



Combating Inequalities through Innovative Social Practices  
of and for Young People in Cities across Europe

**WP7 Case Study: Innovative Practice ‘Challenge Sports’**

Date: June 2015

**City: Rotterdam**

Authors: Maarten Davelaar, Suzanne Tan, Henk Spies, (PlusConfidence, NL)

## Cover page

<b>Training and coaching to direct young unemployed people towards school or work</b>	
<b>Challenge Sports</b>	
<b>City</b>	Rotterdam
<b>Pilot type</b>	Case study of existing SIP
<b>Type of target group</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motivated for integration into mainstream society but in need of support;</li> <li>2. Living day by day, opportunistically. Given up hope and lacking competences, social support and motivation to change;</li> </ol>
<b>Type of practice</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning and counselling; social capital; matching/bridging;</li> </ol>
<b>Aims/objectives in brief</b>	Challenge Sports trains and coaches young people on benefits in the hope that this can direct them towards school or work within a short period of time (3-6 months). The practice helps young people to develop the necessary attitude and skills to obtain and keep education or employment. Builds social capital and mainstream social values. Sports are an essential part of the training.
<b>What needs, what inequalities</b>	Limited skills in communication, personal presentation, motivation and endurance, school and employment skills. Almost all young people have problems concerning money management. Life style and health situation are sometimes considered problematic.
<b>What (activities in brief)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sports,</li> <li>2. Group training (behaviour, presentation &amp; communication skills, intakes for schools, job application, resume-writing, etc.)</li> <li>3. Individual support (personal plans, depts.)</li> </ol>
<b>Who (actors)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Young people (up to the age of 27) on benefits</li> <li>2. Staff (mainly young people)</li> <li>3. Professional sportsmen</li> </ol>
<b>How (involvement of the actors, their roles)</b>	Staff works as youth or job coach or supports (sports) activities Professional athletes act as coaches and role models

<b>Scope: number of the participants of practice(s)</b>	Capacity up to 445 per year (2015), in previous years between 250-400
<b>Duration (when the project/practice started)</b>	22 years
<b>RESOURCES</b>	
<b>Financial</b>	<p>The annual turnover of Challenge Sports depends on the number of people that are referred to the programme by the Youth Counter (municipality).</p> <p>CS works on a ‘no cure, less pay’ basis. Maximum €3.500 per participant to cover all costs.</p>
<b>Personnel</b>	<p>14 employees:  2 coaches REBOUND (boys/men)  2 coaches In Controll (girls/women)  2 coaches Baljuw (mixed, preparation for basic education)  2 duo-managers  1 director  3 role models (top sport professionals)  2 activity supervisors / leaders</p>
<b>Other</b>	<p>The main office and training facility is located in an older building (including a former chapel) without any luxury in a district close to the city centre. Challenge Sports uses regular sport facilities nearby (fitness). Since May 2014 a branch office ‘Baljuw’ is located at ‘Startcollege’ (for those participants of Challenge Sports without a basic qualification (a diploma at the secondary education level / intermediate vocational education).</p>

**Contents**

- Introduction ..... 5
- 1. Evaluation methodology ..... 5
  - 2.1 Social Issue(s) addressed..... 5
  - 2.2. Project goals and plans ..... 6
  - 2.3 Competences and resources required ..... 8
  - 2.4 Degree of organization ..... 8
  - 2.5 The logic of intervention ..... 8
  - 2.6 Transfer adaptations ..... 9
- 3. Organisational context of implementation ..... 9
- 4. Project implementation and outputs ..... 9
  - 4.1 Targeting of the program..... 9
  - 4.2 Addressing needs..... 9
  - 4.3 Empowerment, engagement and choice ..... 11
  - 4.4 Stakeholders involved ..... 11
  - 4.5 Competences and resources involved ..... 11
  - 4.6 Barriers and drivers for implementation ..... 12
  - 4.7 Innovativeness ..... 13
  - 4.8 Success factors and conditions ..... 14
- 5. Project results/outcomes..... 15
- 6. Final reflections ..... 17
  - 6.1 The role of the pilot/project/practice ..... 17
  - 6.2 Innovation..... 18
  - 6.3 Success factors ..... 18
  - 6.4 Policy recommendations, transferability ..... 19
- References ..... 21
- Appendix 1 Respondents..... 22

## **Introduction**

For 22 years Challenge Sports has been ‘fighting youth unemployment’ in Rotterdam, using sports to teach young people social skills and helping them find their way (back) into education or employment. These services are offered through a private company, commissioned by the municipality (Youth Counter). Top-sport athletes, martial arts experts or football players are motivators and teachers. The aim is to get unemployed young people back to school or help them find a job. The programme lasts for three to six months, with five days a week of teaching. It is considered to be a relatively light and short programme, which nevertheless keeps young people busy and helps them prepare (once again) for school or work. Officially, its target group is young people who are only self-sufficient to a limited extent. Many have financial problems, problems in finding education, have criminal records (boys/males) or the care of young children (girls/females). Challenge Sports is in quantitative terms an important partner of the municipality (Youth Counter) and heralded for its flexibility in integrating new participants in its programme on a daily basis. Perceived success factors are (1) the use of ‘authoritative’ role models to which young people look up, (2) the fact that sports contributes to better health, self-confidence and a day-night rhythm better adapted to the world of work, (3) tailoring the delivering organisation to the demands and needs of the municipality, (4) 20 years of experience in training and coaching young unemployed people.

## **1. Evaluation methodology**

This evaluation is based on a combination of desk research (websites, magazines, project and methodology descriptions, newspaper articles), semi-structured individual interviews and two group interviews with participants in April – May 2015 (see Appendixes 1 and 2). We found no relevant scientific literature on Challenge Sports, except one limited evaluation of Youth interventions commissioned by the municipality on three projects, including Challenge Sports. Challenge Sports monitors its results and provides the Youth Counter with information on a regular basis. It publishes its main outcomes in magazines and newspaper articles.

We spoke with 6 participants, the general director, one of the managers and a Youth Coach. A policy advisor at the municipality was also interviewed. All quotations are from interviews conducted for the Citispyce-research project, unless indicated otherwise.

In addition, discussions with representatives of provisions and public officials (see WP6 Rotterdam pilot description) during meetings of a local working group on improving the intake and referral process for young people in Rotterdam provided input for this evaluation. Since many young unemployed people have attended the training at Challenge Sports, we were also informed by participants of the other programmes about their experiences with CS.

## **2. Project/Practice Design**

### ***2.1 Social Issue(s) addressed***

The project works for the city of Rotterdam and targets individual young unemployed people. The project is targeted at young people - young men, girls and young mothers - with multiple problems, in most cases with a background of social deprivation and family problems, who in many cases are or have been in contact with social help and/or the police. It is not aimed at

young people who are not self-sufficient at all (have no income, very problematic debts, no housing) or who are in need of a lot of care, since people should be able to return to or start with education and/or work within 3-6 months. Referral only takes place through the Youth Counter (central municipal office for social assistance and obligatory education for young people aged 18-27).

## **2.2. Project goals and plans**

The primary goal is to support young people to enter into education (according to the School First-rule) or, as a second option, into a job. Although not an official goal, it is clear to all stakeholders that the programme is also suitable to “bridge gaps” between the start of school - mainly September / March - or jobs or job training programmes.

The primary goal is measured intensively. The same holds for data on the number of people that leave the programme before finishing, and the reasons for that. Underlying goals – related to fostering self-sufficiency are partly measured through the SSM (Self-Sufficiency Matrix). Developments on issues like self-confidence, trust, and other forms of social capital are not captured with monitoring or other forms of (qualitative) research.

Core values are creating trust and reaching out to the participants: *“It is all about really making contact with these young people.”* (Manager). *“If you can touch them, then it works. It is a behaviour model,”* says the Founder / Director, *“and 70% of our staff are able to genuinely get in contact with them.”*

### *Main components and phases*

Its current programme (since 2012) has run a ‘boys’ group (Rebound) and ‘girls’ group (In Controll) since 2012. Since May 2014, training is also offered at Start College of the large Albeda College for intermediary vocational education. Challenge Sports has a second base of operations at the College since May 2014. There, two staff members of the reintegration company guide young people towards an education in an attempt to create an innovative convergence of education and reintegration. The group that is trained there consists entirely of young people without a basic qualification (two years of vocational training on top of secondary education).

### Phases:

- Diagnosis: 2 weeks
- Training programme: 3 to 6 months, however also sometimes shorter, until the start of new education or employment
- After care: coaching up to 12 months

The groups consist of 10 to 30+ people. New groups can be organised and new participants can start almost every day. Training / lessons are mainly given by Job / Youth Coaches. Top athletes act as role models during this programme, and also in non-sports lessons. Men start early with sports and continue with classes. Women start later (related to opening hours child care) and follow lessons before sports. The programme starts early in the day and ends early. There is an afternoon group for participants *“who have arranged everything, just to keep the day-rhythm.”* (Manager).

Child care is available during the initial period for young mothers so that they can quickly register and start the programme. During this period, young mothers are helped with organising permanent care, formally or informally.

Challenge Sports also claims to take care of “disadvantages” such as:

- addiction
- inability to make themselves understood in Dutch
- homelessness
- severe psychological problems

Compulsory modules are:

- career orientation / choosing a course
- money management
- school / employment skills: practicing intakes at school, sending out job applications (10 per week, or 5 per week for people with ‘label’ School First)
- life style / health

Additional modules for young mothers:

- maternal and child care
- combining work / private life / school

Optional modules are:

- self-sufficiency
- Dutch language
- work placement
- applying for jobs
- managing aggression (boys)
- child care (girls/young mothers)

Lessons on health are, for example, organised with the public health service.

Boys’ REBOUND programme: During the diagnosis phase (the first two weeks of the programme) the young men go through intensive training. Apart from behaviour training they are tested on language, arithmetic and aptitude for learning. Additionally, they are monitored with the Dutch self-sufficiency matrix (SSM). Like other organisations in the local ‘landscape of provisions’ for young unemployed (and vulnerable) people, Challenge Sports is obliged to permanently monitor progress on the individual level with the Dutch version of the SSM, the self-sufficiency matrix.<sup>1</sup> The SSM distinguishes 5 levels of self-sufficiency of persons: Acute problem, Not-, Barely-, Adequately-, Completely- Self-sufficient. This is based on sufficiency in 11 domains: income, day-time activities, housing, domestic relations, mental health, physical health, addiction, daily life skills, social network, community participation and judiciary. At the end of the two weeks they receive a report containing a programme plan. The plan lists the points of special interest for the next phase of the modular programme (3 to 6 months). Sports are important in the programme to address young men’s behaviour. Apart from sports, they take part in modules that are developed to improve both performance and behaviour. The Girls’ IN CONTROLL programme differs from the boys

---

<sup>1</sup> This version is developed by the public health service of Amsterdam and the municipality of Rotterdam. The Youth Counter was one of the first departments to implement it. <http://www.g4-user.nl/sites/default/files/files/Self%20Sufficiency%20Matrix%20-%20EU%20pilot.pdf>

programme in that it is specially developed to help the women and young mothers become more resilient and to gain more self-confidence so that they can enter school and/or work. Apart from sport, they take part in modules that are developed to improve both performance and behaviour. The programme places emphasis on the mother-child relationship and on the combining of care and school/work.<sup>2</sup>

After care coaching has been de-intensified to once a month, because more contact is believed to be counter-productive. Some ex-participants prefer not to have any contact at all. Others come back to visit the office every now and then.

### ***2.3 Competences and resources required***

The young participants are obliged to attend the programme, if they want to receive social benefits. 20% of the people that are referred to Challenge Sports leave the programme early. Half of them because they show no interest in the programme and repeatedly break the rules or do not show up whereas the other half turns out to be in need of specialised (mental) care.

The staff is selected on its ability to make real contact with young people, to be flexible and think along with the participants, but also to be able to keep rules and confront people with 'unproductive' forms of behaviour.

They are chosen on their personal qualities, rather than on possessing formal qualifications, yet, according to the organisation, all work and think on a higher education level.

One of the duo-managers started at Challenge Sports as a participant, the other on an internship. The role models and coaches speak openly in interviews about the difficulties they encounter in working with the groups of young men and women. Some of them have gone through the same difficulties as the people they supervise and support now.

### ***2.4 Degree of organization***

This reintegration company is a top-down initiative of a social entrepreneur / investor. The small staff works in an informal way. The staff seem to be quite accessible for the participants. The organisation is proud to be able to adapt itself quickly to changes in demands from its commissioner.

The practice mainly addresses the micro-(individual) level (see also: 4.7). The firm seems to manage and monitor the daily necessary 'routines' efficiently and, indeed, business-like. The atmosphere seems friendly and informal with room for individual attention.

### ***2.5 The logic of intervention***

The practice can be classified as mainly aimed at addressing (social) competences (SID) and addressing standards of "normality" (MUD), although through offering the possibility to become member of sport clubs at a reduced fee, it is contributing to redistributing resources a little bit. NB: a campaign in which participants who left the programme successfully were rewarded with a bike attracted much attention ('joblessness rewarded'). After complaints in local and national parliament the municipality asked Challenge Sports to end it.

---

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Rotterdam on the move (2014): p 28, 29.

The practice can be placed in the first and fourth quadrant, since the intervention aims at providing learning and counselling, and contributing to empowerment for young people with low abilities and limited social support.

### ***2.6 Transfer adaptations***

The SIP has not been transferred, and was developed in Rotterdam. Over its life course it has been adapted many times.

## **3. Organisational context of implementation**

Challenge Sports, a private company, has been offering its services for 22 years, a remarkable fact in a field where profit and not-for profit businesses come and go. The driving force was, and still is, its Founder/General director, who is also the owner of the Challenge Sports Holding. This holding also invested in top sports in Rotterdam, e.g Challenges Sports is sponsor of the women's Basketball club of Rotterdam. Very early on the organisation started using top-sports(wo)men to motivate and coach young people, which has become the most important distinguishing aspect of the approach. The organisation is not aligned to national or sector quality systems, but is transparent and reports on a regular basis to the municipalities. The resources seem to be sufficient.

Challenge Sports cooperates with specialised and general services in the city but is relatively independent in its operation: it is set up and managed to be able to implement its programme and reach its goals as a stand-alone service. Its success does not depend on the (quality of) interventions of others.

## **4. Project implementation and outputs**

### ***4.1 Targeting of the program***

The organisation is only working with young people referred by the Youth Counter. Youth Counter staff decides who has to go to Challenge Sports or to other services. The organisation signs a contract for each single individual in its programme. Public Relations is considered important and the company is prominently present in newspapers with success stories of participants and visits of public figures and politicians.

### ***4.2 Addressing needs***

In general, Challenge Sports helps young people to bridge waiting time till the start of new education in September or March. The degree of individualization of the services is lower than at the Buzinezzclub or The New Opportunity, two other services that are more specialised. The first service targets people with their own plans and goals and offers opportunities to learn to set up businesses. The second only works for male clients who have 'failed' to complete programmes elsewhere and who mostly have a criminal past. Challenge

Sports caters for much broader groups, and scores particular well in getting people back to school. The most important explanation seems to be that there is a good match between the target group and the intervention, i.e. a good selection of participants by the Youth Counter, and an efficient but adequate support of participants. It would be interesting to compare the SSM scores of participants to those of participants in other interventions, but these data are not currently available.

The interviews with participants show how the young participants view the situation they are in and perceive the coaching and support they receive at Challenge Sports. One of the participants, (Man, 25, unemployed) says he has been running his own business, but made some mistakes. He was in jail for 10 months and has no family in the Netherlands: *“I don’t have other options. I’ve got to go to school again. Jobs and money, I’ve had it all, I’m not looking forward to that anymore. I’ve to start at zero again, so I better make the best out of it.”* After the Challenge Sports programme he wants to become a mechanical engineer. Another participant (Man, 23, unemployed) is also trying to get back to school. He failed at an intermediary vocational education, but wants to return to that level, and become a process operator. Because he has a son to look after and knows it is his last chance to obtain a proper job qualification, he is motivated to work with the support of Challenge Sports on his financial problems before school starts again (man, 23, unemployed). A woman (22, unemployed) is at Challenge Sports for the second time after she did the programme a year ago. Her mother was ill and she had to take care of her, thus she could not concentrate on school. She has, unlike almost all other participants, no debts. She was accepted at a new school preparing her for the food service industry. She complains that the benefit of €650 per month has a negative influence on her peers *“because people who follow an education get less”* meaning that people hesitate to go back to school. She would prefer more variation in her lessons at Challenge Sports, because she has gone through it all before. Others have no complaints on this, and emphasize that the training is about building a solid CV, learning to present oneself and changing your attitude and that this costs time and repetition. One participant says he would prefer smaller groups because some are more insecure and other are more extravert. The others reply that at school the groups are also quite big and that at Challenge Sports insecure people gain self-confidence: *“it is up to you. If you are motivated, they help you in every way”*, says a participant, *“Don’t use slang, and be serious about your goals.”* (Man, 25). *“And leave your old network behind.”* Most others seem not to think in radical changes, but just hope to be able to stick to a better day rhythm and a healthier life and wish others would succeed in doing that, too: *“I’m from the same neighbourhood as those who still smoke joints all day. But I don’t want to give them up.”* (Woman, 22, unemployed) The group element seems not to be very important, given the short programme and the permanent in and outflow of participants in the groups. But nevertheless, most participants are positive about the group dynamics: *“You are addressed as a group, (...) you learn a lot as a group.”* *“At school there is much fighting going on, here not. Everybody wants to improve and wants help and that is what they give here.”* Not all succeed, the participants stress, *“but the majority do benefit from the programme.”* Those who leave the programme without a (new) start at school or work have problems at home, have to deal with huge financial problems, or think they are better off on the streets, the young participants think.

### ***4.3 Empowerment, engagement and choice***

Young people themselves do not have a say in decisions about the activities. The young people are solely consumers of the activities, although, of course they have to put some energy into it.

### ***4.4 Stakeholders involved***

The key stakeholder in the project is the Youth Counter/municipality. It commissions Challenge Sports. Other important stakeholders are intermediary vocational education schools in Rotterdam, 85% of the placements from participants leaving the programme (positive outflow) in 2013 were in schools. Sport professionals are individual stakeholders, benefitting from cooperation with the reintegration firm (financially and in terms of publicity).

### ***4.5 Competences and resources involved***

See also 2 and 3.

All members of staff (including the youth coaches) work or think on a 'higher education level'. The work is divided between one director, two managers, and four youth/job coaches.<sup>3</sup> Almost all are (young) women, except the director. In addition, the company works with two professionals who support the (sports) activities and work with top athletes, at this moment three, in soccer, running and martial arts, etc. (sometimes also counted as members of staff, and are structurally aligned to the organisation for one or two days a week).

Apart from their regular tasks in planning, scheduling, monitoring and financial issues, the managers invest time in communication with the young clients. As we observed they operate on close distance to the other professionals and know many participants and spend time with them: *"Sometimes you see that a participant is having a hard time at the beginning. They don't want to participate in sports, and really don't think much of it. We can listen to them and explain everything. That makes the work of the job coaches easier as well."*<sup>4</sup> One of the managers was once a participant at Challenge Sports herself. The job or youth coaches run the group lessons and are responsible for individual support. For the (sports) activities they get help from the activity leaders. Like other staff they are selected by the director on their capacity to connect with the participants. The athletes have two tasks: they supervise sports sessions and give lessons for groups of between ten to thirty people (men and women apart). The lessons are there "to inspire them to think out of the box" and to motivate them to face their problems and to keep faith, but the role of the role models can also be to share practical tips and tricks in personal presentation. The sports lessons are seen as essential: *"If these guys don't start the day at Challenge Sports with a sport lesson, they're hopeless. You won't get anything out of them. But after some play you have a group that wants to get going"* (freestyle athlete, role model)

---

<sup>3</sup> June 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Rotterdam on the move (2014), interview with management team: p. 21

The resources of Challenge Sports or the annual turnover of Challenge Sports depends on the number of people that are referred to the programme by the Youth Counter (municipality) and on the rate of success: the company works on a ‘no cure, less pay’ basis and receives a maximum of €3, 500 per participant to cover all personal and material costs (see also 5).

#### ***4.6 Barriers and drivers for implementation***

The drivers for implementation are described in 4.7 and 4.8, we will focus here on critical implementation barriers that can also be seen as challenges for further improvement.

The first barrier is that new clients that are referred to Challenge Sports by the Youth Counter sometimes need more support than expected or that the programme, given its relatively light nature and limited timeframe, seems suited for. Many clients of the Youth Counter are dealing with complex problems. Even if at first sight a person is doing well, there might be hidden difficulties that reveal themselves later on. A three-month scheme is too short in some cases. This fact is recognised, but has not led to adaptations in either the programme or the characteristics of the target group that is referred to Challenge Sports.

The second barrier is the extent to which financial problems can be tackled. *“Almost all our participants have debts, ranging from €1.000 up to €30.000”*, states the manager, who nevertheless sees some improvement in dealing with this issue: *“Although compared to a few years ago, financial and housing problems are dealt with earlier, often before these young people start with us. Many have already been in contact with social workers who have started to solve these problems.”* She notes that young people are more active in finding solutions themselves too. Challenge Sports has the contractual obligation (just like the other provisions such as Buzinezzclub and The New Opportunity ) to work on financial problems, but in many cases, according to public officials, they do not manage to do so. This is a major concern as almost every single young client out of the 2500 clients that are supported by the Youth Counter has debts. (*“And we only start counting at €2000”*, according to a policy officer). So not being able to deal with debts sometimes stands in the way of a sustainable positive societal integration of young persons. On the other hand, Challenge Sports is not aimed at people who are not self-sufficient (SSM 1 or 2), but almost all of them have, in addition to other problems, substantial debts (and not all these debts are ‘stabilised’, as SSM level 3 ‘demands’, at the moment of referral to Challenge Sports that has to cater for people with SSM 3 or higher.) Moreover, Challenge Sports is obliged to work on debts, but it is acknowledged by representatives of the municipality that 3 to 6 months, and the average time in the programme is closer to 3 than to 6 months, in a relatively light programme might be insufficient to work effectively on a sustainable stable financial situation.

The same is true for other complex problems.

Thirdly, the programme could be more challenging for some people. The more motivated and self-supporting participants, or those who joined Challenge Sports for the second time, would like to learn more or other things in the programme and see more variation in the lessons. In contrast, the majority of the participants that we spoke was satisfied with the content of the programme.

Fourth, the important role of sports in the programme is also debated, although there is consensus that in general sports motivates the participants to become healthier and to keep up a good day-rhythm. It is also seen as a tool to work on fortitude and resilience. There are some doubts, however, whether sport is the most appropriate intervention for young (single) mothers who have many hindrances to overcome to organise their life.

Finally, the cooperation with sports stars and occasionally TV personalities can bare the danger of disappointment: you will never manage to live like these idols (Assessment Commission Youth Interventions 2014). The staff is aware of this, the ‘regular’ role models seem to have developed their own way of dealing with these expectations.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4.7 Innovativeness**

The intervention aims at fostering motivation, changes in attitude and on improving (practical) skills. The programme is aimed at young men and women who can return to education or work within 3-6 months. Its solutions are primarily targeted at individuals. Problems on the family level or related to friends or peers can be addressed, but the programme is not aimed at finding solutions for this. Solutions in the functioning of institutions or in improving the cooperation in networks are not key to the programme, with the important exception of an attempt to experiment with cooperation with a school catering for drop outs or people without basic qualifications. The programme targets the middle category of clients of the Youth Counter (18-27) – those who are in need of support, but are self-sufficient to a limited extent (according to the Dutch SSM). Challenge Sports does not focus on redistribution of resources.

Challenge Sports has been offering its services to the municipality for 22 years now. There have been several changes in the past. Challenge Sports has been highly adaptive to changes in its political-administrative context (rules on funding). So a good track record, continuity and a high level of adaptability to changes in goals and preferences of the political administration is what certainly counts. What once was new and innovative, such as the importance of sports in the programme is now copied by others. Some elements could, however, still be listed as innovative:

- Registration and transparency of intake, throughput and results on placements
- Way in which role models (professionals in various sports) are integrated in the programme
- Cooperation with Startcollege: a training group and offices in the college buildings

We will discuss them in somewhat more detail:

- Registration & transparency: “Transparency is essential”, according to the General Director. The organisation places much emphasis on registration and the director wants to be able to take “a snapshot of the organisation”, in particular of the primary process: “*A requirement that I specified myself is that, if necessary, we have to be able to produce the latest figures within 24 hours. What is our rate of inflow, how many young people are now participating in the process, and how many have successfully left it? We do this not only for our own purposes but for those of our customer as well.*”<sup>6</sup> Other organisations may also work with smart registration procedures and systems, but often these are seen as necessities. Challenge Sports uses this asset without restraint to communicate and underpin its success in working with young people, which is of course contributing to the continuity of the organisation.

---

<sup>5</sup> See for example the approach by freestyler Soufiane Touzani, one of them: Rotterdam on the move (2014): p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Rotterdam on the move. Reintegration and sports, nr.5, 2014: p.8.

- Role models: Mostly role models are ‘visitors’, willing to do a clinic or workshop or give a single motivational speech to a young audience. Challenge Sports occasionally invites TV celebrities or athletes this way. But, in addition, role models at Challenge Sports are integrated in the programme and affiliate themselves for a longer period of time for the organisation and train groups one morning or afternoon each day (or more). Challenge Sports also supports professional athletes this way.
- Cooperation with Startcollege: Getting people back to school, and making them finish it, is a major challenge. In 2013, almost 85 % of the placements of Challenge Sports were in education. Challenge Sports is critical about the quality of education, especially the ability of teachers and other school staff to connect with less motivated pupils or to cope with forms of deviant or disruptive behaviour. And the schools that run basic qualifications programmes experience difficulties in keeping their students motivated and avoiding dropout. Since May 2014 Startcollege (a cooperation between Albeda College and Zadkine College, both large schools for middle level professional education) and Challenge Sports are running a pilot: a group of people without basic qualification attends parts of its programme at the College premises. The idea is that once they have participated for a while in the Challenge Sports educational programme, they can enrol in the Startcollege earlier than usual. Moreover, problems can be discussed between teachers and reintegration coach quicker and more effective: *‘Since one of the reasons for dropping out can be the kind of guidance provided, this is a way to improve that situation. The dropout rate will then decrease.’* According to the Director of Startcollege.<sup>7</sup> *“Our Job Coaches can intervene quickly when teachers have problems with misbehaving Startcollege students. And because they have worked with them in Challenge Sports, they can have a positive influence on them’,* says the Manager. On the other hand, the Challenge Sports-team can see *“the kinds of complicated matters that teachers have to deal with.”*<sup>8</sup>

#### ***4.8 Success factors and conditions***

What do the actors, main stakeholder and participants consider to be the critical success factors?

Challenge Sports emphasizes:

- Thorough knowledge of the target group
- Quality of the team
- Well-organised and fast intake process and decision whether or not to start a trajectory with a client
- Being able to deliver all requested data on results quickly (transparent)
- Flexibility towards customer-demands (Youth Counter)
- Cheaper than other suppliers of re-integration services

The municipality stresses:

- The role of sports (although some doubts exist, whether sport is an effective motivator for everyone, especially for young mothers with more complex problems)

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview with the director of Startcollege in: Rotterdam on the move, reintegration and sports, nr. 5, 2014: 6)

<sup>8</sup> Interview with the director of Startcollege in: Rotterdam on the move, reintegration and sports, nr. 5, 2014: 6)

- Working with role models
- Ability to handle a large number of people
- Organised on constant inflow of new clients, flexible
- A well organised primary process, precise management, business-like character
- A clear vision of what they have to do with their clients. They focus on getting them back to school or work. Clear goals.

Clients highlight:

- Role of sports in the programme
- Young team that understands young people
- Practical help on problems (debts, housing, forms)
- Training on school and job applications

## 5. Project results/outcomes

It is difficult to draw a line between direct results (effects) of the programme and the outcome, or between intended and unintended outcomes. We start with the results that are reported and monitored.

Challenge Sports works with a limited set of clear, measurable goals. It does not mention nor address issues of inequality, rights, equal chances or social mobility. Likewise, these concepts are not mentioned in its communication strategy. Key to this strategy is:

- (1) mentioning the numbers of young people that found a job or went to school
- (2) emphasizing the amount of money that the municipality ‘saved’ due to the work of Challenge Sports
- (3) individual stories of regained self-confidence, trust and ‘fitness’ to overcome personal problems.

Challenge Sports fulfils its obligation to send its results on a monthly basis to the municipality.

### *Results*

Year	Clients	Percentage of total group that entered school / employment permanently <sup>9</sup>
2010	274	57%
2011	148	53%
2012	104	50%
2013	413+	57%
2014	315	53%

---

<sup>9</sup> Terminology by Challenge Sports: after six months still in school, at a job.

### *Effectiveness percentages 2013*

Total Started	413	100%
Total Placements <sup>10</sup>	237 (201 school, 36 job)	57%
Total in pathway end of year	32	8%
Total Rejects and dropouts	145	35%

### *Effectiveness percentages 2014*

Total Started	315	100%
Total Placements <sup>11</sup>	168 (136 school, 32 job)	53%
Total in pathway end of year	50	16%
Total Rejects and dropouts	97	31%

There are many reasons and causes for people to not finish the programme ('the rejects' in the tables above). Due to administrative reasons (e.g. lack of official documents) part of those who start are refused participation at a somewhat later stage, after the intake, by the Youth Counter. This seems to account for about 10-15% of the negative outflow. Of those who actually start participating, on average 20% leave the programme before completing it. Half of this group is 'not supportable': they do not show up and do not follow the rules, show no initiative to send out applications and so on. They are sanctioned by the municipality (reduction or stop of benefits). The other half is referred back to the Youth Counter because a 'care-programme' seems more appropriate given the nature of their (multiple) problems.

We encountered some doubts (government, other actors) on the long-term success rates of Challenge Sports, although figures on the situation 6 months after finishing the programme are relatively high. Local government admits that it cannot produce figures on long term individual developments of clients of the Youth Counter. Moreover, real outcome is difficult to estimate in this field because it remains unclear what would be the 'natural developments' without interventions, i.e. how many people would have found education or employment after a period of time without help from the official services, or for how many participants Challenge Sports is only a way to bridge the time until they can start at school (in September or February/March), without the programme itself contributing much to outflow into education

Side-effects are not measured, although there is reason to believe that young people are busy at Challenge Sports and later returning to school or entering the labour market will have positive effects on nuisance, or in some cases criminality, in neighbourhoods. Some participants prolong their participation in the sports activities of the organisation and motivate their peers.

### *Cost-benefit assessment*

We start this brief assessment, with an illustrative example of the way Challenge Sports tries to demonstrate its cost-effectiveness: *"In 2013, for example, of the 413 young people who participated in this programme, 237 made it successfully out of public assistance. This is 57% of the total, and another approximately 7% are still in the programme with the potential to follow suit. Now, in the middle of September 2014, only 37 (15.61%) have returned to living*

---

<sup>10</sup> Still in placement (school, job) 6 months after the programme. 140 men, 97 women.

<sup>11</sup> Estimation.

*on benefits. This means that around 200 (84.38%) young people from the 2013 group are still in school or at work. Since an annual average net benefits payment costs the Municipality of Rotterdam around 14,500 euros, this means a net benefits savings of almost 3 million euros a year for the Municipality of Rotterdam. This is a typical example of how reintegration should work: by combating youth unemployment and saving the municipality money.”<sup>12</sup>*

“*We have found a way to Rome with a high turnover*”, the Director says. The approach certainly seems cost-effective. Results are claimed to be the highest in the Netherlands, but the counting of the savings is (of course) based on some assumptions that are debatable. However, the attempt to argue the effectiveness of the approach on the basis of social costs and benefits (savings), which the Buzinezzclub also does, in itself can be seen as innovative.

The approach is also cost-effective, if we focus on the price of the pathways. A reintegration pathway at Challenge Sports costs €3.500 maximum, which is well below average. “*We deliver premium quality for discounter-prices*”, says the director. “*I always emphasize that municipalities as commissioners of reintegration services should be aware not to pay too much.*” (...) *For €7.000 or €8.000 per pathway, clients should stay out of social assistance for a very long time to make any savings.*”

After 2 weeks €1.000 is charged, €1.500 euro when a job or education is found and €1.000 if the client stays out of the benefit system for more than 6 months. “*This is a risk, not many organisations would dare to take. But we know where we are competent at this*”, the Director states.

## **6. Final reflections**

### ***6.1 The role of the pilot/project/practice***

Challenge Sports has no direct role in changing mechanisms or patterns of exclusion. Instead it helps young people to stay fit and healthy and to prepare and motivate themselves for education or work. The lessons that the young people learn (knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour) might be helpful for the rest of their life, but will at the least guide them through the steps and decisions they have to take on their route (back) to school or work.

For the Youth Counter, Challenge Sports is useful because it helps bridging waiting time for educational programmes to start. It is also a way of keeping people ‘busy’ after they have finished a care-programme or a more intensive rebound programme such as The New Opportunity. It is less important to follow the programme for the entire 3 to 6 months. There seem to be almost no barriers for entry from the side of Challenge Sports – and no municipal criteria either, which makes the service accessible for a broad target group. For all these reasons it is also a programme, unlike Buzinezzclub and The New Opportunity, to which the municipal coaches can send people more than once, be it for a last chance in preparing to enter education, or just to maintain a healthy day- rhythm for a couple of weeks before school

---

<sup>12</sup> Rotterdam on the move, interview with the general director (2014): p.8. For accuracy it should be noted that average benefit costs for 18-21 year old are significantly less than the general average of 15.000 euro per person/benefit. Also, this way of calculating assumes that people would have remained on benefits for a full year without the intervention, and it assumes that the result is brought about by the intervention.

or a job starts. We can conclude that Challenge Sports is a flexible and cooperative partner that helps the municipality reach its goals (increase the level of participation and reduce the number of young people on social assistance).

Some criticism could be heard on the target group of Challenge Sports: it is sometimes accused of ‘cherry picking’. But that does not match with the fact that a large number of people are referred to them without clear indicators or criteria for referral. In fact, Challenge Sports is fully dependent on the selection process at the Youth Counter and is bound to regulations in their contract with the municipality that limit the number of people they can send back to the Youth Counter. In reality, Challenge Sports seems eager to try to make the best of it, and to take on board as many clients as possible. Afterwards the search starts for the best way to give individuals the support they need. The Assessment Committee on Youth Interventions mildly criticised Challenge Sports for its ‘flexibility’ to accept almost everyone. The fact is that Challenge Sports seems to know its target group very well and what it can or cannot achieve with them.

Since 2014 Challenge Sports is part of the control group in a Randomized Control Trial for provision of The New Opportunity, meaning that the number of participants with multiple problems and with a criminal record referred to Challenge Sports will grow. It will be interesting to see if and how this will affect the (long term) results of Challenge Sports.

## ***6.2 Innovation***

Challenge Sports’ strength seems to lie more in its long track record and trustworthiness than in its innovative character. We did however mark the following elements as innovative in 4.7:

- The way registration of intake, throughput and results on placements is organised
- The way in which role models (professionals in various sports) are integrated in the programme
- Its attempts of intensive cooperation with schools to improve the effectiveness of its pathways and placements in the field of ‘basic qualification education’.

In terms of the dimensions distinguished in WP3, the most important feature of Challenge Sports is bridging – using role models to familiarize young people with ‘normal’ behaviour and expectations in the world of education and employment. In terms of the WP6 typology, the target group can be characterised as (1) motivated for integration into mainstream society but in need of support, and (2) living day by day, opportunistically, given up hope and lacking competences, social support and motivation to change. The intervention can be characterised as positioned in the first quadrant. Central elements are learning and counselling, building social capital, and matching/bridging.

## ***6.3 Success factors***

The success factors of Challenge Sports are very diverse (see 4.8). Our conclusion is that the most critical factors are:

- Use of sports and role models in sports
- Thorough knowledge of the target group Challenge Sports works with
- Quality and characteristics of the team: reflecting Rotterdam being ‘a city of minorities’ and a young city. Attitude towards young clients.

- A clear vision of how to achieve its social and commercial goals:
  - A clear vision of what they have to do with their clients. They focus on getting them back to school or work in a short period of time
  - Well-organised primary process (intake, start-up of pathway); precise management, business-like character
  - Being able to deliver all requested data on results quickly (transparency)

However without the following factors, Challenge Sports would not have been quite so successful:

- Flexibility towards customer-demands (municipal Youth Counter): able to handle a large number of people, organised on constant inflow of new clients
- Cost effectiveness and being cheaper than other suppliers of re-integration services: “A *light programme*”, or, according to Challenge Sports, “*not heavier and more expensive than necessary.*”

#### **6.4 Policy recommendations, transferability**

Challenge Sports shows that commercial enterprises can contribute to public values and goals, as long as public or private investments into these businesses are aimed at long-term, sustainable results.

The referral process from Youth Counter to Challenge Sports (and other provisions) could be improved further. Approximately 16% of the potential participants do not start due to administrative problems, mismatches in interventions in the intake period, et cetera.

Just as in the case of the other interventions available in Rotterdam, clear municipal indicators to help decide to which facility the clients should be referred are lacking. There is need for improvement here.

This case also highlights the importance and difficulties of setting up a local monitoring system. Focussing on keeping track of young people over a long period (2- 5 years) of time. Much has been improved in the referral system itself, and in the exchange of information and forms of consultation between the public and private actors during the pathways. But individual developments over a longer period of time are not monitored at all. Data from existing instruments such as the SSM are not used for monitoring or other research. There is knowledge and experience at the services that can be used by the municipality to organise a monitoring system that supports practitioners (at the municipality and at the services).

Research centring on the interaction of young people’s coping strategies and (public) interventions is rare but seems necessary for matching interventions as well as possible to abilities and ambitions of young people themselves.

Being a light and flexible intervention can be a danger for the continuation of the Challenge Sports, if the municipality wants to reorganise its support towards more tailor-made care for the most vulnerable groups and that process of analysis decides that parts of the current Challenge Sports target groups need more care. It will be hard for Challenge Sports to prove that it is able to work for more vulnerable groups, since there is only limited information on the nature of its participants, or on what their methodology contributes to various groups. In

addition, Challenge Sports could benefit from (its own or coordinated) efforts to provide evidence for its social impact claims. Do its participants go to school because of the intervention, or would part of them go anyhow after some time? How could the value of the intervention be perceived in terms of its contribution to bridging certain periods of time and preventing 'problems' (e.g. lethargy, growing financial problems, nuisance and crime) getting worse?

As in other projects, the fact that almost all of the 2500 young people that are supported by the Youth Counter for a longer period of time (i.e. receive social assistance and are directed to work, education or care) have debts (*"and we only start counting from €2000 on"*, according to a policy officer) is a growing and important problem. Each individual contract that Challenge Sports signs for its services includes that financial problems have to be tackled. *"But that is impossible to do in a pathway of 3 months."* In addition, all policy makers and practitioners emphasize that debts are still an underestimated problem, which also frustrates progress on other problems. These problems are worsened by the fact that the full extent of financial distress often reveals itself only after weeks or even months. The 'debt problem' is still underestimated and the cooperation between Youth Counter, specialised public and private services and provisions should be improved.

Information from this case suggests that the schools have difficulties keeping young people with behavioural problems 'on board' and calls for innovative ways to combine interventions on behaviour and attitude with the task of knowledge transfer. Connecting better with these often vulnerable young people is a major challenge.

## References

Challenge Sports (2014). *Rotterdam on the move. Reintegration and sports*, nr. 5, 2014.

Challenge Sports (2013) Rotterdam in beweging. Reintegratie en sport, nr. 4, 2013.

Toetscommissie Interventies Jeugd (2014). *Toetsing interventies Jongerenloket Rotterdam*. Rotterdam: Gemeente Rotterdam. [Assessment Committee Youth Interventions (2014): *Assessment Interventions Youth Counter*]

<http://www.challenge-sports.nl/>

<http://www.metronieuws.nl/binnenland/2013/05/gemeente-bespaart-een-miljoen-met-sporttraject-jongeren>

## **Appendix 1 Respondents**

- Founder/general director Challenge Sports
- manager Challenge Sports
- coach Challenge Sports
- policy advisor social development department City of Rotterdam
- 6 participants: 1 woman, 5 men, age 21-27, 5 of them from minority groups mainly born in the Netherlands, 5 unemployed and without basic qualifications, 4 directed towards education, 1 planning for a combination of work and education, 1 former participant now accepted in a job, following in company training