

# An Action Research Study with a Sports Themed Employability Charity: How Can Sport4Life Greater Evidence Their Social Impact?

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## Introduction

The Third Sector is under increasing pressure to greater evidence it's impact (Harlock, 2016). The researcher, in collaboration with the host charity, undertook a period of in-depth research, with a special focus on how Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) methods could better evidence a Social Impact. This poster will highlight the challenges the third sector faces evidencing 'softer' outcomes (Moxham & Boaden, 2007).

Establishing the link between academia and the "real world" was a difficult and complex process, with the researcher facing initial outsider issues (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) and having to gain the trust of the practitioners who were involved in the research process.

Key words: Monitoring and Evaluation, Evidencing Impact, Action Research, Third Sector, NEETS.



## Methods

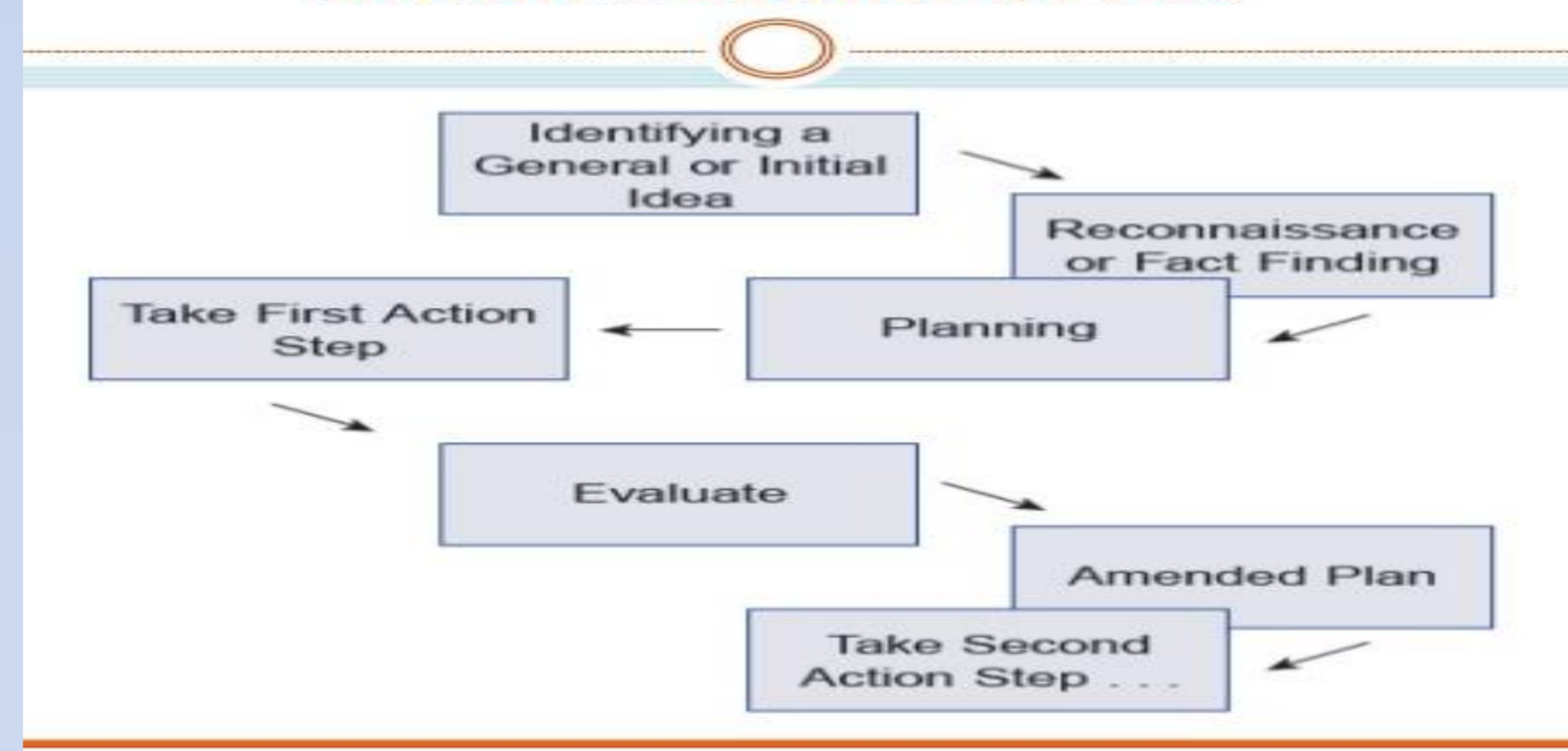
An Action Research model, pictured below, designed by Lewin (1946) was utilised. Action research is associated with changing practice in the workplace through the active engagement of those practitioners who reside within it (Gilbourne, & Richardson, 2005).

Elliott (1991) defined action research as a process that leads to improvement in the quality of action, while Dickson and Green (2001) perceived action research to lead to the "empowerment" of others.

Interviews, observations and focus groups were used for data collection purposes.

The researcher spent eleven months in-situ at the host charity, becoming fully ingrained with the working culture and practices.

## Lewin's Model of AR



## Key Findings

- M & E can be difficult to complete with young people who have little interest in completing paperwork.
- Tension can exist between deliverers (tracksuits) who are tasked with capturing raw M & E Data, and non-deliverers (suits) who have to compile impact reports.
- A Payment by Results Culture has resulted in M & E becoming a laborious task, as opposed to a key exercise that S4L can learn and grow from.
- The longer term impacts of attending a S4L course are not being captured sufficiently.
- Funders do acknowledge softer outcomes in S4L attendees, such as improved confidence and self-esteem, but more emphasis is placed on hard outcomes (NEET to EET)

## Recommendations from the Action Research Study

- The S4L delivery model when working with NEETS was altered, moving from a circular approach (recruit, deliver, mentor), a one size fits all approach, to a mentoring approach that is more bespoke to an individual's needs.
- Every NEET attendee at S4L now complete s a 10 Year Plan, a more relaxed form of M & E that will help S4L identify how they can best support a young person achieve their career goal.
- S4L will continue to work with NEETS in Birmingham who are furthest away from the job market, but will ensure that a new "Traffic Light" strategy is in place, so staff and funders are aware of the support a young person may need.
- Deliverers and non-deliverers must work with a greater synergy, with M& E data used for internal growth and job support, not just for ticking funders boxes.

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Sport4Life use sport as "the hook" (Spaaij, 2009) to engage TEENS and NEETs to help increase their life skills and employment opportunities.

A payment by results culture has transformed a charity that was originally set up very much for "Sports for Sports Sake" (Coalter, 2007), but now focuses on the "Use of Sport to Aid Employability Skills" (Spaaij, Magee & Jeanes, 2014)

## IMAGINE...

### Living in the top 10% most deprived wards in the UK

- > 100,000 children in Birmingham live in poverty. That's 37% of children in Birmingham.
- > 40% of Birmingham's population live in the top 10% most deprived areas in the UK.

### Making it very likely for you to leave school without a qualifications

- > Only 33% of young people from low income backgrounds achieve 5 A\* to C GCSEs.
- > Young people without a Level 2 qualification are over twice as likely to be NEET\* than those who do.

### And significantly more likely to be welfare dependant.

- > Long periods of unemployment make young people 7.9 times more likely to become NEET again, and unable to create a better future for themselves. This cycle continues onto the next generation.

### Leaving you with limited opportunities in life

- > Birmingham has the highest youth unemployment amongst core cities in the UK at 8.9% and over double the UK average (4.1%).
- > 15,100 young people in Birmingham are unemployed, with 6,320 claiming Job Seekers Allowance.