

ICHOOSE2BACTIVE HOLIDAY CAMP



United
Through
Sport

Background

Walmer Township (also known as Gqebera) is a township in Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa. Walmer Township is a low-income area plagued by many challenges associated with poverty including unemployment, HIV and AIDS, alcohol and drug abuse, crime and low levels of education. While some formal structures and government houses have been built in the area, many homes in the township are informal structures, known as “shacks”, built from scrap materials which offer insufficient shelter to the families living inside of these self-built homes, during the cold winter and hot summer months when they are exposed to the elements.

Many children are orphaned, adopted or live in child-headed households because of HIV and AIDS, substance abuse and crime. Breaking the poverty cycle is a challenge for the youth of Walmer Township, with only two primary schools and one high school serving over 20 000 residents of the township (2011 Census Results). During school holidays, township children are even more exposed to the social ills in their community.

United Through Sport uses sport as a tool to develop children in Nelson Mandela Bay. This is done by discussing critical issues (HIV and Aids) in a fun and interactive manner on the sports field and using direct sports coaching for its health benefits, improved emotional well-being and increased life skills.

Holiday Camp

The life skills associated with playing sport, like respect and discipline, as well as making the community more aware of the health benefits associated with playing sport, were at the core of the goals and outcomes of a holiday camp hosted in Walmer Township from Tuesday, October 2 to Friday, October 5.

The theme of the camp was “IChoose2BActive”, empowering the 147 youth and children who attended the 4-day camp to make healthy choices every day. The average age of the children who attended the camp, which was hosted at Walmer Primary School, was 9 years old. A morning event titled “IChoose2BActive”, which was co-hosted by Sports for Social Change Network (SSCN) and United Through Sport proceeded the holiday camp on Tuesday, October 2. The holiday camp kicked off straight after lunch.

The attending children were divided into similar-sized groups according to their ages and stayed in their specific groups for the remainder of each day of the holiday camp. The groups alternated between various sport stations including Rugby, Soccer (Football), Netball, Basketball and Cricket. The younger pre-school children were entertained with various Arts and Crafts projects every day.

The sports groups followed a rotational schedule, which resulted in every child getting the opportunity to play all the different sports by the end of each day. Sport sessions started at 10:30 with the last sessions ending at 14:00. The children also had a short lunch break at 12:00.

Challenges

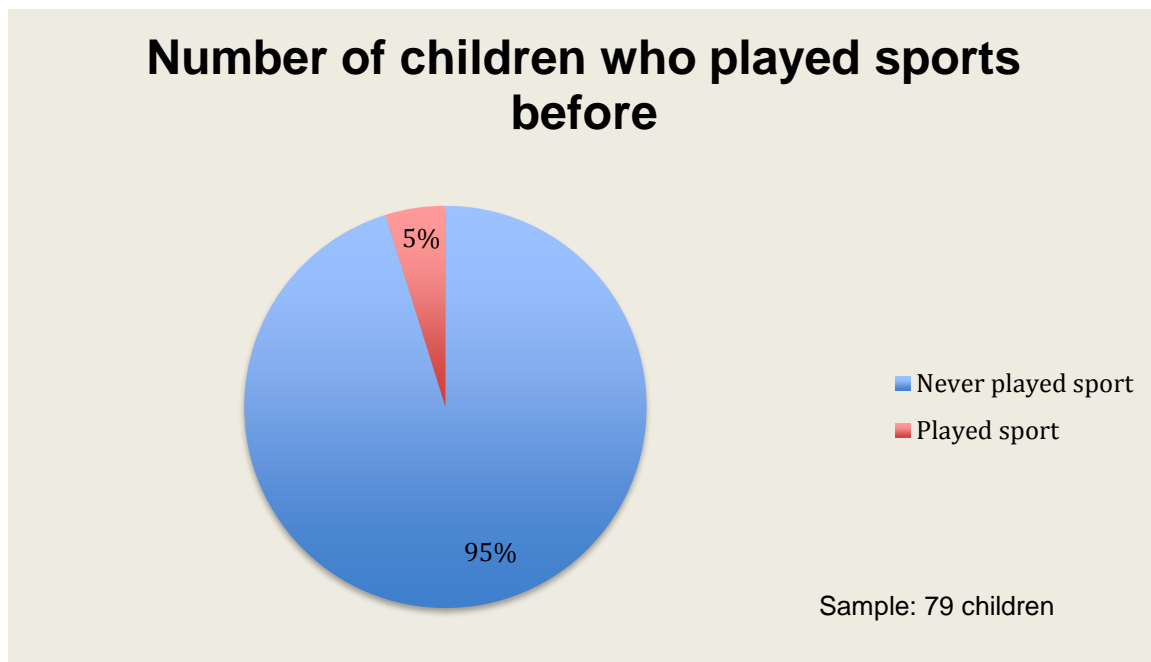
On the first day of the holiday camp, the number of children who showed up for the event were lower than expected. This was due to challenging weather conditions (wind and rain), as well as the children not being aware of the camp.

The schedule for the first day was adjusted, as the groups were smaller, and the rotating times changed. Despite the low number of children on day one, the day still went well, with lots of engagement and interaction with the children. Best of all, the children came back the next day – bringing more of their friends and neighbours with them.

Results

During the holiday camp, research was conducted on the children's involvement in sport. They were asked about their sport experience, interest and level at which they played sport. Many children answered that they had never received coaching or played sport at a formal level.

In fact, a total of 95% of the children indicated that they had never played sport. This is indicative of the children's environment: Walmer Township has very few sports facilities and the schools offer limited or no after school sport activities.

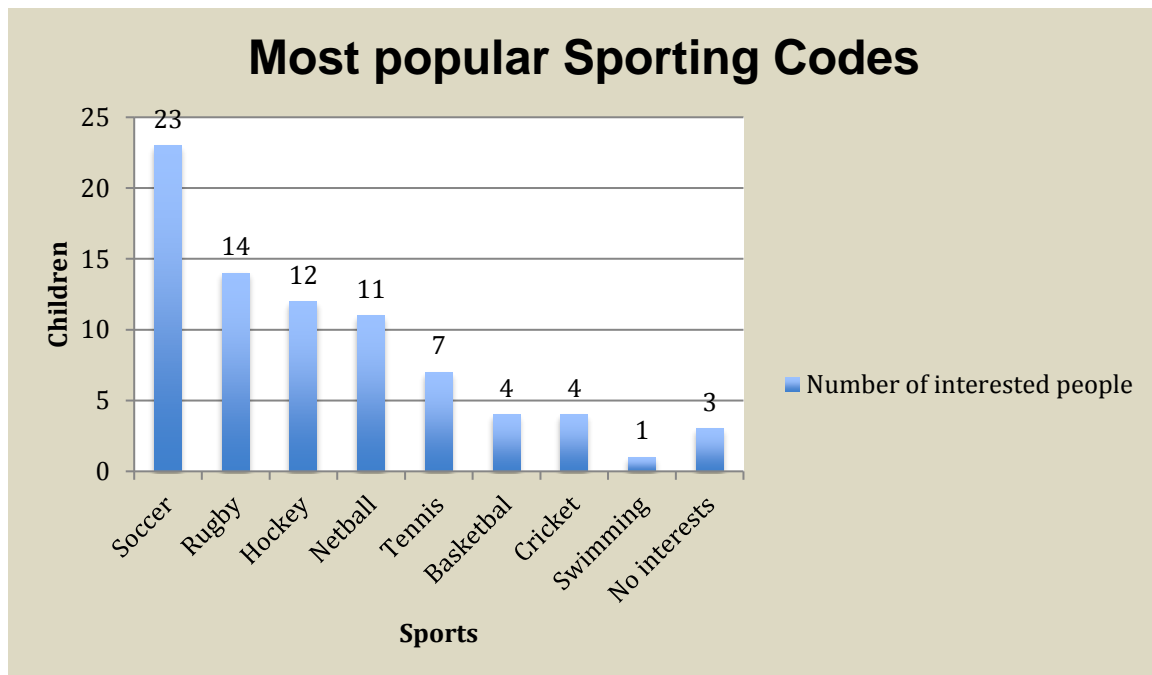


Introducing the children to sport, and the life-skills associated with sport, was a very valuable exercise for the area of Walmer Township. Sport teaches children crucial life skills such as respect, discipline and teamwork. During the week, the coaches experienced the children's joy at the opportunity to play sport and getting individual attention and group coaching in the various sporting codes.

The children’s sport skills massively improved as the week progressed – with many children discovering the power of sport for the first time. The children were encouraged to exercise and play sport, not only for the associated health benefits, but also to have fun with their friends through positive interaction.

Interestingly, our research also found that the sport that the biggest number of children preferred to play, was Soccer. Of the 23 children who selected Soccer (Football), only three were girls. The second most popular sport amongst the children surveyed was Rugby. Soccer and Rugby are very popular sports in South Africa.

Many children did not want to rotate to other sporting codes during the holiday camp, as they loved playing Rugby and Soccer so much. Several boys continued to play rugby on the field even after the camp had finished -as the coaches left on the busses. This showed a real skills transfer and impact on the children – by getting them active, engaged and excited about sport.



Conclusion

The holiday camp ran smoothly, with no major challenges experienced. The fact that the children came back everyday, was proof that they enjoyed the activities. Being introduced to structured sports coaching, the children showed a real hunger and enthusiasm for playing sport.

The interaction between the children and the coaches was very positive and energetic. The children had a lot of fun and learnt a great deal about a variety of different sporting codes. The camp empowered the children with new sporting skills, to practice at home and at school. The holiday camp also offered a place for the participants to be safe and secure, with positive role models engaging them in healthy activities.



After Soccer (Football), Rugby was one of the most popular sporting codes played during the Walmer Township Holiday Camp.



A total of 95% of the children surveyed at the Walmer Township Holiday Camp, had never played formal sport.



Pre-school children who attended the camp, were entertained with various Arts and Crafts every day.



Sports prizes were given out to children who performed particularly well during the first day of the fitness challenge of the camp.