

Sports club dropout prevention!

Exercise and practice alone won't cut it!

Sports clubs within the Netherlands and other countries in Europe struggle to prevent youthful members, aged 11 to 15, from dropping out. Kids often have plenty of other options and “tasks” they can choose to fill their day with. Transitioning to another school, playing video games, spending time with friends and wanting to earn some extra money often consume their time.

TEXT COR NIKS

Should we accept this and consider it the way things are nowadays? Or is there something we can do to let youthful members become more involved, stick around and perhaps even start participating in extra activities offered by the association?



Projects

The Erasmus + Sports-program, founded by the European Union, has started multiple projects to prevent kids from dropping out. Examples of these projects are: “project SportParent (2017-2018)” and “Keep Youngsters Involved (2017-2019)”.

Now, we have the KidMove project (www.kidmove.eu), which began in 2019 and will continue till the end of 2020. They target the same issue as the older projects and try to prevent the increasing number of dropouts. The KidMove project doesn't offer a solution for clubs struggling with this issue but, just like the older projects mentioned above, they can be supportive to those in need of guidance. The project offers short videos, blogs, and articles that contain tips and relative background knowledge to prevent members from dropping out.

This article is specifically about the challenge of becoming more than just a sports club. According to KidMove's staff, formed by a collaboration between Finnish, Austrian, Czech, Polish, and Dutch partners in sports and education (Higher education), we can keep youngsters from dropping out by taking a different perspective on what a sports club is.

<https://www.kennisbanksportenbewegen.nl/?file=7728&m=1492694266&action=file.download>



Background

The knowledge centre of Sports and Movement defines a sports club as a meeting place for members, parents, volunteers and athletes. A club offers structural activities. Because of these structural and frequently offered opportunities to exercise and compete, as well as the social benefits, we encourage the decrease of dropouts. Apart from reason mentioned above, clubs often offer volunteering jobs, which is a great way to gain experience (Aalbers, 2017).

A research that investigated 526 different clubs came to the conclusion that over half of the clubs participating (52%) did not expect a bright future, they expect the increasing number of dropouts to become their biggest challenge. The aging of our society, increasing individualism and decreasing willingness to work voluntarily, are all mentioned as causes (Hoeijmakers, 2019).

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Pictures:

swww.kidmove.eu/

Websites:

<https://www.kidmove.eu/>
<http://www.sportparent.eu/en/>
<https://en.kenniscentrumsportenbewegen.nl/international-projects/keep-youngsters-involved/>
<https://www.specialheroescampus.nl>
<https://www.verenigingen.nl>

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When considering the frequency of exercising we notice that frequent participants often care about improving their results and competition, the same is seen in team-sports. When considering the incidental athlete, it is noticeable that external motivation plays a bigger role for them. Chances of these athletes to train more often and to “stick around” are considerably lower.

Interpersonal characteristics, such as the athletic history of their parents, and youngsters’ own educational level both seem to influence their motivation on whether to stay or not.

Another important factor is the way friends and family perceive sport, if they consider exercise to be important, so will the person in question. Growing up in an active household where sport is considered important, enlarges chances of the individual to exercise regularly. (Tiessen-Raaphorst, Woittiez, Vonk, & Pulles, 2019).

The SportParent project offers tips & tricks for parents on how to motivate their children to participate in sports activities. They focus on communication, strengthening the relationship between kid and parent and as proven by previous research the importance of sharing a passion for sports. The ultimate goal according to this project is to become involved in a club. Involvement can result in friendships with other parents, athletes, volunteers and hopefully create beautiful memories that will last a lifetime.

Social factors

KidMove sees a number of factors that clubs and trainers can influence to keep trainees from dropping out.

First of all, the social factor is one of the big reasons to either stay or leave. Just take a look at team sports where friendships for life are often found.

Furthermore, the third half could very well be the reason for youngsters to stick around, whereas some might perceive this as a negative part due to alcohol usage, this is not something that is to be taken in to consideration when talking about youthful members aged 11 to 15 since alcohol is not allowed to be served to minors. The challenge here would be to make the third half more appealing for youngsters without luring them in with a beer. To achieve this goal a club could offer other facilities like darts, card games, video analyses with your team, having a chat with your coach about that one amazing goal, etc.

Opportunities to change?

Remarkable is how we keep on trying the same strategies used in the past to prevent youngsters from leaving, sometimes it did work for a while, but usually this does not end in the wished-for result. Especially our target audience, of youngsters aged 11 to 15, are essential to keep a sports club active.

General factors

The just-released report ‘Kansen op sportieve groei’ (published by: Centraal Planbureau (2019)), states that personal motivation plays a big part for youngsters to either stay or leave.

In team sports it is crucial that friendships are formed for the motivation to keep participating.

KidMove states that self-development within a sport is not just the progress made within that specific sport, the opportunities for a young athlete to develop him or herself further on a personal level are not to be ignored. A youngster can often make steps towards more autonomy, the opportunity to self-rule at their club is often a reason to stick around. When at practice a kid can often be him or herself without the direct supervision of a parent.

Under the stipulation that the activities offered remain challenging enough. When you are constantly challenged to become better, and the hard work shows itself in the results, the internal motivation is almost always improved. However, when a lack of variation within the activities is offered, and the focus is no longer on improvement, we often see many youngsters leave.

Never sport alone

Exercising by yourself, during a competition or practice, often doesn't motivate youngsters to stay member, they are looking for other ways to self-develop. A sports club can improve the bond by offering a variety of side activities, for example a movie night or watching the game together. Apart from that, it's just as important to offer opportunities to participate in other activities.

Being allowed to help with the preparations for a local amateur competition for the kids is one of the examples of activities that a club can offer its members. This will not only result in a stronger bond but will improve the self-esteem of the youngster as well. He or she will feel more part of the club, and chances that they want to help out again are very much there. An important condition on this is that the youngster is not asked to do too much. Experiences with this issue can be read on www.verenigingen.nl, on here we find that volunteers are often willing to do short, relatively simple, tasks that don't consume too much time. Activities that take long and require more responsibility can be off putting.

Not to be underestimated is the importance of involving youngsters within actual issues and questions within the club. Think about things like changing the interior of the accommodation, creating a training schedule, the hunt for new sponsors or how to deal with aggression on the field. It turns out that young members often come with creative solutions that could potentially tackle an actual issue.

When the board, trainer or coach makes sure that plenty of praise is given the self-value of the person often improves.

A wonderful example of improving the bond with youngsters is offering Professional Assistant (P.A.) functions within the club. Special Heroes has developed a program especially for kids with disabilities. This program could most certainly be used for anyone and not just kids with disabilities. (www.specialheroes.nl).

Conclusion

To keep youngsters motivated to stay part of their club for a long time it often isn't enough to offer opportunities to exercise and compete, by offering a variety of activities and even the opportunity to get some responsibilities youngsters are more likely to stay.

The Board, trainers and parents all should work together to facilitate these things. Luckily, we have an increasing access to relative information digitally which means that there is an opportunity for the trainer, teacher or coach to apply this knowledge and spread the information gathered within the board and parents, so they can all work together to decrease the number of dropouts.



For clubs and trainers:

Keep Youngsters Involved*

Within Europe and the Netherlands, a lot of youngsters start exercising less between the age of 12 and 19. Their motivation is decreasing, or it becomes too difficult to combine their sport with school. The European Erasmus+ project "Keep Youngsters Involved" (KYI; 2016-2019) revealed reasons for youngsters to quit their sport and found motives to prevent them from doing so. Researchers found 14 factors that contribute to keeping youngsters around. These factors are processed into practical and handy tools, like an infographic and even a cardgame offering steps that can be taken. The card game can be used within the club, together with youthfull members, to come up with solutions. Many youngsters talk about their own experiences in videos and articles, that are offered in translated versions for international partners on the site: www.keepyoungstersinvolved.eu. An important insight of this project is that by actively involving kids and youngsters within the activities of the club, chances of them staying part of their clubs are considerably higher.