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Exploring the power of positive sporting role models in relation to the wellbeing of young people: The case of The Mintridge Foundation.

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Abstract

This project explored the role of the Mintridge Foundation sporting programmes in enhancing the wellbeing of young people through the power of positive sporting role models. Active participation in sport can enhance mental wellbeing and improve quality of life. However, Sport England (2018) found that 2.3 million children do not meet the national guidelines of 30 minutes of physical activity a day. Twelve participants, including past mentees, teachers and Mintridge Ambassadors took part in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis identified four themes: replacing pressure with fun; breaking down barriers and challenging sporting stereotypes; levelling the playing field by broadening horizons; and enhancing core transferable life skills. Whilst findings clearly demonstrate the impact of Mintridge Foundation programmes, challenges still exist in relation to physical activity being absent from health policy reports and the lack of government funding for such initiatives. Future research needs to continue to evaluate the role of charities in promoting active participation in sport, especially at grassroots level.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This project explored the role of the Mintridge Foundation programmes in enhancing the wellbeing of young people through the power of positive sporting role models. The Mintridge Foundation is a sports charity dedicated to enhancing the life skills of young people through the power of sport. Using their team of sporting role models (known as Ambassadors), they assist young people of all ages and abilities to develop and support their mental and physical wellbeing. The Youth Sports Trust believe that sport can be used to enhance the wellbeing of young people by addressing the challenges and pressures they are facing. They suggest that the benefits of physical activity are most effective when there is a focus on boosting the wellbeing of young people whilst nurturing life skills and incorporating inclusion (Youth Sports Trust 2021).

In contemporary British society, there are growing concerns about the physical and mental wellbeing of young people. Kessler (2007) suggested that half of mental illnesses emerge by the age of fourteen, with anxiety starting at around eleven years old (OECD 2012). One in six children aged 5-16 have a mental wellbeing disorder, such as depression, anxiety, and behaviour problems, which has increased by 5% since 2017 (NHS Digital 2020). The Mental Health Foundation (2021) suggest 75% of young people who experience a mental health problem are not getting the help or the support they need. Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, young people are experiencing heightened pressures in relation to trauma, bereavement and feelings of isolation (Young Minds 2021). The Children's Society (2021) found that roughly 250,000 children were mentally struggling to cope with lockdown restrictions and Young Minds (2021) reported that 67% of their respondents believed that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will have long term negative consequences on their mental wellbeing. As research evidence has clearly indicated a link between positive mental wellbeing and future success in relation to education, work, friends and stable relationships (Butler and Kern 2016) it is essential that policy addresses these growing concerns.

In relation to physical wellbeing, literature highlights the growing concerns of sedentary lifestyles and the impact this has on other health conditions. A sedentary lifestyle can increase the risks of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes and cancer (World Health Organisation 2012). NHS Digital (2020) found that obesity levels in primary school children have increased by 4.5% since 2019 and children living in deprived areas are twice as likely to be obese (NHS Digital 2020). Bailey (2005) notes that although physical activity can offer huge benefits for young people, from an early age, inequalities towards sporting opportunities can hinder young people's participation in sport. Therefore, there is a fundamental need to promote active sport participation to support both the physical and mental wellbeing of young people.

During lockdown, 68% of young people said their mental wellbeing was impacted and they reported increased feelings of stress, loneliness and worry (MIND UK 2020). Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (2021) suggested 94,000 fewer active young people in England compared to pre-pandemic activity. They also found that societal inequalities in relation to accessibility have heightened, and overall enjoyment of physical activity has decreased. The Centre for Social Justice (2020) called for sport to be accessible for all and suggested that at an individual level, sport is a protective factor against physical and mental wellbeing and at a societal level, sport can be used as a weapon for social transformation, enhancing positive long-term outcomes for the individual and wider society.

Chapter 2 will explore the beneficial link between regular physical activity and wellbeing and identify reasons as to why young people drop out of active participation in sport. Incorporating theories of role models, this chapter will then introduce current literature on the role of positive sporting role models in encouraging active participation levels of young people. In Chapter 3, I will detail the methodological approach and Chapter 4 will present the identified themes utilising relevant quotes from the interviews whilst also linking back to the literature. Chapter 5, will discuss the findings and future implications for sport and health policy before finally, making concluding remarks in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review will explore the beneficial link between regular physical activity and wellbeing before looking at the concerns around lack of sports participation. Theories of role models and the influential role they play in encouraging active participation in sport will then be explored before looking at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the role the Mintridge Foundation post pandemic.

2.1 The beneficial link between regular physical activity and wellbeing

Wellbeing is a multidisciplinary concept (Dodge et al 2012) defined by Huppert (2009) as “feeling good and functioning effectively” (page 1). Multiple studies have suggested that sport can have a positive impact on youth development, behaviour, wellbeing and quality of life (Eime et al 2013; Warburton et al 2006; Bird et al 2021; Vancini et al 2021; Arient 2006). In the long term, physiological, cognitive, and psycho-social competences can be acquired through participating in physical activity (Meier 2015; Youth Sports Trust 2021). The Centre for Social Justice also (2020) suggest that taking part in regular physical activity can reduce the risk of illnesses such as depression and the onset of early dementia. The charity, Made by Sports (nd) suggests that young people who take part in regular physical activity are over five times more likely to report increased resilience levels and twenty percent less likely to suffer from mental health issues (cited in Centre for Social Justice 2020). The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2015) identify that keeping physically active can enhance a range of mental wellbeing benefits such as feeling good about yourself, concentrating, focusing and improving quality of sleep, whilst also reducing anxiety and depression in young people (Biddle and Asare 2011). However, Sport England (2018) found that whilst three million children in England are active, 2.3 million of these do not meet the national guidelines of 30 minutes of physical activity a day. These findings clearly illustrate the importance of promoting young people's active participation in sport.

2.2 Concerns about lack of sports participation

Exploring the reasons why young people drop out of sport is fundamental for future policy implementation. Research suggests that increase in pressure; lack of female role models; and issues around accessibility and diversity in sport could be major contributing factors.

Increase in pressure

Sport England (2014) suggested that in a challenging economic environment, extra pressures have been added to the younger generations. Sport is becoming more serious, as life becomes more serious, resulting in a move from fun to function (Sport England 2014; Merkel 2013). Saez et al

(2021) looked at why young people drop out of sport. Using questionnaires from 813 participants, they found multiple factors such as excessive pressure, lack of enjoyment and bad sport results. They concluded that the goal of winning can hinder sport participation for young people which has a knock-on effect on physical and mental wellbeing. Kelley and Carchia (2013) found that 38% of girls and 39% of boys drop out of sport due to the lack of fun, with O'Sullivan (2015) adding that extra pressure from parents and coaches can increase anxiety, contributing to the dropout rate. Gould and Carson (2004) also noted how the specialisation of youth sports and the pressures to be the next elite athlete does not optimise the development of young people. The Youth Sports Trust (2021) also noted that confidence, competence and self-belief are key barriers to taking part in physical activity in school.

Literature also suggests that pressures of competitive sport and body image are heightened for girls, with Women in Sport (2019) suggesting a third of girls aged 14-16 are unhappy with their body image which is a critical factor contributing to the dropout rates of young girls (Koulanova et al 2021). Lunde and Gattario (2017) note how young girls face complex and restricting norms and values if they are to engage in sport, highlighting the added pressures of social media and feelings of judgement which can contribute towards the dropout rate of teenage girls in sport and negatively impact their wellbeing. Wetton et al (2013) used questionnaires and semi structured interviews to assess the reasons for 15–16-year-old girls not taking part in team sports. They found that girls drop out of sport due to a lack of enjoyment, sport being too competitive and the stereotype of girls taking part in sport. Self-confidence is also linked to competitive sport where many young girls drop out due to the competitive nature of competing with external pressures and stereotypes suggesting that sport is 'male dominated' (Sport Scotland 2008). To challenge and overcome these pressures, there is a need for female sporting role models to conquer this stereotype.

Lack of female role models

The second factor which may contribute to drop out levels in sport could be the lack of female role models. Lyle (2009) highlights that at multiple levels, women especially those from marginalised groups are invisible in the sporting world. Wetton et al (2013) found that the invisibility of high-profile female sporting stars contributes towards increased levels of young people dropping out of sport, due to having little to watch and be inspired by. The media exacerbates this issue due to the primary focus of coverage of male sports. Sport Scotland (2005) highlighted that only 5% of sports coverage was women's sport. Literature suggests that there is a vast lack of female sporting role models for young girls to aspire to, explaining that it is a critical issue that needs to be addressed (Youth Sports Trust 2021; United Nations 2007).

Vescio et al (2005) investigated sporting role models for teenage girls in Australia. Using a mixed methods approach, they gathered data through two focus groups and a survey conducted in two high schools. Their results showed that only 8.4% of teenage girls perceived a sporting individual as their role model and described them as female, young with a similar sporting background to themselves. Lockwood (2006) looked at whether there is a need for same gender role models. They conducted two studies assessing the impact of gender- matched and mismatched role models as well as describing a role model who had inspired them in the past. Results from this study showed that female participants were more inspired by female role models but in contrast, gender did not determine the impact on the male participants. It is interesting to note that Meier (2015) found that girls and women tend to aspire to male and female role models, but boys and men usually avoid female role models. This can be linked to other research which suggest that it is possible for girls to aspire to both males and females due to the lack of female role models (Singh et al 2006) which can be explained by gender heroism which is the driving force behind the choice of role models (Vescio et al 2005).

Issues around diversity and accessibility in sport

The third and final factor to consider is the challenges around diversity and accessibility in sport. Sport Scotland (2015) note that discriminating stereotypes can limit active participation for BAME individuals. With MacNicol (2019 BBC News) adding that people from ethnic minorities in Scotland are under-represented in sport governance. Sport Scotland (2015) found that out of 459 people on the boards of 50 sporting governing bodies, only six were from BAME backgrounds. They suggested that boardroom diversity amongst these governing bodies could help to achieve better ethnic minority representation at grassroots level all the way to the elite and inspire BAME young people to get involved. The Youth Sports Trust (2021) noted that existing inequalities have widened since the start of the pandemic, highlighting that only 34% of black children are active, in comparison to 45% of all young people.

Accessibility to sport is also thought to be a key barrier to active participation. Variety (nd) found that 82% of schools reported the accessibility to appropriate facilities was a key barrier for young people with disabilities, with 11% of parents saying that their child's active participation in sport is limited due to disability. In addition, 72% of disabled young people report feeling “left out” of sport (Youth Sports Trust 2021). Sport Scotland (2015) concluded that young people with disabilities are less likely to participate in physical activity due to the inexperience of coaches being unable to adapt sessions as well as the lack of disabled role models to inspire and encourage active participation.

2.3 Role models

The Mintridge Foundation programmes involve Mintridge Ambassadors who aim to be inspiring sporting role models. First coined in the 1950s, Merton relates the term 'role model' to individuals who have specific roles (Merton 1957). Numerous literature articles define the term role model differently however they all hold the same values. Biskup and Pfister (1999) suggested that role models offer essential help and orientation for young people. Similarly, Lockwood et al (2002) define role models as "individuals who have achieved outstanding success and who can inspire one by illustrating an idea, desired self" (page 854). Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1969) emphasised the importance of observing, modelling and imitating the behaviours and emotional reactions of others. In 1986, Bandura identified that paying attention to the behaviours of the role model, retaining and reproducing the behaviour and furthermore being motivated to repeat the behaviour illustrates how Social Learning Theory can explain the power of role models.

Bailey et al (2015) suggest that role models change over time. In early childhood role models tend to be parents, moving on to friends, teachers and external media, and then in the adolescent years, sport stars become increasingly influential. Effective sporting role models need to have a connection with the young person, where goals and achievements seem attainable (Bailey et al 2015). This idea supports Motivational Theory which identifies three role model qualities (goal embodiment, attainability and desirability). The perception of these qualities influences several role modelling processes such as vicarious learning and identification, which play an important part in changing the perception of goals and goal related behaviours (Morgenroth et al 2015). For effective role modelling to occur, the role model needs to be relatable to the learner (Bailey 2005; Berscheid and Hatfield 1969). This supports Model-Observer Similarity theory which suggests that the effectiveness of modelling correlates with the similarity and perceived relatability of the learner to the model (Hoogerheide et al 2018). In summary, Lyle (2009) suggests that sporting role models can contribute to the increased participation of sport for young people and can positively influence their future behaviour.

Whilst the Mintridge Foundation programmes are based on the notion of learning from positive role models, it is important to note that not all sporting role models are positive (Gibson 2004). In contemporary society, heightened by globalisation, young individuals have a lot more choice of who they look up to (Lockwood et al 2002). Male sports stars can be seen as 'drunken lads' who have multiple affairs whereas female sport stars are often trivialised and objectified (Lines 2001). Suspended Manchester United footballer, Mason Greenwood was a role model for many young aspiring football fans but has recently been accused of rape, generating a negative identity of himself. Lines (2001) concludes that fast growing social media has altered the way young individuals

view and admire sporting role models, making it an unreliable and questionable experience. Lockwood et al (2002) further identifies that the behaviour of a negative sporting role model can further lead to avoidance of their actions instead of being inspired by them. However, despite these negative role models, the role of a positive sporting role model can be extremely inspirational. Globus (1998) highlights the role of positive sporting role models who are involved in charity activities, such as footballer Marcus Rashford who spearheaded the free school meal campaign and has become a role model for many (BBC News 2021). Similarly, heptathlete Jessica Ennis who overcame multiple injuries to win Olympic Gold with Fordyce (2016) describing her as “no better sporting role model”.

An interesting finding from Wicker and Frick (2016) was that according to the trickle down-effect, only elite successful role models were influential. They examined the effect of national sporting success on amateur sports participation in German football using longitudinal data. Although they found a relationship between elite sport and amateur sport participation, they concluded that only World Cup title wins had a positive impact on the increase of club memberships and participation. Within the Mintridge Foundation, not all the role models are world record holders or title breakers therefore it was interesting to explore if the levels of elite success had an impact on the effectiveness and power of the Mintridge programmes. Or, alternatively, if the key driver of relatability plays a more influential role.

2.4 The impact of COVID-19 and the road to recovery

The Youth Sports Trust identified four main objectives for 2018-2022: to transform physical education; remove barriers from sport; unlock potential; and empower activism. These objectives were derived from issues relating to inactivity, obesity, PE provision and the increase in mental wellbeing disorders. In their paper titled “*The Class of 2035*” they aimed to create a future for every young child where they can experience the benefits that come from physical activity. They highlighted that wellbeing is impacted by lack of physical activity, low levels of resilience and confidence and the added pressure of social media, education and unemployment. These challenges are magnified for girls, BAME individuals, disabled young people and those in disadvantaged areas. To address these challenges and increase opportunities, sporting experiences need to be supported across schools and community environments.

The Mintridge Foundation has a key role to play in supporting young people and their sporting Ambassadors have a fundamental role to inspire, encourage and motivate all young people to take part in physical activity. Whilst research has clearly found a link between physical activity and depression in adulthood (Cooney et al 2013), less is known about the impact in childhood. There are

also gaps in the literature regarding the role of positive sporting role models in encouraging and inspiring sport participation of young people. Therefore, the aim of this research project is to explore the power of positive sporting role models in relation to the wellbeing of young people, through the work of the Mintridge Foundation. The research question is “What role do the Mintridge Foundation programmes play in enhancing the wellbeing of young people through the power of positive sporting role models?”

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter will provide a rationale for the qualitative methodology, an explanation of the interview design, details of the recruitment process, ethical considerations, information on the pilot study, an overview of the data collection procedure, and a detailed overview of the analytical approach. The research aim and question are;

- *Research Aim: To explore the power of positive sporting role models in relation to the wellbeing of young people, through the work of the Mintridge Foundation.*
- *Research Question: What role do the Mintridge Foundation programmes play in enhancing the wellbeing of young people through the power of positive sporting role models?*

3.1 Qualitative Methodology

As I was exploring a complex societal issue, qualitative research was the most suitable as it focuses on the power of words rather than quantification, helping to understand the social world through the examination of people's opinions (Bryman 2016). Qualitative methods are valuable because the richness of data permits in-depth developments of under researched areas (Pistrang and Barker 2012). Gathering in depth qualitative data compared to numerical quantitative data was more useful to apply to future research and policy.

Semi structured interviews were chosen for this project because they are best used for an open, small-scale research project, where a focused yet conversational two-way communication can take place (Arksey and Knight 1999; Drever 1995; Pathak and Intratat 2012). As I was interviewing participants with different roles, semi structured interviews allowed me to gain in depth data from multiple perspectives. Interviews are an important data collection strategy as they enhance rich description and detailed accounts of individuals' experiences (Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). Whilst the flexibility of semi structured interviews allows the interviewer to ask a series of structured questions from a set of standardised topics, they also can pursue areas spontaneously initiated by the participant (Lune and Berg 2017).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, research has transitioned from in person interviews to virtual platforms (Oliffe et al 2021). Whilst literature has highlighted the importance of interviews being a face-to-face encounter (Oltmann 2016; Longhurst 2003; Self 2021), Deakin and Wakefield (2014), found that online interviewing can enhance rapport building as well as offering greater flexibility. As I was interviewing teachers and elite athletes, I was aware of their busy schedules, therefore, online interviews were best suited best for this project. Participants were also more used to online communication methods, such as TEAMS since the start of the pandemic (Self 2021) which

also aided the interview process. However, I still had to prepare for technical difficulties and complications and be flexible with this approach.

3.2 Interview Design

Guided by the literature on sporting role models and wellbeing, I created an interview guide which consisted of four topic areas as well as prompt questions (Appendix A). This interview guide facilitated a free-flowing conversation to naturally take place, allowing myself (the researcher) to explore the issues rather than pre-empting them (Pathak and Intratat 2012). The topic areas consisted of open-ended questions which allowed for in depth responses (Ryan et al 2009) and were standardised across all three groups of participants. However, some prompt questions differed to suit the person and context of the interview (Lune and Berg 2017). The first topic area was generic about becoming involved with the Mintridge Foundation and the role they have within the charity. This allowed a rapport to be built with the interviewee as we could share common ground and experiences. As Roulston (2010) highlights that to be successful at qualitative interviewing, the researcher must be able to effectively build rapport with participants to create feelings of trust. The second topic area was about a typical Mintridge Foundation programme day, the third topic was about working with the Foundation and the final topic area was about their own experiences of inspiring role models. This gradual approach enabled the participant to become comfortable with the interview and gave them time to decide about how much they wanted to share.

3.3 Participants, recruitment and sampling

For the recruitment process, I used The Founder of the Mintridge Foundation charity, to recruit Ambassadors, mentees and teachers. A gatekeeper is an individual who stands between the person collecting the data and the potential participant (Lavrakas 2008) and has a very important role to play in recruitment. As I worked for the charity during my placement year, I had built connections with Ambassadors, mentees and teachers which I was able to utilise for this research. However, it was ethically important that participants had a genuine choice to take part. Using The Founder as a gatekeeper was beneficial as she made initial contact with the participants, so they did not feel pressured to take part. Once participants had responded to The Founder's initial contact, I then contacted them myself in a friendly manner and explained what the project entailed (Appendix B). The Founder selected participants who were relevant to the research question proposed. This type of purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research as it identifies information-rich participants (Eitkan et al 2016; Bryman 2016).

In total, twelve participants were recruited and interviewed and a summary of their role within the charity can be seen below (all names have been replaced with a pseudonym).

Table 1. Participant pseudonym and role in charity

Pseudonym	Role within the Mintridge Foundation
Abby	Ambassador
Finley	Ambassador
Ben	Ambassador
Leah	Ambassador
Georgia	Ambassador
Chloe	Mentee
Esther	Mentee
Amy	Mentee
Wendy	Teacher
Charlie	Teacher
Jamie	Teacher
Luke	Teacher

3.4 Ethical Considerations

I gained ethical approval on the 16th of November 2021 (Appendix C). A key ethical consideration in this project was the importance of ensuring that I gained genuine informed consent. This was a concern due to my previous role within the charity, as I had built up friendships with the participants, so it was crucial that they felt they had the ability to decline taking part. Through the use of a gatekeeper this concern was controlled and carefully managed to avoid any participants feeling pressured to be involved. Before the interviews, I emailed participant information sheets and received signed consent forms from each of the participants as well as verbal consent before the interview started. I sent these prior to the interview so that they had time to read, sign and ask any questions if they needed to. During the interviews, I reminded all participants that their data would remain anonymous and that they could stop the interview at any point. It was important that participants were reassured that they could disclose sensitive information and speak openly without concerns that their identifiable information would be passed back to the charity. A reminder of ethics was emailed

to them with the debrief form which included my contact details as well as sources of support as any interview has the potential to raise sensitive issues. All the participants' names were replaced with a pseudonym and all data including transcriptions and audio files were stored on a password protected computer in the Loughborough University cloud. All files will be deleted once I graduate.

3.5 Pilot Study

A pilot interview was undertaken to check if the questions were able to generate rich, in-depth data, to identify any technological issues and to practise my interview skills. Pilot studies are known to be beneficial for many reasons, including finding issues related to the recruitment process and to help to modify interview questions (Kim 2011). At the end of this pilot interview, I asked the participant for honest feedback and checked that they understood the questions. This participant said that the questions were great and made you really think but they had a fear of feeling like they were answering the question wrong. *"No I really enjoyed it, I was just scared I was answering the questions wrong *laughs*" (Esther)*. Therefore, to address this I added reassurance at the start of the interviews highlighting that there are no right or wrong answers. During the pilot interview, I did not encounter any technological difficulties and TEAMS worked well. However, it was good to practise on this platform to ensure I was comfortable with recording, muting my mic and using the camera. I also wanted to make sure that I spoke slower during the following interviews and this improved once my confidence built up over time. This pilot interview was a valuable exercise and only minor changes were made.

3.6 Data Collection / Procedure

Once I gained ethical approval (Appendix C) I contacted The Founder from the Mintridge Foundation (who was acting as my gatekeeper) and sent her my dissertation poster (Appendix D) and participant information sheet. She introduced me to individuals willing to take part and I then contacted the participants myself via email. I attached the participant information sheet (Appendix E) and consent form (Appendix F) and asked them in a friendly manner if they would be happy to be involved (Appendix B). Willing participants signed the consent form, and we arranged a suitable date and time. I was as flexible as possible, offering evenings and weekends to talk to them. I then sent them the TEAMS link for this call via email, asking them to contact me if they had any questions or concerns.

On the morning of the interviews, I sent the participant a reminder email with the TEAMS link again as well as the topic areas that we will be talking about, removing the risk of hidden questions and giving them control and agency in the interview process. I picked a quiet location with a neutral

background to minimise disruption and I was on the TEAMS call 10 minutes early, to check that my camera and sound were working. I had a bottle of water next to me to help navigate and support natural silences, as well as a notepad and pen, to make notes. I also had a printed sheet of 'probes and prompts' to encourage the participants to keep talking as well as raising certain topics again if the participant did not answer the question (Hennink et al 2020) (Appendix G).

When they joined the call, I started off the interview with general rapport building, where we shared common ground about Mintridge, and I checked that they didn't have any questions. I collected verbal consent alongside their already completed written consent form and we started the interview. I had my camera on during the interviews and most participants had theirs on too, although some didn't due to connection difficulties. I gave them agency by asking what topic they would like to start with, and everyone said they had no preference or said let's go from the top. During the interviews I encouraged an active listening environment and used thought provoking interjections – such as a 'head nod' or a subtle prompt or cue to encourage the interviewee to keep talking (Bernard and Bernard 2013). I also allowed natural pauses to evolve within the interview which enabled the participants to have time to reflect (Kvale 1996). This was difficult at the start due to my inexperience of interviewing but got easier as I gained more confidence. Throughout the interviews, I made notes on the printed interview guide sheets relating to each question, making sure I didn't miss out any questions or opportunities to delve deeper (Appendix H). At the end of the interview, I finished on a positive question asking them to sum up the Mintridge Foundation in three words and then asked if they had anything extra to add. I thanked them again, reminded them about ethics and withdrawing their data and invited them to email me with any questions or concerns.

After the interview, I sent a debrief form (Appendix I) to the participants which included contact details and support resources and copied the gatekeeper into this email. I updated my diary (Appendix J) with my thoughts and feelings about the interview and transcribed the data from the TEAMS recording straight after, so it was fresh in my mind and made notes about interesting comments or re-emerging themes (Appendix N).

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data - an accessible and flexible method of qualitative data analysis that identifies and analyses recurring patterns in a data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). This included looking across all the data and highlighting certain parts and placing them into certain themes (Rivas 2012). This type of analysis best suited this study as it highlighted the similarities and differences in the multiple perspectives of each interview.

I followed Braun and Clarke (2006) six stages of thematic analysis. In the first stage, I immersed myself within the data by transcribing the interviews and actively looking for meanings and patterns. Transcribing took a while, but it was important that I transcribed accurately so I had breaks throughout to ensure my standard of transcribing remained consistent. When transcribing I made the decision to not correct grammatical errors to support the authenticity of the data, which is a key driver in enhancing the quality of data collection (Harding 2018). In the second stage, I generated as many codes as possible by using different coloured highlighters to enable the visual identification of repetitions (Appendix K). In the third stage, I searched for themes and considered how different codes may fit together into broader themes, also noting potential themes or codes that did not fit into any theme. For this step, I developed a thematic map (Appendix L). Stage four involved reviewing the themes, ensuring that each theme consisted of clear and coherent data, and I re-read the material to include any missed data. By double checking the data I adopted a rigorous analytical process which is a key requirement to ensure the quality of qualitative research (Tracey 2010). In stage five, I defined and named my themes and wrote a detailed outline of each theme and how it fits into the overall picture (Appendix M). This was a difficult step as it was integral for me to narrow down my themes with succinct names which answer the research questions best. In the final stage, I completed my report whilst critically questioning my themes and linking them back to the literature review.

3.8 Reflexive Account

Throughout this qualitative project, it was essential that I reflected upon my own biases and assumptions and the influence this could have on the research. Sport has always been a fundamental part of my life and I have always been aware of the benefits to my own wellbeing. During my placement year with the Mintridge Foundation, I saw the impact of positive sporting role models and wanted to explore further. However, whilst working for the charity enabled the recruitment process to be smooth and efficient due to knowing the participants from my placement year, I had to be careful that this friendly position did not shape the research or their answers. I needed to be careful with leading questions as I already have my own opinion about the value of the Mintridge Foundation. Looking at the wider picture, I also had to acknowledge my presentation as a white middle class female and be aware of my position to ensure that all participants felt comfortable, enabling them to trust me with our reciprocal-built rapport.

Chapter 4. Findings

After undertaking an in-depth thematic analysis, the following four themes were identified: replacing pressure with fun; breaking down barriers “if you can’t see it, you can’t be it”; levelling the playing field by broadening horizons; and enhancing core transferable life skills.

4.1 Replacing pressure with fun

A strong theme within most of the interviews was the concerns about young people feeling pressured within society and the impact this has on their wellbeing. Two key pressures that emerged from the data were young people feeling pressured in sport to win and young people facing unrealistic physical standards (often through social media). The Mintridge Foundation role models were regarded as having a crucial role to play in addressing these pressures and enhancing positive wellbeing by promoting sporting participation and bringing the aspect of fun back into physical activity.

Addressing the pressure to win

The concerns about the pressures young people face were clearly expressed by Finley:

“I think young people have lost the enjoyment of having fun with sport... nowadays I think it is either you are pressured into a sporting environment from external influences...that middle ground of simply having fun and enjoying sport is disappearing” (Finley - Ambassador)

Similarly, Leah spoke about how sport focuses too much on success rather than participation and praised the Mintridge Foundation for being inclusive, encouraging participation for everyone:

“Sport focuses too much on pressure and success and I think it’s important especially for the younger generations to step back and teach them that winning isn’t everything and that enjoyment, fun and building themselves up as an all rounder is more important...I think the Mintridge Foundation really focuses on how sport is inclusive and for everybody...” (Leah - Ambassador)

The notion of “sport focuses too much on pressure and success” can be supported by the idea that physical activity is moving from fun to function due to the increased amounts of pressure to win rather than to simply enjoy the benefits (Sport England 2014). The participants spoke about how this increase in pressure can be a “*blessing and a curse*” (Ben - Ambassador) with an increase in opportunities but also the pressure to “*do everything now*” (Ben - Ambassador) which can in turn negatively impact their wellbeing. Increase in pressures for young people is apparent in literature with

McNamara (2000) noting how young people have faced increased amounts of pressures, resulting in social and psychological problems.

Addressing unrealistic physical standards

Participants also noted how external pressures have increased for young people and there are increased pressures in relation to education, employment and what they are meant to look like which can be seen *“manifesting in mental wellbeing and additional stress”* (Abby - Ambassador). Similarly, Ben (Ambassador) spoke about how external pressures from society *“overwhelm young people”*. Multiple participants highlighted the negative impact of *“social media and pressure on body images”* (Jamie) and how this can place extra pressures on young people to look and perform a certain way. Charlie (teacher) noted how pressure from the media can *“try to mould them into something they aren't...the more adverse effects...such as anxiety and poor mental wellbeing”*

“I think as well self belief and doubt can be linked to this... things like social media is an additional pressure for young people to deal with and see these unrealistic physical standards to fit in I think is a huge pressure for them and really affects them mentally” (Abby - Ambassador)

This highlights the damaging effects of conforming to these ‘unrealistic physical standards’ and echoes Lunde and Gattario (2017) findings that the complex and restrictive norms young girls face, contribute to the dropout rate for those who do not believe they ‘fit in’. This also reflects the alarming statistics that a third of 14–16-year-old girls sampled reported being unhappy with their body and consequently drop out of physical activity (Women in Sport 2019; Koulanova et al 2021).

The Mintridge Ambassadors were aware of these challenges which young people face and aim to support and enhance their self-belief whilst challenging these unrealistic standards at the same time. Esther had six months mentoring with a female Ambassador and was confident enough to talk about her body image. She noted how she has always been aware of it and has never fitted in to the “slim athlete” stereotype: *“for me personally, I have always been like a bigger girl like I have never been quite slim, looks like a fit athlete...sport gave me more confidence...I remember (my mentor) talking about not being very tall...I found it super relatable...why don't I just have a crack at it!”*. Esther spoke about how her inspiring mentor instilled confidence into her, and she was able to relate to her sporting journey, giving her increased amounts of self-esteem.

Bringing back the fun

“...bringing in somebody who like I said a professional sports person kids eyes light up...and they bring back the fun within sport and it is so great to see all my kids taking part, even those who would normally sit out or you know forget their trainers, to see them running around and engaged is incredible” (Charlie - teacher)

The notion of “bringing back the fun within sport” highlights how the Mintridge Ambassadors make their programmes inclusive and enjoyable, encouraging and motivating all young people to get involved. Multiple Ambassadors spoke about the importance of bringing back the fun. Georgia (Ambassador) spoke about how the line between developing young performers and simply having fun can be “*blurred*” and Leah noted how you don't always have to be the “*best in your field*” to take part in physical activity. Gould and Carson (2004) support this by suggesting that a multisport approach needs to be adopted, making sport fun for all young people, concluding that in turn this will encourage active participation in sport. Luke (teacher) also emphasised the need to have a focus on “*engagement and enjoyment*” and to be aware of all the physical and mental well-being benefits it has to offer. His key aim was to get the children to “*...the end of the season, wanting to play again next year and participate more*” (Luke - Teacher). Due to the increase in pressures, some young people refuse to take part in physical activity so when their “*eyes light up*” and they are willing to engage and be involved, this can illustrate the positive impact of the Mintridge Foundation programmes. Effective sporting role models need to have a connection with the young person, where goals and achievements seem attainable (Bailey et al 2015). This idea supports Motivational Theory which identifies three role model qualities (goal embodiment, attainability, and desirability).

In summary, the Mintridge Foundation role models are effective in enhancing the wellbeing of young people by addressing some of the pressures young people face such as the pressure to win and the pressure to conform to unrealistic physical standards. By bringing back the fun and enjoyment of physical activity can encourage active participation and enhance well-being as a result. This can be supported in research by Kelly and Carchia (2016) as well as Saez et al (2021) who suggest that pressure and lack of enjoyment are two factors contributing to the dropout rate in sport for young people. However, like multiple participants have highlighted, the Mintridge Foundation Ambassadors ensure that their programmes are inspiring and inclusive, removing that barrier of pressure and teaching young people that “*winning isn't everything and that enjoyment, fun and building themselves up as an all-rounder is more important*” (Leah - Ambassador).

4.2 Breaking down barriers and challenging sporting stereotypes

Another strong theme that emerged from the data is the role of the Mintridge Ambassadors in breaking down barriers to participation and challenging sporting stereotypes. Participants spoke about the fundamental need for relatable role models and the importance of promoting visibility and inclusivity in the sporting field to truly encourage 'sport for all'.

Fundamental need for relatable role models (including gender and disability)

Many of the participants spoke about the importance of having relatable role models both in relation to gender and disability, with many of the Ambassadors noting the lack of role models in their young sporting lives. For example, Abby (Ambassador) spoke about her journey growing up and how there was a lack of female role models but also disabled role models, noting that she felt *"isolated having the disability"* with no one to look up to.

"...so even though I thought I was encouraged to dream big...I think having role models that break stereotypes is really important, I think it's really important to have role models from both genders... I think it is really important to have role models who reflect you" (Abby - Ambassador)

Some participants thought that the gender of the role model mattered due to the difference in physiological characteristics boys and girls have, explaining that *the "issues girls and boys go through as teenagers is always going to be different"* (Leah - Ambassador). Whereas others simply believed that the reliability of the role model is the most important thing. Finley (Ambassador) said *"...a lot of young girls will look up to a female athlete as their role model similarly to young boys looking up to males. But i don't think it matters I think it's just that relatability..."*. This can be supported by Lockwood (2006) and Vescio et al (2005) who note that girls are more likely to be inspired by females who relate most to themselves. Similarly, to the Model-Observer Theory (Hoogerheide et al 2018) which suggests that the effectiveness of modelling correlated to the relatability of the learner to the model. Highlighting the importance of sporting role models being relatable to young people to encourage their participation in sport, which in turn, will benefit their wellbeing.

Challenging invisibility "If you don't see it, you can't be it"

The notion of *"if you don't see if you can't be it"* (Luke - teacher) vividly explains the need for all sporting role models to be visible to inspire the next generation. Chloe (mentee) spoke about the lack of coverage of her sport on TV and the impact this could have had on her journey.

"I guess it's a struggle for young girls especially as you kind of have to dig deeper as they aren't on tv ...as that is covered in male football and rugby and stuff like that so I think younger me would have probably not have been as inspired...so without the help from my mentor I don't think I would be where I am now" (Chloe - mentee)

Multiple participants noted the barriers around positive sporting role models, incorporating the need for diverse, and in particular female, sporting role models to be more visible. Abby (Ambassador) notes how these barriers have been apparent for a long time explaining how she did not realise she could have a career in sport because that was something *"...boys did when I was growing up"*. Most participants spoke about the role the media plays and how it does not help by making *"female athletes absent"* (Leah - Ambassador) giving young people (especially girls) limited opportunities to be inspired. This finding can be supported by literature highlighting how women are invisible in the sporting field which can in turn increase drop out levels (Lyle 2009; Wetton et al 2013). Alongside the lack of female role models in the media, intersectionality can also hinder active participation from young non-white girls who face multiple oppressions. With Ben importantly noting *"...there is also an issue with the lack of coverage and representation of women and black women in the sporting media field"*. These challenging barriers can in turn decrease levels of active participation in sport which has a knock-on impact on wellbeing as a result. The Mintridge Foundation plays an influential role in breaking down these barriers by recruiting a diverse range of Ambassadors. Currently, out of thirty-nine Ambassadors there are twenty-four female athletes and seven disabled athletes, from both individual and team sports and a range of ethnicities. This can be supported by the Model-Observer Similarly theory which notes the importance of relating to the learner for effective role modelling to occur (Hoogerheide et al 2018).

In summary, Mintridge role models break down societal barriers of invisibility in the sporting field and their relatable journeys can encourage active participation in sport which enhances levels of positive well-being by promoting self-esteem and self-belief to achieve.

4.3 Levelling the playing field by broadening horizons

The third theme refers to how Mintridge programmes makes sport accessible for all, encouraging young people to open their eyes to new opportunities. Two key sub themes emerged from the data, the importance of levelling the playing field and the importance of broadening horizons. From this, the Mintridge role models were praised for encouraging active participation in new sports, enhancing positive wellbeing as a result.

“...their stories are of course really important because that is what inspires the children...and I tell the children all the time is that as human beings we are all equal you know we all start off with the same basic fundamental human make up and we are all capable of amazing things...that is what really lovely about Mintridge because the children can relate to them you know they can see the story...and start to believe that actually that could be my story in the future” (Wendy - teacher)

The importance of levelling the ‘playing field’

Within this whole theme, the effectiveness of the Mintridge Mentoring Programmes and the power of the sporting role models was clearly illustrated. Leah (Ambassador) spoke highly about how taking part in new sports can help to *“...get them moving and focusing on something that isn't about them always being judged”*. Similarly, to Charlie (teacher) who praised the Mintridge Foundation for encouraging young people to always give something a go,

“one of the one of the pupils is a very anxious...and (the mentoring) has made a massive impact on her... to get involved in football and netball there's just a real determination and a grit to her” (Charlie - teacher).

This can highlight the power the Mintridge role models have at introducing them to new opportunities which in turn can help to level the playing field and increase active participation in sport. This finding supports Bailey et al (2015) who suggested that for effective role modelling to occur, there needs to be a connection to the young person. So by introducing them to a new sport that they may not have tried before, this connection may occur. When looking at the role of the Mintridge Foundation role models in enhancing the wellbeing of young people, Leah (Ambassador) noted how effective the Mintridge Foundation programmes are. She said that they *“give them something to aspire to...they see that there is a whole range of sport, and that sport is accessible to everyone and not every sporting role model looks the same like everybody looks different and everyone is good at different things”*. Furthermore, Wendy (teacher) spoke about their school cultures which is all about raising aspirations with their values of *“warmth, pride and aspiration”* adding that the work Mintridge and the Ambassadors do is in line with their school values, and she is able to witness these benefits first hand. This again opens young people's eyes to equal opportunities, which multiple Ambassadors note as *“...really important...”* (Abby - Ambassador). Ben (Ambassador) also spoke about how during the programmes he aims to *“...instil the message that everyone is the same...”* to promote this level playing field and encourage and motivate participation from everyone.

The Ambassadors spoke about their own individual journeys growing up and how they were worried about what people thought of them. Abby (Ambassador) spoke about how she remembers her *“self-confidence completely flatlining...”* further speaking about how the power of inspiring mentors and coaches really helped her as a teenager to look past her disability and to open her own eyes to getting involved in sport. However, there is a need for experienced coaches and mentors to ensure that they have the right expertise for disability sport delivery (Thomas and Smith 2008). Finley (Ambassador) also spoke about how sport was an *“escape...from very early on from the struggles I was facing in school”* further talking about the more you do something the better you get at it. This can be further supported in literature with Darcy and Dowse (2013) noting how if access to sport is inhibited or not supported, the benefits of being physically active cannot be achieved. Inspiring mentors like Ben (Ambassador) said how he always portrays a message to the young people during the programmes that *“...some people are disabled but that doesn't make them inferior...”*. This can highlight the importance of levelling the playing field for all young people to encourage active participation in sport, which in turn will improve multiple areas of their wellbeing such as confidence and self-esteem.

The importance of broadening horizons

Multiple teachers spoke a lot about this subtheme regarding how they see their school and students situated in a “bubble” with limited horizons.

“...the children have got quite a narrow perspective of the world you know...I think any opportunity to work with you know different people that are going to increase the diversity in the school and broaden the children's horizons and awareness of different people” (Wendy - teacher)

“Get them to see also erm people from different walks of life I suppose because this school is such a bubble so to see people with these very obvious disabilities really succeeding against all odds... and people who are from completely different backgrounds to what our kids are used to I thought we just need to get them and expose them to these amazing people” (Jamie - teacher)

Therefore, the participants highly valued the work of the Mintridge Programmes who bring in diverse Ambassadors and a new range of sports to broaden the horizons of young people both on and off the sporting field.

Chloe (mentee) spoke about how her six months of mentoring with her Mintridge role model helped her broaden her own horizons by encouraging her to take part in sport. Noting that growing up, she experienced “...imposter syndrome...getting put into a non-sporty category...” (Chloe) because she didn't take part in sports when she was younger. She then noted that her mentoring programme with Mintridge encouraged her to take part in a new sport, giving her enhanced amounts of confidence and self-belief. And it is interesting to note that she is now excelling in this sport, competing professionally. This links back to the theme of relatable role models, giving young people the opportunity to relate to these individuals, hear about their inspiring life stories and encourage them to follow their journey. Sport can also open the eyes of young people in relation to the diversity of different experiences. For example, Ben (Ambassador) noted that “some may have never seen a wheelchair before...”. This can broaden their horizons and create a wholesome sense of wellbeing, educating the young people that everyone is different. In turn, this can encourage them to take part in physical activity as past mentee, Esther says “...you can see someone else's journey and can think actually I can have a crack at it”.

In summary, this theme highlights how Mintridge programmes effectively enhance the wellbeing of young people by opening their eyes to new opportunities. Literature from Sport Scotland (2008) notes how discriminatory stereotypes has the power to limit active participation in sport, which can have a knock-on effect on aspects of their wellbeing such as self-esteem and confidence. To overcome this, the Mintridge Foundation Ambassadors play a powerful and influential role in levelling the playing field and broadening the horizons of young people by introducing them to new sports whilst also relating to and having a connection with the learner which can increase the effectiveness of successful role modelling (Lyle 2009; Bailey et al 2015). This in turn is an effective way of enhancing the wellbeing of young people due to the increased levels of enthusiasm towards active participation in sport.

4.4 Enhancing core transferable life skills

The fourth and final theme illustrates how the Mintridge Foundation Ambassadors enhance core transferable life skills such as social, physical and interpersonal skills.

“I love all the values that sport can give you and I think the translatable skills as well, lots of the values that you apply to sport can be translated into life, like I said, respect, teamwork, discipline, enjoyment, focus etc and I think as well sport can also impact mental wellbeing you know”

(Ben - Ambassador)

“I guess the main lessons are kind of about perseverance, resilience, dealing with failure... I guess as an Ambassador I tell my own story from the setbacks I have experienced and then try and inspire the younger generations about how to overcome those setbacks in the best possible way to enhance their wellbeing if that makes sense?” (Leah - Ambassador)

From the data, it was clear that The Mintridge Foundation Ambassadors were acknowledged for enhancing the wellbeing of the young people involved in the programmes by promoting transferable core skills to utilise when they are faced with challenging situations in their future lives.

Addressing the concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic

Exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the teachers spoke about how they are worried about young people having limited life skills and strategies to support their wellbeing. Charlie (teacher) said *“things aren't always going to be rosy...learn how to deal with setbacks...resilience and perseverance...after the pandemic....im really concerned with the children's mental health”*. Similarly to Wendy (teacher) who notes that *“...mental wellbeing is growing...particularly after the pandemic...children are struggling....socialisation, team work, corporation, collaboration...”*. These feelings of concern are supported by literature from the Youth Sports Trust (2018) and MIND UK (2020) who both found an increase in feelings of stress and worry during the lockdown periods. With literature suggesting that there is a fundamental need for sport to be accessible to everyone to benefit their mental and physical wellbeing (Centre for Social Justice 2020).

The importance of promoting core transferable life skills

One way the Mintridge Ambassadors promote these core transferable life skills is by highlighting the importance of different aspects in sport and how it can translate not only to other sports but to wider life experiences too, benefiting both physical and mental aspects of wellbeing. Charlie (teacher) spoke highly of the Foundation and praised them for supporting multiple areas of wellbeing through their programmes.

“...there's the physical aspect of wellbeing that sport can generate but also there's a lot of erm intangible mental health aspects as well, again going back to resilience and perseverance but also the communication with others, there's the relationships the friendships that come through sport” (Charlie - teacher)

Georgia (Ambassador) spoke about gendered notions of sport and illustrated how the physical skills that seem specific to one sport can also translate to other areas such as *“balance, core*

skills, flexibility...". Literature notes the importance for young people to enhance their Fundamental Movement Skills (such as balance, flexibility, throwing and running) for all-round physical development (Pion et al 2020). However, issues around gendered sports have been highlighted by researchers such as Plaza et al (2017) who notes that sporting activities are still gendered, both at explicit and implicit levels. Georgia (Ambassador) recalled how boys demonstrated these gendered notions of sport, not wanting to take part in "girly gymnastics" until she highlighted the core skills which can transfer to strengthen and improve their ability in their chosen sports.

The Ambassadors spoke a lot about transferring key social skills such as *"working in a team...and taking those teamwork skills into wherever they go"* (Ben – Ambassador). Finley (Ambassador) spoke about how sport enables you to develop your own interpersonal skills by helping you to *"build your own character"* and *"learn how to win graciously and to lose graciously"*. With teacher, Luke adding *"...it helps to build the individual and create a more well-rounded person..."* which enhances their wholesome levels of wellbeing. Furthermore, Chloe (mentee) discussed the positive impacts of the Mintridge Foundation programmes in enhancing her own personal development and wellbeing. She spoke about how she felt categorised at school as *"non-sporty"* which made her reluctant to take part in sport. But since the Mintridge Mentoring Programme, she has had a change of mindset, as she said, *"I think its made me become like a lot more of a confident person and I guess like it makes you a stronger person too...I think Mintridge definitely helped me with my confidence massively"*. Furthermore, Finley (Ambassador) spoke about the role he has as an Ambassador and how he aims to instil these transferable skills into the young people in order for them to look back on in the future when they may be faced with a challenging situation. He highlights the importance of *"...remembering what that role model once said to you..."* in order to pick yourself back up when faced with a challenging situation. With Abby (Ambassador) adding that *"...the messages that you can give them really shapes the directions of their lives..."*. Finley (Ambassador) further notes about the long-term positive impact of the mentoring programmes, saying *"it's so much more than simply being inspired, it's an impact that lasts for years..."*. This can be further supported by theory of role models (Bandura 1969) and how young people can be inspired from and go on to repeat the actions of positive sporting role models. Whether that is simply starting a new sport, or going on to compete professionally, with Lyle (2009) identifying that sporting role models can positively influence future behaviour.

To summarise, this theme refers to the long-term transferable skills that can be gained from Mintridge mentoring programmes. Young people learn vital life skills and lessons from the positive

sporting role models during the inspiring programmes which can be transferred to all other areas of their life. Aspects such as teamwork, resilience, determination and leadership can help to build all rounded individuals, supporting them to overcome setbacks in the future. These life skills learnt from the Mintridge Ambassadors promote resilience, teaching the young people how to react and deal with both positive and negative aspects of their life.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This detailed thematic analysis indicates that the Mintridge Foundation programmes are very effective at enhancing the wellbeing of young people through the power of positive sporting role models. A main finding was that the Mintridge Ambassadors encourage active participation in sport, which has a positive impact on young people's wellbeing. Four key themes emerged from the interviews regarding the influence of the Mintridge role models: the importance of replacing pressure with fun; breaking down barriers and challenging sporting stereotypes; levelling the playing field by broadening horizons and enhancing core transferable life skills.

5.1 Current policy

Whilst the findings clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the Mintridge Foundation Programmes, current government policy needs to ensure that physical activity is at the forefront of health policy initiatives. And to ensure active sports participation for all, sports charities such as the Mintridge Foundation need to receive long term sustainable funding.

In a 2017 report (Department of Health and Department for Education 2017) it was identified that wellbeing during childhood can influence development and learning which can have a knock-on effect on wellbeing during adulthood. The key government commitments in this paper included support for a mental health lead within schools, funding for mental health support teams and an expansion of the current NHS services available in schools. However, there was no mention of the integration of sport and physical activity, demonstrating a lack of awareness of the power physical activity has on enhancing positive wellbeing. A year later, in 2018, the Department of Education updated guidance which covered both physical health and mental wellbeing. Starting from 2019, the government pledged to publish a "State of the Nation" report annually which will highlight the needs and issues around young people's wellbeing (Parkin and Long 2021). This was the first-time young people's mental wellbeing was reported alongside their physical health and academic achievement (Parkin and Long 2021). Similarly, in 2019 the government introduced statutory health education which made it clear that mental and physical wellbeing are interlinked. In this report, they noted that in both primary and secondary education, physical exercise, time outdoors and how to talk about their emotions are key drivers for positive mental wellbeing. This updated policy reflects many of the values of the Mintridge Foundation, highlighting the fundamental need to instil sporting programmes into the education setting. The wellbeing benefits of physical activity are conspicuous in the literature, and with the additional help of inspiring and relatable role models, active participation can be encouraged. However, the challenge of funding remains.

5.2 Funding and the future

This project clearly demonstrates the inspiring impact Mintridge role models have on the wellbeing of young people. However, this impact comes at a cost and the Mintridge Foundation, being (at the moment) a small charity, relies on fundraising and support from a small number of sponsors. Whilst this is a great way to engage the wider community, it is also challenging to find willing sponsors as well as recruit participants to join fundraising events. During the interviews, the teachers spoke about the price of the programmes being a barrier as they are on strict budgets. Whilst they felt the programmes are value for money, they wished that they could afford Mintridge mentoring for every child. Therefore, charities such as the Mintridge Foundation need to receive government funding, as their impact on wellbeing is evident.

The government is aware of the challenges young people are facing in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and have announced £79 million of funding to improve young people's mental health support (HM Government 2021) as well as £17 million for mental wellbeing initiatives in schools (NHS Confederation 2021). However, policy makers are apprehensive about short-term financial support instead of long-term sustainable funding towards successful initiatives (NHS Confederation 2021). Multiple literature sources highlight the need to support the wellbeing of young people with timely intervention (OECD 2021) implementing a whole school approach (Rainer 2021). By incorporating relevant policy makers, schools and charities are able to target those who need help the most (Widnall 2021). But current policy is yet to utilise the benefits of physical activity to its full extent by not incorporating this notion as a main driver to enhance the wellbeing of young people.

5.3 Strengths and limitations of research process

There are several key strengths of this study such as having access to a supportive gatekeeper, being able to utilise the contacts made during my placement year and the quality of the online in-depth interviews from multiple perspectives.

Recruitment for this project was an efficient process through the help of a supportive gatekeeper who was the Mintridge Foundation founder. The Founder was able to contact multiple participants (Ambassadors, teachers and mentees) and gave them the opportunity to participate (or not). Thus, it was genuine, informed consent. Additionally, as I worked for the Mintridge Foundation in my placement year, I was able to utilise many of the contacts I had made with many teachers, Ambassadors and mentees. This enhanced the recruitment process and enabled the participants to feel comfortable as they knew of me already. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews for this project were conducted online. This allowed greater flexibility around the busy schedules of the elite

athletes and teachers and may have made the participants feel more relaxed being in the comfort of their own environment. The semi-structured interviews enabled me to gather in depth rich data, allowing me to explore this topic to its full extent. Within this, interviewing a range of participants allowed me to gather multiple perspectives on this topic which enabled me to explore similarities and differences between their accounts. A strength of this research project was the quality and depth of the interviews, with considerable attention to ensuring that the participants felt relaxed. I worked hard to address power imbalances by emphasising my role as a student. This gave the participants involved some power and hierarchy where my youth and slight incompetence may have resulted in the participants feeling less threatened (Jordan 2006).

However, although the use of my placement year allowed the recruitment process to be efficient and successful, limitations also emerged such as, my previous role within the charity, the vested interest of the gatekeeper and the lack of diversity within the sample. As I already had a pre-established role within the charity (as programme coordinator) I had a friendly relationship with the participants. Therefore, I had to be careful that this did not interfere with the data collection. In addition, whilst the use of a gatekeeper enhanced the recruitment process, I had to be aware that they had a vested interest within the project. Therefore, participants may have been hand-picked for the interviews. I was also unable to gather a diverse sample, with no male mentees coming forward. A future study would aim to recruit a more diverse sample as well as incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data in their research. I think a mixed methods approach, consisting of both surveys and interviews would further gather statistical data which could further support the qualitative findings and also be compared to current literature.

5.4 Reflexive Account

Throughout the research process, I had to ensure quality was at the forefront of my project, with reflexivity being a key element. Tracy (2010) identified eight key markers of quality in qualitative research, including the notion of 'sincerity'. This notion involved being reflexive of my own biases related to this topic as well as transparent about the challenges I experienced. Due to sport being an integral part of my own life, I had to guard against my own thoughts and opinions, so it did not impact the analysis. I was aware that I had a very positive outlook of the Mintridge Foundation so needed to be careful that this did not interfere with my data collection and analysis. After every interview, I maintained a detailed diary noting my thoughts and feelings (Appendix J). When transcribing the interviews, I made the consistent decision to include pauses, laughter and moments of hesitation as well as not correcting grammar. This made the transcribing process genuine and could incorporate

reasons as to why the participant paused or laughed at certain points (Harding 2018). During the analysis, I carefully coded the data using Braun and Clarke (2006) six steps of thematic analysis, again making detailed notes about the process and my ongoing thoughts and feelings. On reflection, I ensured that I coded the data in a neutral position, not focusing on only the positives but being aware of and addressing the negatives too (for example, concerns about the programme costs).

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This research project concludes that the Mintridge Foundation programmes enhance the wellbeing of young people using positive sporting role models. The Mintridge Foundation programmes successfully replace the negative notion of pressure with fun, break down barriers, level the playing field by broadening horizons and enhance core transferable life skills. This project highlighted that the most effective and impactful role models are those who can relate to young people and not necessarily those with the most gold medals or world titles. This project also indicates how skills learnt from sporting environments can be transferred to wider aspects of life outside of sport, thus showing the long-term impact of the Mintridge programmes. However, charities such as the Mintridge Foundation, need long-term support and funding to continue their valuable work.

This project has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the role of positive sporting role models in encouraging active participation in sport. Future research could increase our knowledge and understanding by utilising a mixed method approach (including questionnaires) to collect statistical data to allow for comparison with similar charitable initiatives. A longitudinal study could also be adopted, conducting a follow up study to explore this relationship over time. This would be particularly insightful in this post-COVID period.

In summary, when asking the penultimate interview question “describe the Mintridge Foundation in three words”, the most common words were, “*inspiring, inclusive and powerful*”. With one participant simply summing up the Mintridge Foundation as “*helping young people be the best they can be via sport*”.

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