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**Sport and physical activity in the lives of looked-after children: A ‘hidden group’ in research, policy and practice**

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## **Abstract**

Looked-after children are arguably one of the most disadvantaged groups in society and constitute a 'hidden group' in relation to sport and physical activity research, policy and practice. Research *on* looked-after children has explored the views of care-givers, practitioners and policy-makers who have often been asked to speak for children on their behalf. Through the use of the mosaic approach and innovative participatory methods, including peer interviewing, the purpose of this paper was to provide an insight into a new area of research in the field of sport and physical activity. As such, it reports on initial findings from a wider project *with* looked-after children that explores their sport and physical activity experiences. Specifically, it asks: (1) What are the sport and physical activity experiences of looked-after children? (2) What meanings and values do looked-after children ascribe to their engagement in sport and physical activity? Findings from the voices of four male looked-after children highlight that these young people used sport as a means to an end; to spend time with friends and develop stocks of social capital. However, due to changes in placement they also experienced disrupted patterns of engagement coupled with additional institutional constraints that shaped access to sporting activities.

**Key words:** Participatory methods; mosaic approach; peer interviewing; looked-after children

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## **Introduction**

In the last decade, research in sport, physical activity and physical education has experienced a methodological shift that aims to give voice to young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds (e.g., Burrows, Wright & Jungersen-Smith, 2002; Macdonald et al., 2004). However, there are still some ‘groups’ of young people that remain unrepresented. For instance, looked-after children (a diverse group often subjected to specific forms of vulnerability and social marginalisation) constitute a ‘hidden group’ in relation to sport and physical activity research, policy and practice. The term ‘looked-after’ was introduced in England by the Children Act 1989 to refer to those young people who have been removed from their family and placed in the care of local authorities (in children’s homes or foster care<sup>i</sup>). They may be subject to compulsory care orders or, for various reasons, be accommodated voluntarily at the request of, or by agreement with, their parents (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NSPCC], 2012).

In March 2012, there were approximately 67,050 looked-after children in England (Department for Education [DfE], 2012); 75 per cent of whom (50,260) lived in foster care, while around 9 per cent (5,930) were looked-after in children’s homes (DfE, 2012). In comparison, approximately 40,000 children were living in out-of-home care in Australia during 2012 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013), while in 2011, there were an estimated 400,000 children living in care in America (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). In the UK, a growing body of evidence suggests that a significant gap remains between the quality of their lives and those of all other children. Looked-after children often experience a disrupted education; in 2006 only 12 per cent achieved 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE<sup>ii</sup> compared to 59 per cent of all children (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2007). In addition, 45 per cent of looked-after children were reported to have a mental health disorder compared with around 10 per cent of the general population (DfES, 2007). These

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issues appear to be related to placement instability (Scott, 2011), with disrupted attachment thought to contribute to many of the commonly recognised risky behaviours looked-after children display (e.g., drug and alcohol misuse, crime involvement [Broad and Monaghan, 2003]).

Not surprisingly, Sempik, Ward and Darker (2008, p. 122) noted that young people who become looked-after are already among ‘the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society’. Prior to their entry into care, they tend to live in low income, lone parent households in deprived neighbourhoods and may have been exposed to violence, poverty and parental substance abuse (McAuley & Davis, 2009; Scott, 2011). It is thought that enabling looked-after children to engage in sport and physical activity ‘equal to their peers’ may provide fruitful opportunities to enhance their physical and psychological wellbeing (DfES 2007, p. 10). This belief that sport and physical activity can aid young people’s social and moral development through its inherent ‘character building’ capacities and has led to their use as tools for re-engaging disaffected youth (Sandford & Duncombe, 2011). A growing body of international research suggests that sport can help strengthen relationships and promote ‘active citizenship’, build resilience and address social problems of disadvantage and exclusion through the generation of social capital (Bailey, 2005). Hence, engagement with sport and physical activity may alleviate looked-after children’s earlier disadvantages and provide secure, stable, affectionate relationships in one sphere of life (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). However, this field still lacks a significant body of work engaging with looked-after children to explore their engagement with sport and physical activity nor the meaning, value and relevance it has in their lives.

To gauge a more nuanced understanding of looked-after children that incorporates the interconnections between the care setting, other socio-cultural factors and pays attention to individual agency, Winter (2006) called for the wider use of sociological understandings in

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research and policy. Often, research *on* looked-after children has explored the views of care-givers, practitioners and policy-makers who have been asked to speak for children in research studies. While not devaluing these perspectives, conducting research *with* looked-after children, may provide different perspectives and insights (Holland, 2009) that would enrich understanding of this very complex field. Drawing from a wider, on-going project this paper provides initial insights into a new area of research by highlighting the voices of four looked-after children from one residential children's home and their experiences of sport and physical activity. Specifically, it asks:

- (1) What are the sport and physical activity experiences of looked-after children?
- (2) What meanings and values do looked-after children ascribe to their engagement in sport and physical activity?

## **Methodology**

This paper views young people as competent and skilled social agents capable of reflecting upon, understanding and articulating their own experience (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). As such, the wider study drew from the mosaic approach and sought to engage with looked-after children through a variety of participatory research methods. The mosaic approach acknowledges young people and adults as co-constructors of meaning through a combination of the visual and the verbal (Clark & Moss, 2001). It is a participatory, multi-method approach whereby young people's own research artefacts (photographs, maps, drawings, etc.) are joined to talk and observations to gain deeper understanding of their perspectives and everyday lives (Clark & Moss, 2001). It involves participants gathering documentation and generating research artefacts (each providing a piece of the mosaic) before piecing together such information for dialogue, reflection and interpretation (Clark & Moss, 2001).

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In seeking to capture the voices of looked-after children, this research recognised the benefits of using participatory methods to provide pieces of the mosaic, give voice to vulnerable, ‘hidden’ young people, and highlight the issues/challenges they faced. Participatory research methods “facilitate participants in finding their own language to articulate what they know... and share understandings of their worlds” (Enright & O’Sullivan, 2012, p. 36). Since looked-after children were not involved in designing the research, “participatory techniques provide participants with control over the agenda and how information is provided” (Kendrick, Steckley & Lerpiniere, 2008, p. 82). The informal nature also encourages participation and reduces anxiety for young people who are anxious about their reading or communication skills (Clark & Statham, 2005). That said, it is thought that a combination of traditional ‘adult’ methods and child-centred methods should be used with young people so that they are not patronised by using only child friendly techniques (Punch, 2002; Clark & Statham, 2005).

### *Access and ethical considerations*

Gaining access to looked-after children living in residential care was a time-consuming and complex process requiring multiple levels of negotiation and discussion with various gatekeepers. Access was granted first from the Virtual Head<sup>iii</sup>, then the service delivery manager and finally the primary gatekeeper (the children’s home manager). Hood, Kelley and Mayall (1996, p. 120) refer to this as ‘a hierarchy of gatekeeping’ running from the organisational level to the ‘parents’ (or in this case corporate parents<sup>iv</sup>) and finally the child. Consent to conduct the research was negotiated through the local authority and provided in loco parentis by the children’s home manager. As Kendrick et al. (2008, p. 88) suggest, “there is the possibility that they [looked-after children] have been placed there because of abuse by their parents, or because there has been a breakdown in relationships in the family”.

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It may therefore not be appropriate nor in the best interests of the child to approach their parent(s) for consent (Kendrick et al., 2008).

### *The participants and home in context*

Data generation took place between February and July 2013 at Westerly Residential Children's Home<sup>v</sup>; a local authority run home in Yorkshire, England, that housed five boys aged between 12 and 17. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation it is situated in an area considered to be among the most deprived neighbourhoods in England, with high crime and low health and educational attainment. The home comprised a front and rear garden that held several free range chickens. Inside, the entrance hall gave way to a large lounge with mounted TV, dining room and kitchen with an additional office for staff. All bedrooms were upstairs. Of the five boys living in the children's home, four chose to participate in the research. Matt was the oldest at 17 years of age and had been living in the home for 16 months. He regularly attended college, studying English, Maths and ICT. He had mixed feelings about sport and physical activity and indicated he much preferred ICT and media. The other three boys were slightly younger with Pete, 14, the next oldest. Pete enjoyed talking about his sport and activity experiences and had been living in Westerly for almost two years. Like Pete, Adam had been living there for about two years and, at the time the study began, was 13 years old. Adam was quite close with Matt, with the two occasionally playing cricket in the back garden or out in the street. The final participant was Nathan who was 12 years old and had also been living there for two years. Nathan was at his happiest when he was interacting and talking to people. All of the boys living in this home had a variety of special education needs (SEN) including emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) which meant interactions were often short.



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### ***Methods: Listening to Looked-After Children***

During the initial stages of the wider project a variety of methods were created and employed. Initial observations were conducted throughout the period of fieldwork alongside other forms of data generation. Weekly visits to the children's home lasted between 45 minutes – 1.5 hours, with observations and field notes recorded in a notebook. Writing notes about activity was not a new situation for these young people with observations by social workers and care home staff 'part of their normal routine'. That said, the observations and accompanying field notes allowed for an understanding of the care home context and ensured the researcher got to know participants and vice versa (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). These also informed other participatory methods and the final individualised interviews allowing other pieces of the mosaic to be captured.

After preliminary fieldwork observations, participants were given as much choice as possible over how they participated in the research. Several meetings were held with the aim of being creative and flexible in each encounter. For instance, timelines were chosen by the boys to express their engagement with sport and physical activity. These are a popular communication tool used by social workers and provide simple ways to interpret the influence that different contexts and time have on an individual's current life (e.g., in this context, the impact different life transitions/placements have on their engagement with sport and physical activity) (Deacon, 2006; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). Using a template, participants were asked to identify their engagement with different sports and physical activities and the 'critical incidents' that have positively or negatively impacted their engagement. Critical incidents were defined as incidents they saw as having an important consequence for their relationship with sport and physical activity (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012). Drawings and written text were then used to identify these incidents on their timelines (e.g. figure 1).

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It was hoped that using a range of visual artefacts to elicit conversation would better inform understanding of young people's experiences of sport and physical activity. Hence, participants also chose to use a rating system to help express reasons *why* they engaged in such activities. Rating scales, if designed correctly, have the potential to offer useful insights into young people's preferences (Airey, Plowman, Connolly & Luckin, 2002). Here, participants first drew or wrote words/phrases on paper that summarised why they engaged in sport. These were then printed, cut out and stuck onto a coloured target whereby the closer they positioned the word/phrase to the centre, the more importance it had for them (e.g. figure 2).

In order to maintain the participatory nature of the research methods, the discussions of these artefacts were led by the participants themselves and formed the basis of peer interviewing. Peer interviewing is a process that involves individuals conducting interviews with a member of their peer group. To date, there is limited literature on the use of this technique with young people of this age; somewhat surprising since the benefits of involving young people in research include them being able to help put peers at ease in interviews and make the setting less formal (Kirby, 2004). However, peer interviews have been used previously with young people aged 18 and over from care backgrounds (Munro, Lushey, Ward & National Care Advisory Service, 2011) In addition, one of the few studies in the broad field of sport to utilise peer interviewing explored young disabled people's PE and sporting experiences and found it particularly useful in gaining meaningful insights from respondents of a similar age with shared common experiences (Fitzgerald, Jobling & Kirk, 2003). Perhaps more importantly, the students in that study were fully engaged throughout and felt a sense of achievement at completing the interviews (Fitzgerald et al., 2003). Ultimately, involving young people through peer interviews can help redress power imbalances between researchers and the researched and maximise opportunities to hear

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young people's views and explore their experiences (Kilpatrick, McCartan, McAlister & McKeown 2007; Kirby, 2004). Here, after each artefact was created a short training session was held with participants about the ethics of interviewing. They then engaged in a mock interview/role play activity with feedback and questions. Following this, the interview questions were developed in collaboration with the participants meaning the language and terminology employed was accessible to all of the boys, with topics that reflected the issues that the peer researchers perceived to be critical within the overall frame of research. This formed a semi-structured interview protocol concerning the artefacts. The participants then took turns to interview each other about the research artefact. They were encouraged to ask follow up questions and use probes, though the researcher and staff members were on hand for further guidance. The resulting discussions were recorded and later transcribed.

### *Analysis*

Data analysis was on-going throughout the research process with findings from each phase used to inform and develop later phases of data generation. Peer interview texts, research artefact discussions, observations and field notes were thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2008). In an effort to help understand the place of sport and physical activity, and how wider structural conditions meet to influence looked-after children's choices, consideration in the analysis was given to the social theory of Bourdieu. Used here, Bourdieu's (1984) work can be applied to explore not just the lived experiences of individuals, but also the social conditions that shape and limit that experience. After multiple readings of the texts, the raw data were coded based on prior and emergent themes and simultaneous memos were recorded. Following this, codes were collated into potential themes before a thematic map was generated (Cohen et al., 2011). The themes and patterns within the data were identified in both an inductive ('bottom up') and deductive (theoretical

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or ‘top down’) way (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The former ensured that themes identified were strongly linked to the data themselves (similar to grounded theory) without trying to fit them into a pre-existing coding frame. Despite this, it is important to note that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments (Braun & Clarke, 2008) and, as such, deductive analysis was also employed as this allowed for a more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The resultant themes were then refined, whereby negative cases that contradict emergent patterns were sought to expand, adapt or restrict the original construct to help tell the overall story (Cohen et al., 2011). It is important to remember that these emergent themes are based on the voices of four looked-after children only, and are therefore unique to their particular social space and relationships pertaining to a given time and place. Since analysis was conducted immediately after a data collection session, participants were asked during the following week to comment on transcriptions, which provided an opportunity to modify information and share preliminary findings with the co-researchers (Fitzgerald et al., 2003).

## **Findings**

Three common themes emerged from the analysis of the participants voices. The first theme (*‘disrupted patterns of engagement’*) deals with the critical incidents that have impacted their lives and shaped their engagement with sport and physical activity. The second theme (*‘institutional constraints’*) is concerned with the structural conditions of their lives that further shape engagement whilst living in care. The final theme *‘sport as a means to an end’*) explores the reasons behind their engagement and the values they ascribe to sport and physical activity. As mentioned earlier, the following discussions use Bourdieu’s notions of habitus, capital and field to interpret the, albeit brief, descriptions of the four young men’s lives and their engagement with sport and physical activity.

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### *Disrupted patterns of engagement*

Changes in placements and consequently schools mean that for the majority of looked-after children, school attendance is problematic (Murray, 2012). As such, looked-after children often miss out on school-based sporting activities and are more dependent on out-of-school activities than other children. What is apparent in this study is that changes in placement may also impact on engagement with sport and physical activity outside of school.

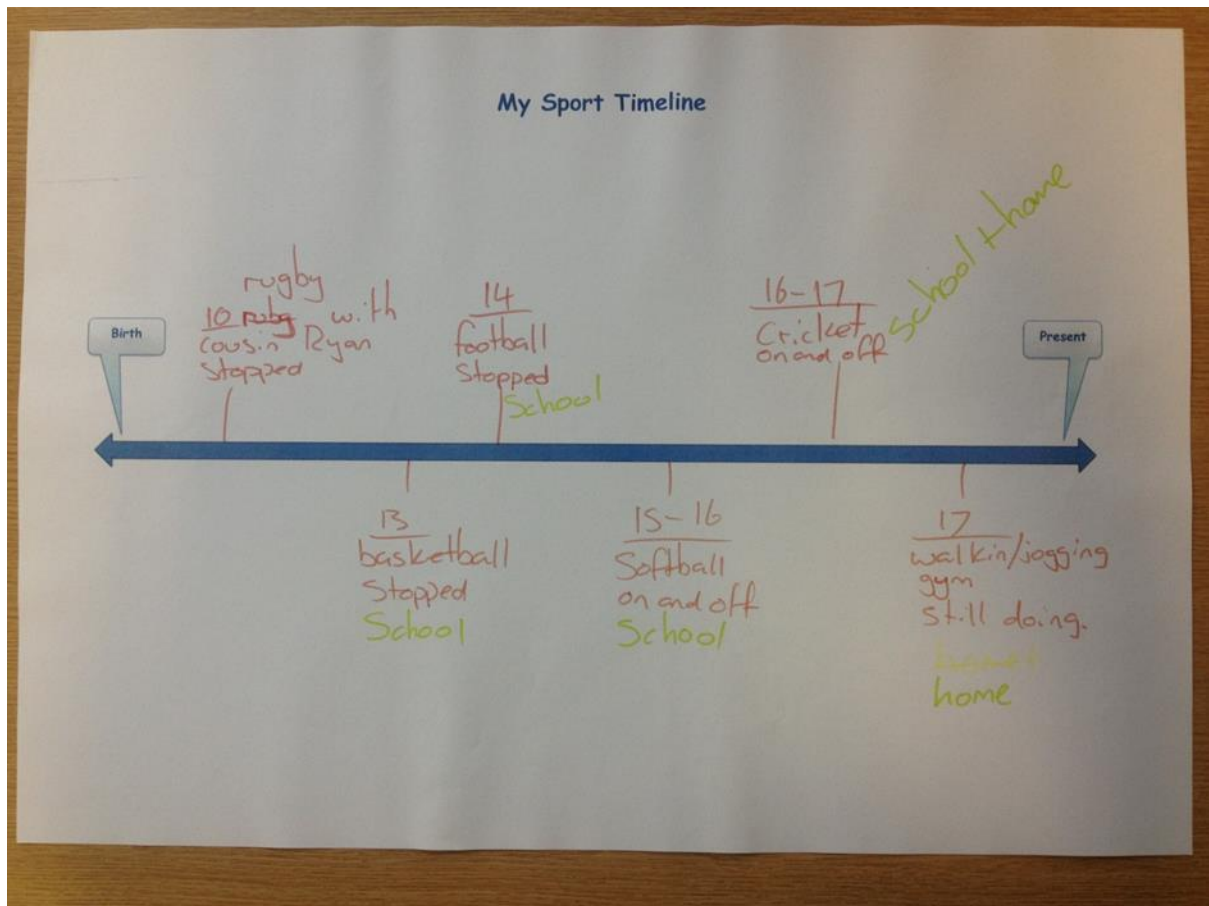
For example, during one peer interview about his sport timeline (figure 1), Matt revealed to Adam that placement moves and subsequent changes in residential home have prevented him playing sport regularly with his cousin, who now lives further away than previously:

Adam: *Why did you stop any sports or activities?*

Matt: Most of them because I, most of them were in school so, obviously I've moved school loads so I've stopped playing them now and I stopped playing rugby with my cousin cos he lives too far away now that I've moved again.

It is argued that prolonged participation in sports activities may be an important source of stability and consistency for those living in or leaving care, as it helps re-establish some sense of structure to their lives (Farineau & McWey, 2011). However, even continued participation in sporting activities appears problematic due to substantial, continual changes in care placements. Fong, Schwab and Armour (2006) proposed that if placement continuity is not possible for certain looked-after children then continuity of activities would allow that young person to maintain regular, familiar and/or 'normalising' activities, which might minimise the disruptive effect of placement in care.

### **Figure 1: Matt's Sporting Timeline**



Echoed in the voices of Nathan and Pete were further examples of the impact of placement instability. During their discussions of their timelines both reported that moving home was a reason for disengaging from sport and physical activity. Pete, for instance, indicated that he stopped horse riding because he moved care homes and later suggested that this was also a reason why he stopped dance.

Pete: Erm, the dancing is the best so far yeah, so far yeah, but erm I stopped it for two years and I'm gonna be starting it back up again

Nathan: *Why did you stop it for two years?*

Pete: I quit because I moved home so couldn't get there anymore and now I'm starting again hopefully in a few weeks' time... at a different place though.

During his peer interview with Pete, Nathan also discussed the impact that placement moves have had on his engagement with sport, though unlike the others, he has been fortunate enough to pick up those activities again: *"Yeah, I have stopped football and scouts because*

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*I've had to move, but erm, I think I've been lucky to start it again quite quickly but at a different place with people I don't know".*

Bourdieu's (1984) notion of field can be used here to help explain this fluctuating sport and activity engagement. Bourdieu (1984) referred to social space as "fields", which he defined as sites where beliefs and values are established and imposed on the people within them through the various relationships and practices that occur. It could therefore be argued that the children's home, a particular social space where they live and interact with others in a hierarchical relationship, can be viewed as a field. This 'field' can nurture sport and physical activity preferences, interests and tastes (the conscious expression of habitus) (Bourdieu, 1984). However, for these young people this immediate field (the children's home and the individuals within it) is often in a state of flux, shifting with each placement move as they are introduced to new agents (new staff and other looked-after children). As well as changes in this field, placement moves often result in changes in school (another field) meaning their position within these new fields (where sport and physical activity could be accessed) had to be renegotiated each time.

### ***Institutional constraints***

As mentioned above, Bourdieu's (1984) concepts place an emphasis on the relationship between structure and agency and were employed to provide a means of analysing the workings of the social world. The structural factors considered are those of children's home environment and associated rules and policies of the wider care system. Agency on the other hand refers to an individual's ability to make free choices, to control how they shape their lives and manifests (in this context) in the type of sport and physical activity choices adopted. Here, it was evident that agency for these looked-after children was a constant struggle with the broader structures of the field that shaped their lives. For instance, early observations

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(detailed below) of the children's home indicate that specific rules and routines impact on young people's ability to engage in certain activities:

*On several occasions today I witnessed the boys asking permission of care home staff to stay out later, play at the park or go biking with friends after school only to be told that they need to let staff know, the day before (before an allotted time), if they wanted to stay out later. This then needed to be negotiated with the care home manager and recorded on the weekly timetable. However, since dinner is usually served at 17.30, this would mean that the boys needed to be back by then anyway which gave them little time to engage in any sport or physical activity (Field note entry)*

While a lack of time was previously reported to be a key factor restricting leisure activities (including sports and physical activities) (Hollingworth, 2012), like these initial findings, this may result from structural and organisational policies (Gay, Dowda, Saunders & Evans, 2011). For instance, having to eat evening meals at set times and needing to negotiate time for activities with staff. This was similarly reported by Adam:

*Matt: What do you do now and why?*

*Adam: I do biking and cricket inside of school, which I want to do on Wednesdays if I can ask staff if they'll let me. But, it's on Wednesday after school so I probably won't do it; I'll probably just do it out here with Matt [pointing to outside of the house].*

This exchange demonstrated Adam's reluctance to ask staff if he could engage in a new activity not currently 'scheduled' for him. This may stem from previous experiences in care and should not necessarily be a reflection of the support provided in his current placement. Previously Macdonald et al. (2004) suggested that young people's physical activity is frequently a task to be managed in relation to the competing demands of other members of the field (in their case, the family). However, this takes on a whole new meaning for looked-



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after children whose relationships with those in the field (children's home) are less well defined. According to Bourdieu (1993), individuals exercise agency within existing social conventions and this was apparent here and in previous studies. For instance, Gay et al. (2011) found that some residential home policies may include rules that affect access to sport and physical activity opportunities (e.g., the provision of transportation to activities and scheduled activity time).

### *Sport as a means to an end*

Perhaps the biggest 'selling point' for sport and physical activity is that such activities may offer marginalised young people, such as looked-after children, an opportunity to reintegrate into mainstream society and develop social networks. Several studies from the UK and abroad have suggested that engagement in sporting activities can open new social relationships beyond the care system (Gilligan, 1999; Safvenbom & Samdahl, 2000). Hollingworth (2012) found that sport for those living in, or leaving care, enabled them to develop friendships and widen their social network, as well as mix and socialise in mainstream activities with young people who are not in care. This is particularly important for looked-after children who, due to past experiences, may find interacting with wider networks and communities particularly difficult (Safvenbom & Samdahl, 2000). Sport can therefore help facilitate social integration through the generation of social capital.

Social capital for refers to an individual's stock of "social connections" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47), that is, the relational networks that allow individuals to maximise their ability to convert capital into different forms. This notion of develop relational networks was evident here whereby sport and physical activity was valued for its instrumental value and as a means to an end. For instance, in his target activity (figure 2), Pete placed spending time with

friends as the most important reasons for engaging in sport and physical activity, with ‘sport for fun’ as one of the least important reasons.

**Figure 2: Pete’s Target Activity**



During a discussion of his artefact, Pete further commented that:

*My most important one, which is on the bulls eye or as call it, which I call it the red spot is to spend time with friends cos I normally spend time alone so first, is to spend time with friends because you have to get, you need to know what they're like and how they, and err you need to know what they're like and what are their favourite hobbies and food and they need to know anything about you. The second is to burn off energy and help my body... The very last one is to have fun.*

Developing social networks is key for looked-after children who often ‘experience a sense of being set apart from their community’ (Murray, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, Matt, Adam and

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Nathan voiced spending time with others as a main reason for engaging in sport and physical activity:

Nathan: Err... well mainly err that one [pointing to 'to keep my heart pumping'] and definitely that one [pointing to 'to spend time with friends'] cos you would spend time with your friends cos it's normally better. Spend time with your friends cos then you get in there and fit as well and you're getting yourself more exercise.

Matt: Yeah, because when I was younger, I didn't do sport a lot but it was good to try and make friends... so I did play to try and make friends.

Given how central this appears to their engagement in sport (alongside health and fitness benefits), it is worrying how easily disrupted their sport timelines appear. As discussed above, changes in field (that these looked-after children experience) also alter stocks of capital, which, alongside habitus and field, are vital in determining practice. These placement moves and subsequent changes in field particularly impact on these individuals possession of the necessary social (access to friends) and cultural capital (taste for particular sport and activities) that would afford them the agency to participate in sporting activities.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to provide an insight into a new area of research in the area of sport and physical activity. As such, it gives voice to a hidden group of looked-after children through the use of innovative methodologies and uses Bourdieu's key concepts to explore the emerging data. Though based on only a few voices, these initial findings indicate that while the barriers they face may be similar to other low income children, due to placement instability, they also experience disrupted sport/physical activity experiences that may alienate them further. Importantly, the various fields these individuals have encountered have

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all been significant in the development of their habitus, which is reflected in their tastes, values and choices. That said, for these young people, developing their habitus (expressed through taste for particular sports/activities) and stocks of (social) capital were often disrupted due to changes in placement. For Bourdieu, day to day activities are produced by an interaction of social structure and agency; an individual's capacity to act and make free choices. However, as Lisahunter (2004, p. 176) has argued that "acting as an agent may be mediated by influences that are beyond their conscious realisation". For instance, permission to engage in some sports/activities after school was a process that needed to be negotiated with care home staff. Despite this, developing social networks (capital) was one important reason for engaging in activity. It is important to remember, though, that due to the disrupted patterns of engagement, sport may not necessarily form a central or formative part of their lives at this particular point in time. It is not to say that sport/physical activity isn't important to these young people, but rather that its value to them should be placed in context with the wider circumstances of their lives. It should also be remembered that looked-after children are not a homogenous group (Armour, Sandford & Duncombe, 2011), and therefore it is important not to stereotype young people in care as having certain undisputable characteristics or tendencies.

Clearly further research is required to help understand the complex and multifaceted lives of these young people. Some of the tools employed here may be useful in future studies as there remains a paucity of research that young people design, conduct and disseminate with adult support rather than adult management. Despite the challenge of maintaining their commitment, these young people eventually took ownership of the process and helped produce useful insights that may have otherwise remained hidden. Not wanting to homogenise looked-after children, future research should explore difference with regard to gender, age, ethnicity and special education need of these young people, since those involved

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here were all white males. Within a formal educational setting, we know little about looked-after children's engagement with, and enjoyment of physical education and school sport and importantly, whether those in-school activities are reflective of activities looked-after children can engage in outside of school. As mentioned elsewhere in this special issue, a strengths based approach should also be considered when exploring further research in this area. Rather than approaching this field from a deficit perspective, it would be worth highlighting what these young people understand as conditions that *facilitate* engagement in existing and new settings. Finally, consideration should also be given to the voices of young people who are cared for in foster homes/families as well as those in institutional homes as they may experience different challenges altogether.

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Endnotes:

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<sup>i</sup> In the UK, looked-after children predominantly reside in foster care (where a child is cared for by a person or people who are not members of their birth family) or in children's homes (a care home that typically houses older children who may have behavioural issues that need addressing).

<sup>ii</sup> General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is an academic qualification awarded in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for those aged 14-16 in a range of disciplines.

<sup>iii</sup> Virtual Heads are appointed by local authorities and oversee the education of children in care within their authority.

<sup>iv</sup> Corporate parenting refers to the collective responsibility of all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, which work together to meet the needs of looked after children

<sup>v</sup> Westerly Residential Children's Home is a pseudonym, as are the names of the boys.