

ACTIVE IN MIND PHASE 2 EVALUATION

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Photo – case study school 3, permission to use granted.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation carried out into Phase 2 of the Youth Sport Trusts (YST) Active in Mind (AiM) programme, funded by Sport England. The evaluation, conducted by the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University, focused on a small number of participating schools spread across England.

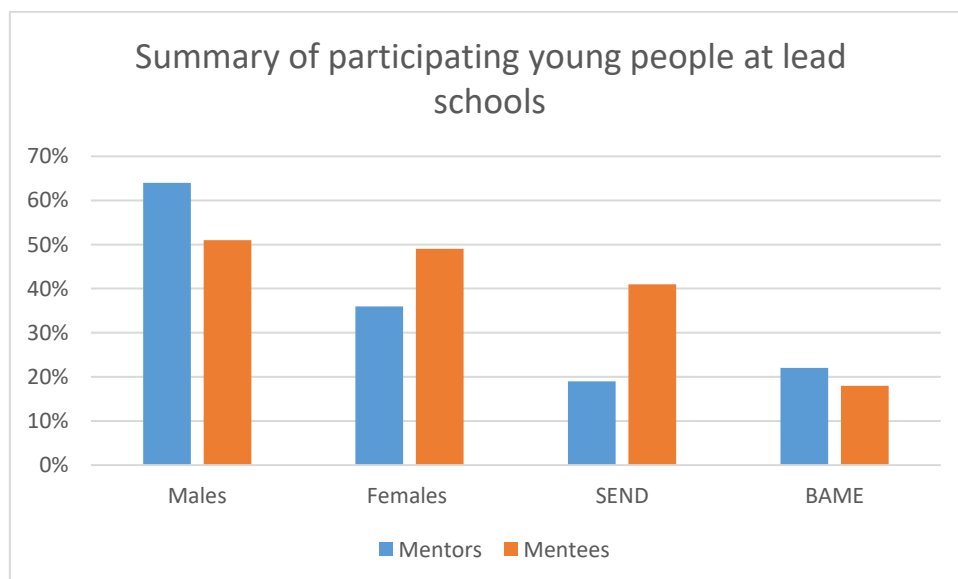
Phase 2 of the project ran from September 2018 to July 2019 in secondary schools across England. The aim of phase 2 was similar to that of phase 1 in that it offered peer mentoring support to young people experiencing mental wellbeing issues via a nurture group, (to mentees) as well as creating innovative and relevant sport and physical activity (PA) opportunities for inactive young people. However, it differed in that it relied on the schools that ran the project successfully in Phase 1 (lead schools) to roll out the project to at least three other secondary (partner) schools in their area.

Young people and the role of physical activity in their mental health and wellbeing

Both the physical and mental health benefits of engaging in physical activity, for adults as well as children and young people, are well documented and widely and internationally accepted (Chekroud et al., 2018; McMahon et al., 2017). Research suggests that engaging in moderate to vigorous activity improves all dimensions of wellbeing (Breslin et al., 2016; Tyler et al., 2016; Vella et al., 2016). However, the impact of peer mentoring is largely inconclusive, mainly because of the wide variety of approaches that are adopted. Despite this, there is some evidence which suggests that the use of trained peer mentors leads to increased physical activity and improved health outcomes in mentees, compared to teacher-led sessions (Smith, 2011; Smith & Holloman, 2013).

Phase 2 reach

In total, 69 schools and 2,534 young people participated in Phase 2 of the AiM project. The project involved 25 lead schools and 44 partner schools. Lead schools trained 530 young people to be peer mentors that worked with 1,067 mentees. Partner schools trained 303 peer mentors who worked with 634 mentees.



Evaluation approach

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach incorporating both surveys and school-based case studies. The YST was responsible for collecting the quantitative data through termly reports submitted by participating schools and via a pre and post-student survey. The evaluation team at Leeds Beckett was responsible for the case studies which involved interviews with the Wellbeing Champion, peer mentors and mentees at seven lead schools and, where possible, their partner schools.

Key findings

Process:

- The lead schools were highly committed to the project and wanted to continue it next year.
- The Athlete Mentor visits were very successful. Athlete Mentors were highly skilled and committed to their roles. This is the YST's unique selling point.
- Schools used a variety of innovative approaches to engage children with complex special educational needs in physical activity. These included the use of individual sports such as climbing and boxing.

Outcomes:

- Young people - peer mentors and mentees alike - enjoyed being part of the project and would like to be part of it again next year. The mentees enjoyed building social relationships with their peer mentors, were more confident in trying new activities and were more physically active at the end of the intervention. The mentors developed significant leadership skills and skills in planning and organisation.

By the end of the intervention:

- 70% of mentees said that they felt more relaxed;
- 67% of mentees said that they were more confident in building social relationships;
- 62% of mentees said that they felt more positive;
- 60% of mentees said that they were generally coping better;
- 73% of mentees were more confident in trying new things.
- Physical activity levels in both mentees and peer mentors increased;
- 95% of the young people said that they were more aware of the value of physical activity in promoting and maintaining good mental health;
- Overall, being part of the project had a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the mentees (62%).

Recommendations

- Provide peer mentors with more training prior to them leading activities.
- Create a standard set of resources to facilitate the training of peer mentors.
- Lead schools to provide a launch event to partner schools to facilitate the cascade model.
- Further develop approaches to dissemination so that schools can share best practice with other schools.