amount of satisfaction. A huge amount of pleasure, and it's a lot of fun is the first thing’ (Club manager)

‘All of the people who come along coach and do it just want to come back, because they love it so much, they enjoy it so much’ (Club manager)

Another important element of Flyerz which is considered by parents to enhance the mental wellbeing of their children is the opportunity that taking part creates to form friendships with other disabled young people:

‘Seeing her friends is really important, meeting new people and new friends who are, as she says are similar to her is, absolutely vital. It's almost as much the social side of things of this as it is the playing side of it. So, when there's a session cancelled, oh, she's bereft. You know, if the weather is atrocious, or icy or whatever, she's beside herself’ (Parent)

‘Flyerz for [name] is playing, being involved seeing her friends. That's what it's about’ (Parent)

In addition to the positive impact that Flyerz has on participants interviewees described how coaches and other volunteers also gained benefits which were perceived to enhance their wellbeing due to the experience being rewarding for them and for others:

‘I take a lot of pride in being in this section and having such a big impact and being involved in setting up and seeing people developing, achieving stuff and I'm keen that more people could benefit from it. I think it's great for the sport and for the club’ (Club manager)

The experiences of being involved in Flyerz provided a number of positive benefits which were also suggested to enhance wellbeing including being inclusive, being outside, feeling welcome and being celebrated:

‘It just drove me to want to do something for kids that were not able to be part of a sports club, and it wasn't, if I'm honest, it wasn't about Hockey, I'm not a hockey player, I've never played hockey. It was about actually, about inclusivity, about being in the fresh air, meeting new friends and actually being welcomed in a club and being celebrated’ (Club manager)

Interviewees also suggested that Flyerz presented opportunities for disabled young people to meet non-disabled young people which were enjoyable for all involved:

‘I think the younger ones [volunteers] have started off because it ticks a box for them in education, then they realise that it's a lot of fun that they're getting a lot back from the participants as well. Some of them have formed genuine friendships’ (Club manager)

‘We are based at a regular school, which I hate saying regular, but the kids from the SEN schools love being part of that, so they love seeing other kids, some of the sixth formers might come down and help us and we have volunteers from [other schools]’ (Club manager)

3.3 Positive change in the perception of what disabled people can achieve (by both disabled and non-disabled people)

The success of the Flyerz programme is highly visible and celebrated in some clubs and this is particularly the case when the programme receives external awards and commendations which recognise the achievements of those involved in Flyerz:

‘The Flyerz are the shining light ... They're the shining lights of everything this Club's been achieving in the last year or two. They won the England hockey innovation award last year, a national award. This is the first time our club has ever won an England hockey award and it was won by the Flyerz not the whole club.’ (Club manager)

The Flyerz programme provides a medium through which disabled young people can experience success rather than failure by being supported appropriately. As indicated in the comment that follows many of those who participate in Flyerz will have experienced failures in the past which make them reluctant to try new things in order to avoid further failure and the negative emotions that this failure results in. Such an approach requires a good understanding of the many challenges that are faced by disabled young people and a positive approach to supporting them overcome these challenges in order to succeed.

‘I think that people, disabled people have internalised a lot of the barriers that they encounter. So this Flyer I mentioned to he will come to a session and if he's not confident that he can succeed at an activity will not engage in it at all. So, he has clearly had a lot of experiences of failure that have been very difficult for him and he's trying to make sure he doesn't get that again. So, I think that when you understand that that has been a lot of people's life experience, that they've been constantly told that they can't do things and then it's quite surprising what a difference in our we can make’ (Club manager)

When disabled young people are appropriately supported participants in Flyerz they are able to demonstrate sport skills which challenge negative perceptions of disability despite those involved having unique starting points for their engagement as indicated by the following comments made by parents:

‘His technical skills are outstanding. He's just got a visual impairment’ (Parent)

‘It all gives her confidence. And even things that she finds difficult, like throwing and catching a ball. It's just sticking with something longer and that has definitely improved since she's done Flyerz hockey’ (Parent)

‘My son's main problems are in speech and language and he has trouble with fine motor skills. But that some of the kids have got physical disabilities, but it doesn't stop

them. And in fact, that's not something that's talked about, you know, it's not about your problems, or about what's wrong with you or anything. It's just everyone just goes along and get started and, and, and get straight into it what you know, and joins in, you know, on the whole. And if you want to stand on the side for a bit, you know, everyone's fine about it, just let you do that and they carry on. What I love about the size group is the inclusivity of it, actually and having lots of kids with lots of different needs altogether, and with different age groups' (Parent)

'One that comes to mind is being able to demonstrate his hockey skill by taking his gold medal from Antwerp into school talk about it. When hockey is played at school he is he's one of the best players rather than one of the worst ones. So it gives him a platform for recognition' (Club manager)

Interviewees indicated that building participants' confidence and engagement in the programme requires time and strong communication between parents and delivery staff and volunteers. It also requires patience and perseverance by all involved:

'There's one young lad who's now playing in groups, but he, we had to work with him very much on his own. Originally, he would never stay for longer than about 20 minutes, but then we found a way to keep him for the whole session. And, you know, to engage him and to manage it and it was trial and error and working something up as a programme with mum and dad, and everything else and was carefully planned and now he's integrated with others. But he started getting involved with participating in more sport, like 10 pin bowling with the family, which he would never do before. He went to play crazy golf where he hockey-ed the ball around the crazy golf course, whereas he'd never stayed more than one or two holes. He started interacting socially with somebody at school. And he's now got to the point where he's interacting socially with, with people at our Flyerz and participating in the games' (Club manager)

Interviewees involved in club delivery indicated that having a Flyerz section within the hockey club had helped challenge negative attitudes towards disability and encouraged positive attitudes based on ability:

'Having Flyerz is a huge improvement for the club, it definitely helps a lot of coaches and players understand and learn a bit more about inclusion' (Club manager)

'I was completely ignorant to it, I never realised how incredible and how capable people with disabilities can actually be' (Club manager)

'Misconceptions about disability and what disabled people can do are just taken away' (Club manager)

3.4 Beneficiaries feel more socially connected and experience reduced social isolation

‘A new network of friends, and we use this term in we are a Flyerz family ... and even the coaches refer to it as that it is quite amazing. It's quite a unique experience that really, unless you witness it, and you're part of it, you don't really you almost can't really comprehend if that makes sense. It's like you're part of something really special. It is very proud of that fact’ (Parent)

Alongside the success of Flyerz providing opportunities for fun and enjoyment is the success of the programme in providing disabled young people with the opportunity to connect socially and to reduce social isolation. Many of the comments indicated that the opportunity to mix with other disabled young people created opportunities to belong and to engage in relationships with other young people in ways that were often denied to them otherwise:

‘She looks forward to it, there's a big social aspect to this seeing her friends’ (Parent)

‘It's about having that sort of camaraderie, banter and belonging right across, that's really important’ (Club manager)

Interviewees also stated that the social aspects provided through Flyerz are not just valued by disabled young people but the benefits extend to the whole family who are actively encouraged to take part.

‘In terms of involvement, we all get involved really, so my son, my wife and I’ (Parent)

‘We got fully involved with Flyerz, when we went on these trips to Amsterdam and Barcelona. It was a family trip’ (Parent)

‘They are brothers and there is nowhere they can go where [name] and [name] can actually play a sport together, and to me that just rang a bell, something shifted in me’ (Club Manager)

‘A lot of the kids love their family being on the pitch’ (Club Manager)

‘The whole family experience is quite important’ (Parent)

‘Especially if it's a first session for someone, or they're new to it, we do encourage their family like brothers, sisters, parents to get involved’ (Club manager)

Interviewees also suggested that belonging to a sports club is significant for the disabled players and their families because of the team aspect of being involved. Being part of the club is significant for those involved because they feel included within a team environment which is something that is typically not an opportunity for them. This opportunity is important because it provides a positive experience for players to enjoy and it is also important because it provides much needed opportunities to help players develop teamworking skills.

‘We like to give our players a hoodie and a club shirt, so they feel part of a club because often with these youngsters and this is the whole point about normalisation, often with these youngsters, they're excluded from anything else. Actually, immediately making them feel welcome and part of a team or a club with something they may not have experienced before’ (Club manager)

‘Because it's sport, and it's a team sport. His ability has developed in working as a team’ (Parent)

Parents and carers also described how Flyerz had created opportunities for them to meet with the parents and carers of other disabled young people and this was important because it helped them to develop a support network with people who shared similar experiences and understanding of their children.

‘For her to be involved in a Flyerz family is a bonus because, for example, if for some reason if [wife's name] and I couldn't get into a session one week, right, we could phone up three or four of the mums and dads. We'd obviously do the same ... That is really powerful in all this. They would look after her. They understand that we understand some of their children.’

The case study that follows illustrates that connecting parents and carers through Flyerz is beneficial for players and their families in their lives beyond the on-pitch experiences.

Case Study: Parents and carers building a network through Flyerz

‘One of the things that things that has been really, really encouraging and quite helpful is that, when you're a parent of a young person with additional needs, life can feel very isolated at times because you're learning to live life in a very different way to where you've been before and certainly with other children in the family and so your areas and navigate, you know the benefit system, the support systems and so forth... By being part of a wider group of parents from different places ... Parents of kids that go to different schools, suddenly you have a, because we all share mobile numbers, we've got WhatsApp groups, and things like that, where we can share experiences... Just recently, someone was talking about personal independence payments for young people and someone was struggling to navigate all of that. So we all threw in our own views and thoughts about how they could do that. And so I think there's a fringe benefit that it's not just to the young person, but sort of parent network about our own support mechanisms, because many of the parents are experiencing new things for the first time. So it could be employment, for example, you know, getting their first job. How does that work? How does that impact their benefits? It could be relationships, it could be all kinds of things that they experienced the first time. So, I think there's a wider benefit to just the players around being part of the Flyerz movement.’ (Parent)

3.5 Empowering young people: improved life prospects for young people living in disadvantaged areas through increased confidence and skills

Young people are empowered through participating in Flyerz because the programme enables them to succeed and to have their success rewarded:

‘His confidence level has just gone way up by being part of this team’ (Parent)

‘My daughter, our daughter won a gold medal and she was feeling on top of the world’ (Parent)

Young people are also empowered because they have opportunities to lead sessions and to be involved in decision-making around sessions:

‘Each of the Flyerz the players will take it in turns each week to lead one of the exercises. So [name] did about two or three things over the over the year, and he loved doing them. He would pick the music and he would pick the routine and get involved’ (Parent)

‘We've even got to the point that some of the older group have started to lead some of the exercises that we did to music by the end of the sessions we were running over this year. And we're now starting to take that out to get them to start doing things in the main group on a on a Sunday. Now, if you looked at that group 12 months ago and said, you know, when they first got on, hardly anyone would talk in the sessions, they were all nervous and self-conscious and everything else, but the way their confidence has grown and their involvement and everything else. It's just been wonderful to watch’ (Club manager)

The case study that follows illustrates that taking part in sporting opportunities like Flyerz can provide an opportunity for disabled young people to succeed and to develop their own sense of agency which enables them to make decisions about their lives that matter to them.

Case Study: Developing disabled young people's agency through Flyerz

'I think he went through a period when he first started at Flyerz, he was just playing any position. Then the, the coach said, have you thought about becoming the goalkeeper? And he said, yeah, I'll give that a go. So, he did all that they measured him up, they got a got sponsor, to provide a professional kit for him, and he went to the Euros and was a goalkeeper for the England squad.

When he came back, he decided off his own back that he wasn't really, he didn't really enjoy being a goalkeeper. He wanted to be outfield and being part of the action, he didn't like standing around. Now, rather than just accepting that and just getting on with it, he spoke up. He didn't speak to us. He spoke to the coach and said 'I don't I don't want to do this anymore. For these reasons. I like I want to be out there running around with the rest of them.' And although they tried to convince him to stay doing the goalkeeping because he was quite good at it. They accepted his view. And he doesn't do goalkeeping anymore. And he had the confidence to have that conversation, not through us, but directly with the coach to say that he didn't want to do that, he want to do something different. So that that's quite for us, that's quite a step change for him' (Parent)

Interviewees indicated that Flyerz provides opportunities for young people to grow their confidence and self-belief as a result of successes they experience on the pitch.

'He likes nothing more than telling people that he scored a goal. Or he scored three goals or whatever it might be. And he you know that self-belief around achievement is quite key' (Parent)

'She's a wobbly on her feet a little bit and her fine motor skills aren't great. But she's learned a lot from hockey, she can hold a hockey stick properly, she can hit it now' (Parent)

'I've learnt that it's difficult for these kids to make friends, they find it really hard, when you see the progress and the confidence that these kids have had, some in the beginning would not step on to the pitch and wanted to watch from afar and that's absolutely fine. Now they are all friends and love to see each other. You see the confidence grow in them' (Club manager)

The growth in confidence achieved by Flyerz participants had often led to them embarking on other new activities as a result of their enhanced confidence:

'That's one of our young players. He's just [recorded a podcast] done that for the first time this week. It will have a shocking taste of music in it. Because I know which music

he likes, but again, just a year ago would never have done that. He just sent it around in a in a message earlier this morning, saying I've done a podcast' (Club manager)

Again, the skills of those involved in delivering Flyerz were acknowledged as being essential in facilitating these opportunities for disabled young people to succeed:

'It's actually inspiring to watch people who, that there's a real skill involved in, in giving, in just judging just right ... how to kind of encourage these children to be themselves and to enjoy themselves' (Parents)

The case study that follows indicates that Flyerz sessions provide an environment where disabled young people can be empowered through being part of a team and through connecting with each other within a supportive and inclusive programme.

Case Study: Providing an enabling and empowering environment through Flyerz

'There's a there's big group of players who are probably about 20-21.... They joined when they were about 16-17, they were at school together. A lot of them are now at college, but they're all looking to get things like jobs or internships and other things, because they've got those difficult questions and difficult things for the families as well. There's no question that some of the things that we get them to do through Flyerz and your obvious examples are ones where we've got people running sessions. So, actually, you can see them starting to develop skills that have nothing to do with playing hockey. It's being part of a team, you see them interacting with each other, and looking after each other from time to time and you know, when you can see when somebody is not happy or something. There are all these other life skills that they're learning and developing because we've given them the environment in which to do. That's all it is, I really don't think it's any more rocket science than that. It's just giving them the environment, they've got all these abilities, let them show them' (Club manager)

3.6 Increased participation in sport and physical activity

In addition to the social opportunities and benefits gained by participants in Flyerz interviewees also noted the value of the programme in creating new opportunities for participants to be active. In some cases the participants were previously inactive before attending Flyerz.

'Quite frankly, he you know, he wasn't really doing a lot of physical sports at all, when we heard about Flyerz. Now, it's just amazing. I mean, he, you know, he runs around the pitch' (Parent)

'Cheerfully I'd say she's become far more active' (Parent)

‘Whereas I think for hour and a half running around a hockey pitch. It's just right. It's just about the right balance, and it's and it's the pace and speed that he can cope with’ (Parent)

‘He really got into running to keep fit and he's very competitive and he now times himself’ (Parent)

‘Anything that keeps her fit and mobile would be great. And Flyerz does’ (Parent)

The importance of accessing inclusive sport sessions was particularly valued by parents and carers whose children who had become disillusioned with PE and sport due to them not being able to compete with non-disabled peers. As a result of being excluded from PE and sport children were also excluded from the broader opportunities that sport facilitates including feeling part of a team:

‘My son used to love PE, but as he's got older, he's found it hard to keep up with his peer group and so he's stopped enjoying PE at school. Because he physically wasn't able to do some of the fine motor things, he couldn't keep up with them. He just said, I don't want to do it anymore. And that's one of the reasons, that I looked into finding a sport for him to do at the weekends. It's so hard for our children to find sporting activities or feel part of a team’ (Parent)

Delivery interviewees described how they had tried to continue to provide opportunities to be active despite the pandemic restrictions:

‘Through lockdown we've managed to do lots of videos that we've sent out to our SEN schools, and I've taken every child, every child has got their own hockey stick, their own ball. So, I've made sure there is nothing that can stop them from playing hockey and we've given them video challenges to do’ (Club manager)

‘Obviously, in lockdown the space was a challenge because everyone was doing it in either kitchen or the living room. So I think, obviously, there's things we couldn't do, like the one thing they really enjoyed the sessions is like the gameplay and running around and just being outside. So a lot of it was like skill stuff. But we also did some fitness stuff as well’ (Club manager)

‘She went and bought some artificial grass to go in our back garden. Just a piece. It's like, it's like 10 foot by 8 foot. So she can do these skills as she tries to practice some of the skills’ (Parent)

‘Flyerz is about one thing and one thing only, it's about creating an environment in which all of these people can participate in normalised hockey. It's not about doing something special because these children have disabilities, it's actually just about creating an environment in which they can be comfortable to come and learn hockey just the same way as everybody else’ (Club manager)

3.7 People being inspired and motivated to get involved in Flyerz hockey as beneficiaries and spectators

In addition to the regular Flyerz sessions the programme provides a number of additional opportunities which aim to inspire and motivate others to become involved in hockey as both participants and as spectators. These additional showcase opportunities include tournaments and tours both within and beyond the UK. Interviewees were very positive about the significance of these opportunities:

‘I think three of our players we have now are people whose parents saw that the piece on the TV, and just thought, oh, crikey, I didn't really I did not know that there was this. That's the most common thing is I did not know this existed’ (Club manager)

‘Now they've even got something in the diary for September, a tournament in Surrey with some other Flyerz groups. So, we will definitely be taking part in that’ (Parent)

‘Then for Flyerz itself, the next thing is because I sit on the national steering group, that Flyerz is that is to pick up where we were last year on running a national Flyerz festivals’ (Club manager)

‘It was to offer the opportunity to everybody in that group to go away as a team on a tour. Because I've seen what the benefit was there for the ones who were doing it representing in the more formalised England type set up. And it's just, yeah, it's hard work. But it's a lot of fun. But again, it gives it will give them again, a real, real sense of achievement’ (Club manager)

‘We've had the Canadian under 21 squad to come and train with them. We've taken them up to, I've taken a couple of them up to the World Hockey World Cup, one that was run up at Lee Valley. We've taken a few of them to participate in some of the Flyerz festival days and then took three of them out to Barcelona’ (Club manager)

The showcase events have been successful in creating demand for the programme and also in encouraging others to get involved in Flyerz.

‘[at a Flyerz showcase] Parents were saying please, please, please can you open your own Flyerz club here, we have nowhere to go, where he will be accepted’ (Club manager)

‘Blogs or newspapers are rather good people who do stuff... You have to tap into people in your own organisation or people you know, locally. We got somebody who works for Gallagher the insurance company, the ones who sponsor the Premiership rugby. It's a separate group from that, but they've given a small amount, it's very generous contribution, it's small by comparison to what they do elsewhere. But they've given a small sponsorship to us, which means quite a lot to the club’ (Club manager)

‘We were on the national BBC, on BBC Breakfast last year with what we were doing in lockdown with Basil Brush. So that was great’ (Club manager)

3.8 Delivering Whole-System Change

The ambition to deliver whole-system change is of course an ambitious aim for any programme. A way in which this aspiration is being implemented is through sharing effective practice with other hockey clubs and with other sports clubs:

‘We’ve put together an equality, diversity and inclusion group within the club. One of the things I actually want to do is, aside from just making sure we improve what we do across the board. It's more than just, it's more than just the hockey for the disabled. We need to make sure we're doing all we should be doing in all areas... We're going to try and tie up with one of the main football clubs, the rugby club and the cricket club in the first instance, maybe more than that, and actually collectively try and look at how can we improve our, our EDI offering for the whole town, so not just for one Sports Club, but as a town’ (Club manager)

‘It’s benefited by just being an open and inclusive club, and demonstratively. It's [Flyerz] something that every Hockey Club really should be either itself or in partnership with some other Hockey Club should be offering. So that's the most important because, if you look at the members of the Flyerz, because they are club members, so therefore they have benefited. So that's the most important thing, they're not they're not a separate group. They're a section within an overall club’ (Club manager)

Another way in which whole-system change is being delivered is through disabled young people becoming part of the delivery workforce for the programme:

‘The players themselves are, now because a little bit older, some of them, they're encouraged to lead parts of the session, which takes the pressure off the coaches’ (Parent)

Delivery interviewees suggested that a primary barrier to developing inclusive sport, and therefore contributing to whole-system change, is finding the right people to deliver the programme and equipping them with the skills they need to be able to be successful in providing an inclusive environment.

‘I think that right at the beginning a lot of volunteers are worried. They are worried that they are going to be able to communicate, are going to be able to do a good job because they just didn’t know how to help or teach kids or adults with learning difficulties and it's so lovely after the first session when all the volunteers say that was incredible. Because it's just a normal session, slightly tweaked and it's nothing to worry about it's actually the most rewarding thing you can do.’ (Club manager)

‘The question is then finding the right people to lead it and champion it, because that's always the thing. You need somebody to grab the bull by the horns, or pick it up and run with it, as they say.’ (Club manager)

Creating sustainable and visible organisational structures and empowering disabled young people to be part of the decision-making within these structures is also important in delivering whole-system change.

‘I didn't expect people to share my commitment to it. You know, I'm not young man now, it's nice to see other people developing as coaches to share responsibility and take responsibility for it. (Club Manager)

‘So, there is a structure and an organisation that [name] understands. They involved her in buying club kit. So, she's now got her hoodie and kit’ (Parent)

‘What Flyerz has enabled is the structure that is quite clearly defined. This is a Hockey Club with a Flyerz section. There is a dedicated coach, there are people who help with the coaching and help with helping out. And I think that all of that plays its part in the structure being very, very workable, very manageable, and very powerful for the recipients. And I see that working from on the side and it really is very good’ (Parent)

Creating a participation pathway is also integral to creating whole-system change but this is not without its challenges:

‘We've integrated two of our Flyerz players now play regular men's hockey in the main men section of the club, and there will be others who enter that in time. But it's again, the point about Flyerz is it's an environment where in some ways, it's a bit like playing junior hockey before going into senior hockey, some of the youngsters are ready to start mixing it up in in mainstream hockey sooner than others. And the same is true with the Flyerz, it's just as I said, it's just a, it's a place that you can hone your skills.’ (Club manager)

‘The two older lads went to men's training. They're quite well received at men's training and they played in the development team. But where do they go from there? They're probably on the boundary of being good enough to play in the one of the lower men's teams, you know, given the opportunity would certainly develop and progress to be a decent player in the sort of mid-level player.’ (Club manager)

An ongoing challenge for the programme is that those involved typically feel strongly that financial constraints should not be a barrier for people to be involved in the programme.

4. Conclusion

The evaluation data presented within this report indicates that those involved in Flyerz highly value the programme which provides unique opportunities for disabled young people and their families both on and off the pitch. The infographic that follows summarises these findings visually.

YOUNG PEOPLE



COACHES AND PARENTS RECOGNISED THAT PARTICIPATING IN FLYERZ HOCKEY IMPROVED DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING, CONFIDENCE AND WILLINGNESS TO TRY NEW THINGS. BEING A FLYERZ PLAYER OFFERED DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRIENDSHIP, FUN AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN A NURTURING, INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT.

PARENTS AND CARERS



PARENTS AGREED THAT THE FAMILY FOCUS AND INCLUSIVE NATURE OF FLYERZ HOCKEY PROVIDED RARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES TO EXPERIENCE SPORT AND BEING PART OF A TEAM TOGETHER.

PARENTS ALSO FOUND THAT BEING PART OF THE FLYERZ COMMUNITY GAVE THEM A VALUABLE NETWORK OF OTHER PARENTS OF DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PROVIDED SUPPORT, ADVICE AND FRIENDSHIP.



"MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT DISABILITY AND WHAT DISABLED PEOPLE CAN DO ARE JUST TAKEN AWAY"



COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS WHO JOIN THE FLYERZ COMMUNITY SAID THAT IT CHALLENGED THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT DISABLED PEOPLE CAN ACHIEVE IN AND THROUGH SPORT. THEY ALSO INDICATED THAT BEING INVOLVED WITH FLYERZ IMPROVED THEIR OWN WELLBEING AND GAVE THEM A SENSE OF PRIDE IN WHAT THEY DO.

COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS

"THROUGH THAT ADVERSITY HAS COME THIS INOREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO GET MORE KIDS INVOLVED"

THROUGH THE NATIONAL LOCKDOWNS MANY FLYERZ PROVISIONS MOVED ONLINE SO THAT THEY COULD CONTINUE TO PROVIDE THEIR COMMUNITIES WITH IMPORTANT STRUCTURE, OPPORTUNITIES TO SOCIALISE AND CREATIVE WAYS TO KEEP ACTIVE AT HOME. MANY EVEN MANAGED TO WELCOME NEW MEMBERS.

FLYERZ ONLINE



