



BENSON COMMUNITY PROJECT

- **Engaged over 1000+ residents in Smethwick with Wellbeing, Sport 4 Good and family activities**
- **Worked with Smethwick Police to effectively reduce Youth crime by 77% over the year**
- **Won Community Ambassador award in line with WM Police partnership work in July**
- **Successfully signposted young people at risk to mainstream employment and 60+ joined an affiliated football team.**
- **November 2017 – won the Community Impact award at the Black Country Sport & Physical Activity Awards**
- **December 2017 – won the Community Impact award at the West Midlands Community Sports Awards**

Benson Community Project has made a significant contribution to overcoming barriers and improving the uptake of sport or physical activity in the Black Country by working with various organisations.

In particular their work with social care is key, and interventions into activity for gender realignment, mental health and asylum seekers is vital to the success of Benson's story.

They never say no or judge and ensure that there is always a way. An offer that's appropriate and welcoming is the key to this. Yes, there is sport and physical activity but people come for Paul and Errol's warm and belonging behaviours.

All Bensons work is free, and when costed up against participants the throughput was over 10,000+ with an average cost per head of 33p a year if you were to pay for their sessions.

The project links with Food Banks, Care Homes, Churches and Social Services in Smethwick and Rood End regularly and links are made on a need by need basis to cater for individuals.

Some participants from Care Homes and Social Services have now become volunteers within the programme.

The project is innovative in its approach. There are 6 offers a week based on free times at local facilities such as Hadley Stadium, Lightwoods Park and Victoria Park. The Benson Van goes anywhere where there is a need.

Through linking with the FA, through word of mouth, there is the Benson Fair Play reward for showing good citizen values. The reward is a Benson shirt. Many a child family member has been seen wearing this with pride in and around Smethwick.

The family games at Lightwoods park every Sunday support either rest bite activities for Grandparents or families or those who just want to play together in a fun and friendly atmosphere.

Activities such as Mousehunt (orienteering), Family Cricket, hoopla and other traditional games are stalwart to the Sunday offer. This happens in rain, sun or wind. A drink and cup of tea are also key to the connection activities.

Soho and Victoria in Smethwick are made up of a diverse community, with 25.1% of the community being White, 22.6% of people being Pakistani, 14.8% Indian and 2% Bangladeshi. This area has one of the lowest levels of full time employment.

Benson opens a door to being accepted and in an area of high socio economic deprivation, low income and high unemployment. They have an offer that is free, safe and welcoming with no bias towards who you are.

The project has helped many people along the way.

Case Study 1: Romario, age 20 – Known to Police as a knife carrier. Benson supported him to gain a qualification and he is now a volunteer at Thursday activities at Hadley Stadium. Romario also now has a job as well as volunteering. Previously to engaging with Benson, he wasn't given a chance due to his past record and history of crime. Benson embraced him.

Case Study 2: Mark – Gender Re-Alignment – 3:1 social care due to depression, drug use and risk of offending. With the support of Benson, Mark gradually went down to 1:1 support and took a role helping Benson manage and collect data at sessions. Mark is still a volunteer and looking at opportunities to attend college.

Benson even has a Bike repair and maintenance man at Victoria Park to encourage self-maintenance and the fixing of bikes. This is a regular occurrence to incorporate the usage of bikes when often it's expensive to replace or fix.



Paul and Errol are there 50 weeks a year and 6 days a week, and have inspired so many to take part, go places and become a valuable member of the community where others have judged.

“In over 15 years of work in this industry we have never come across an organisation that does the range of work with success, numbers and community touch as Benson. To add to this Erroll, Paul and the team of volunteers do this for free and only pay for revenue things such as facility cost and equipment (often from their own pocket). They are there 50 weeks a year and 6 days a week and have inspired so many to take part, go places and become a valuable member of the community where others have judged that they aren't welcome.”

Rus Smith (Street Games) & Luke Bowles (Birmingham County FA)
