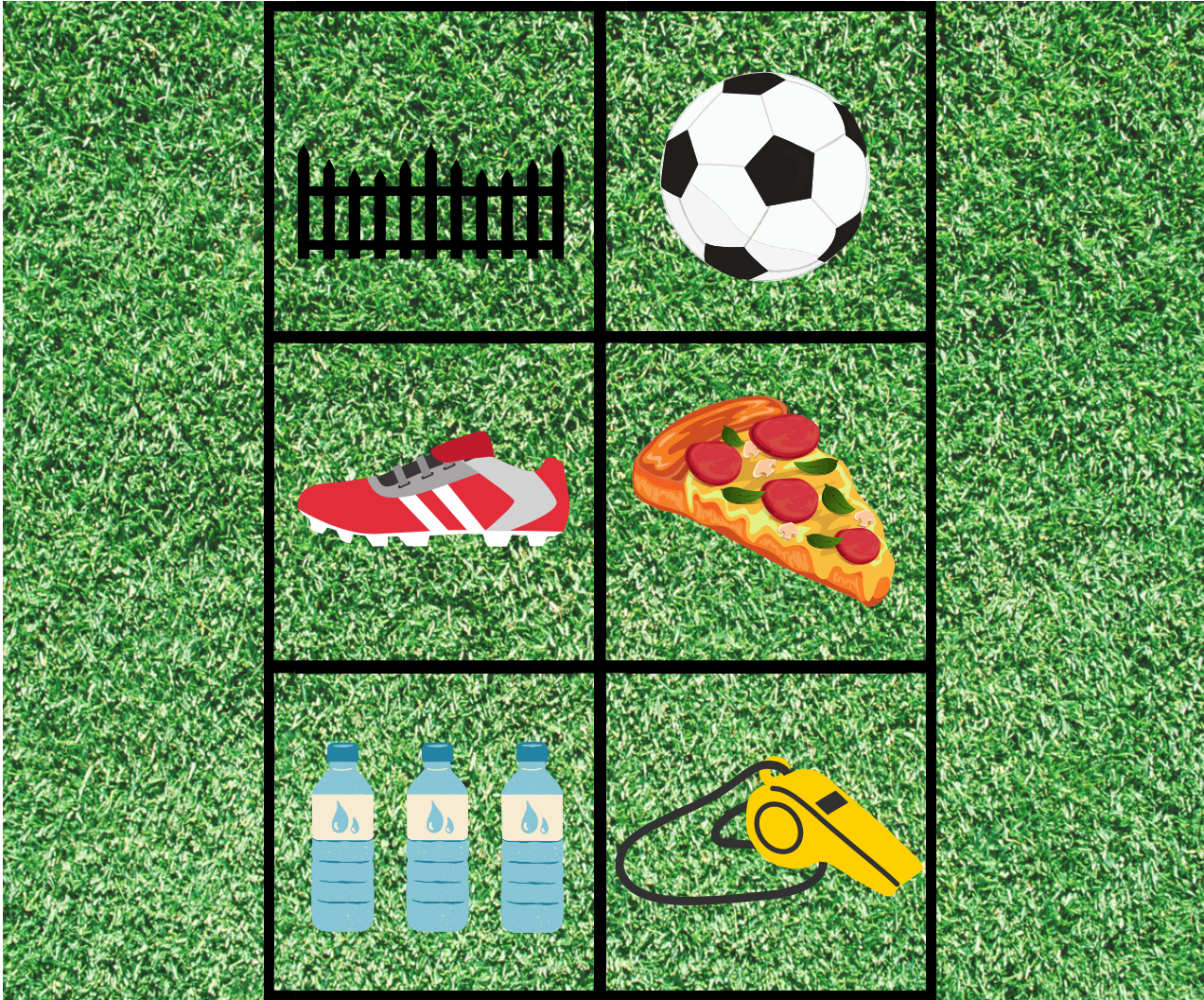


"I JUST WANT TO PLAY FOOTBALL. IT'S REALLY HARD TO FIND A PITCH TO PLAY ON."



**INCLUSION AS PREVENTION IN SOUTH LANARKSHIRE
TEST OF CHANGE SUMMARY REPORT**

JUNE 2022

Summary

A group of young people hanging around a South Lanarkshire park were asked by the Inclusion as Prevention (IAP) engagement coordinator what they like to do in their community and what they would like in their community. The answer came ... they told us they would like to have access to the 'quality' locked football pitches, some of them told us that they would climb the fence in order to access these pitches and be chased away by staff or the police. This is the story of the journey to providing that access and the impact that this had on the young people and the community where they live.

Inclusion as Prevention is a five year project with the aim of reducing criminalisation of children and young people by working collaboratively with them to improve services and access to them. Following detached group work with young people in the community, the germ of an idea for drop-in access to football was taken by Inclusion as Prevention who partnered with Youth, Family, Community Learning (YFCL) in South Lanarkshire who could provide light touch supervision, and a 16 week pilot was carried out. The weekly sessions were positively received by the young people who attended in greater numbers each week, the providers in YFCL acknowledged that this was a positive way to work in a light touch way and they could see potential longer term, and the reduction in antisocial behaviour and material damage in and around the leisure centre was measurable. The next step for this project is to work within the local authority and partners to explore a way to embed this model across other populations of young people and consider other geographies where its positive impact on the local area and young people could be replicated.



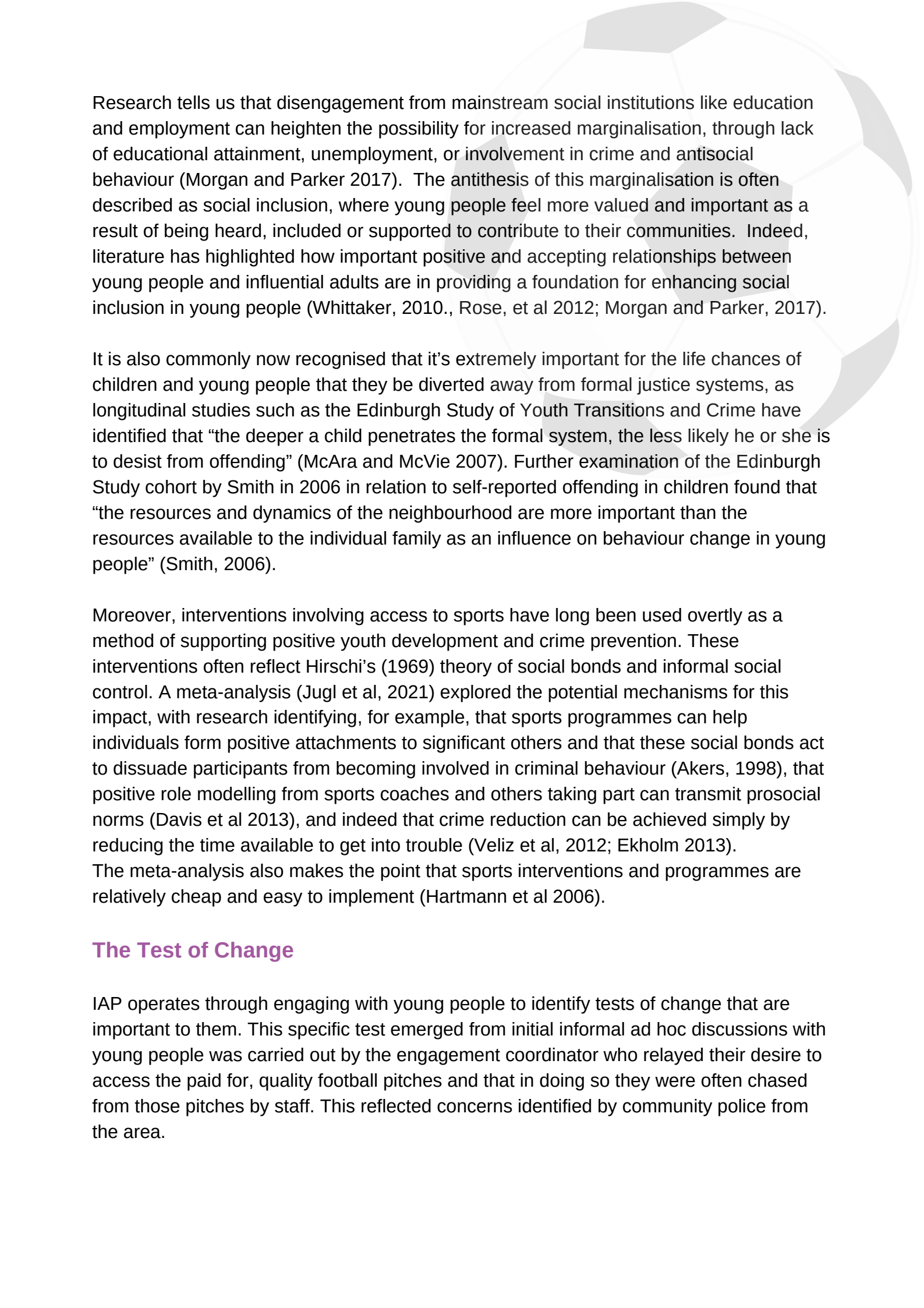
What is Inclusion as Prevention?

Inclusion as Prevention (IAP) is a five-year initiative funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. IAP is a partnership between South Lanarkshire Council, Action for Children, Dartington Service Design Lab and the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ). The focus of IAP is on co-production and collaboration with young people, communities and partners, testing out ways to improve how services can be provided to better meet the needs of children, young people and families. Our vision is to reduce the potential for young people to be involved in offending behaviours and other negative outcomes. The voice of children and young people is at the centre of what we do.

There are three main strands within IAP and they work in an overlapping and supporting way, the strands are engagement, improvement and evaluation. A mechanism used by IAP to explore the ways in which services can better meet the needs of children, young people and families is by using improvement methodology. This method is useful for working in real-life situations and is based on the model of Plan –Do – Study –Act (PSDA cycle), for example identifying a need, designing a way to respond to this need, test this idea and then examine what happens as a result. This is the first step of the 'test of change'. The subsequent stage involves a process of Adopt-Adapt-Abandon, which allows the response to be fully adopted or amended to work better or indeed, based on the findings of the test, potentially abandoned entirely. The test of change described in this report is one of seven which have been or are being carried out by Inclusion as Prevention within South Lanarkshire.

Why is inclusion important in reducing crime and what role can sports play?

Acknowledging that young people enjoy playing football with their friends is not ground breaking news, neither is knowing that young people can, when bored and in the absence of alternatives, sometimes become involved in behaviours that might be deemed 'antisocial' including drinking alcohol, hanging around in noisy groups or breaking into football pitches. The Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act 2004 gave the Police power to respond to, and Sheriffs the power to grant a behaviour order in relation to, individuals, even where there was no proven intention to cause alarm or distress. It is therefore not uncommon that members of the community might consider groups of young people 'hanging around' and socialising in groups an act of antisocial behaviour, even if no criminal acts are carried out. However, while community fears may be real, what is sometimes not acknowledged is that young people are often excluded from public places and spaces, constraining their right to gather, play or simply act like teenagers and that this exclusion might be prompting these behaviours that might be unwelcome or illegal.



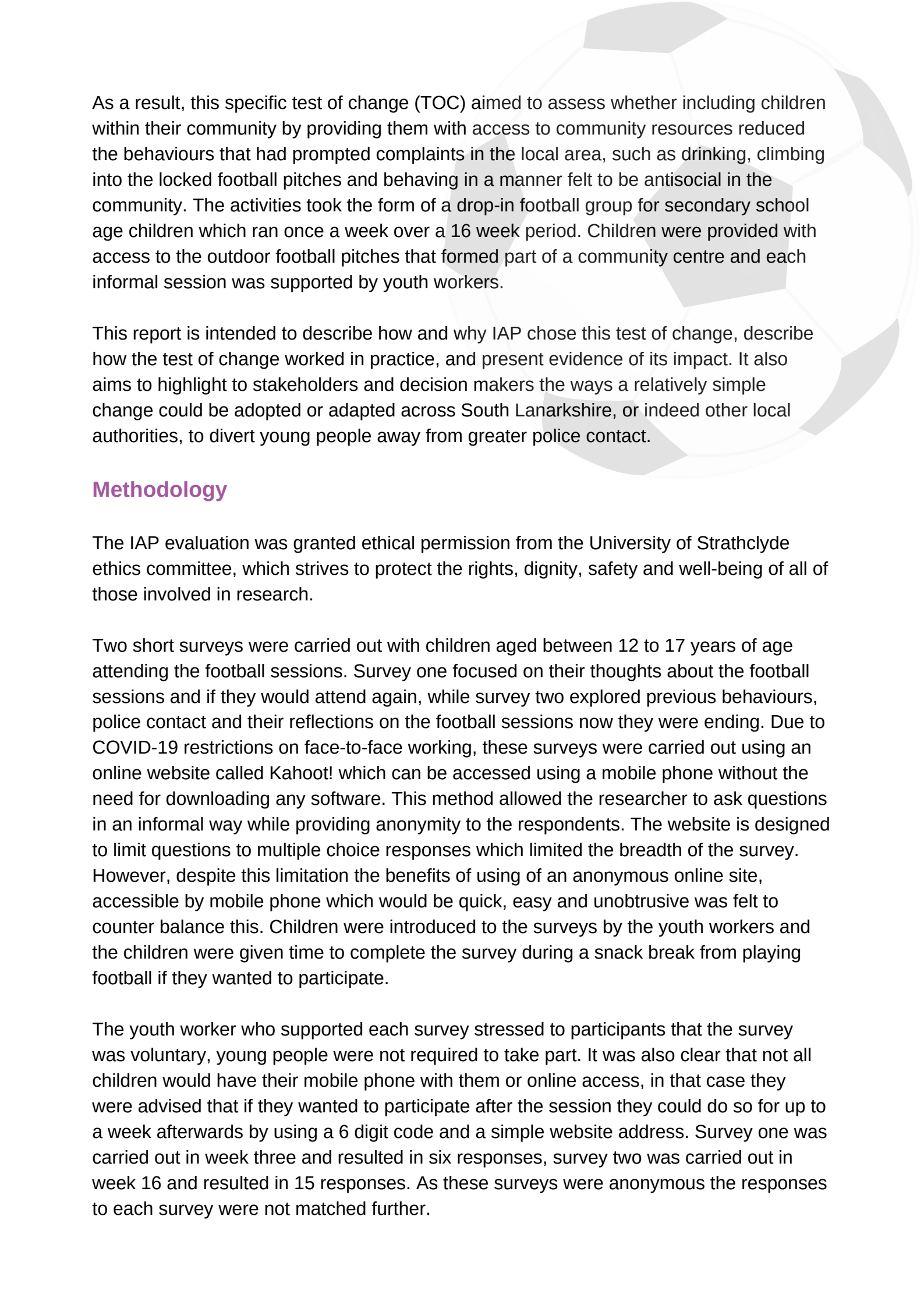
Research tells us that disengagement from mainstream social institutions like education and employment can heighten the possibility for increased marginalisation, through lack of educational attainment, unemployment, or involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour (Morgan and Parker 2017). The antithesis of this marginalisation is often described as social inclusion, where young people feel more valued and important as a result of being heard, included or supported to contribute to their communities. Indeed, literature has highlighted how important positive and accepting relationships between young people and influential adults are in providing a foundation for enhancing social inclusion in young people (Whittaker, 2010., Rose, et al 2012; Morgan and Parker, 2017).

It is also commonly now recognised that it's extremely important for the life chances of children and young people that they be diverted away from formal justice systems, as longitudinal studies such as the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime have identified that "the deeper a child penetrates the formal system, the less likely he or she is to desist from offending" (McAra and McVie 2007). Further examination of the Edinburgh Study cohort by Smith in 2006 in relation to self-reported offending in children found that "the resources and dynamics of the neighbourhood are more important than the resources available to the individual family as an influence on behaviour change in young people" (Smith, 2006).

Moreover, interventions involving access to sports have long been used overtly as a method of supporting positive youth development and crime prevention. These interventions often reflect Hirschi's (1969) theory of social bonds and informal social control. A meta-analysis (Jugl et al, 2021) explored the potential mechanisms for this impact, with research identifying, for example, that sports programmes can help individuals form positive attachments to significant others and that these social bonds act to dissuade participants from becoming involved in criminal behaviour (Akers, 1998), that positive role modelling from sports coaches and others taking part can transmit prosocial norms (Davis et al 2013), and indeed that crime reduction can be achieved simply by reducing the time available to get into trouble (Veliz et al, 2012; Ekholm 2013). The meta-analysis also makes the point that sports interventions and programmes are relatively cheap and easy to implement (Hartmann et al 2006).

The Test of Change

IAP operates through engaging with young people to identify tests of change that are important to them. This specific test emerged from initial informal ad hoc discussions with young people was carried out by the engagement coordinator who relayed their desire to access the paid for, quality football pitches and that in doing so they were often chased from those pitches by staff. This reflected concerns identified by community police from the area.



As a result, this specific test of change (TOC) aimed to assess whether including children within their community by providing them with access to community resources reduced the behaviours that had prompted complaints in the local area, such as drinking, climbing into the locked football pitches and behaving in a manner felt to be antisocial in the community. The activities took the form of a drop-in football group for secondary school age children which ran once a week over a 16 week period. Children were provided with access to the outdoor football pitches that formed part of a community centre and each informal session was supported by youth workers.

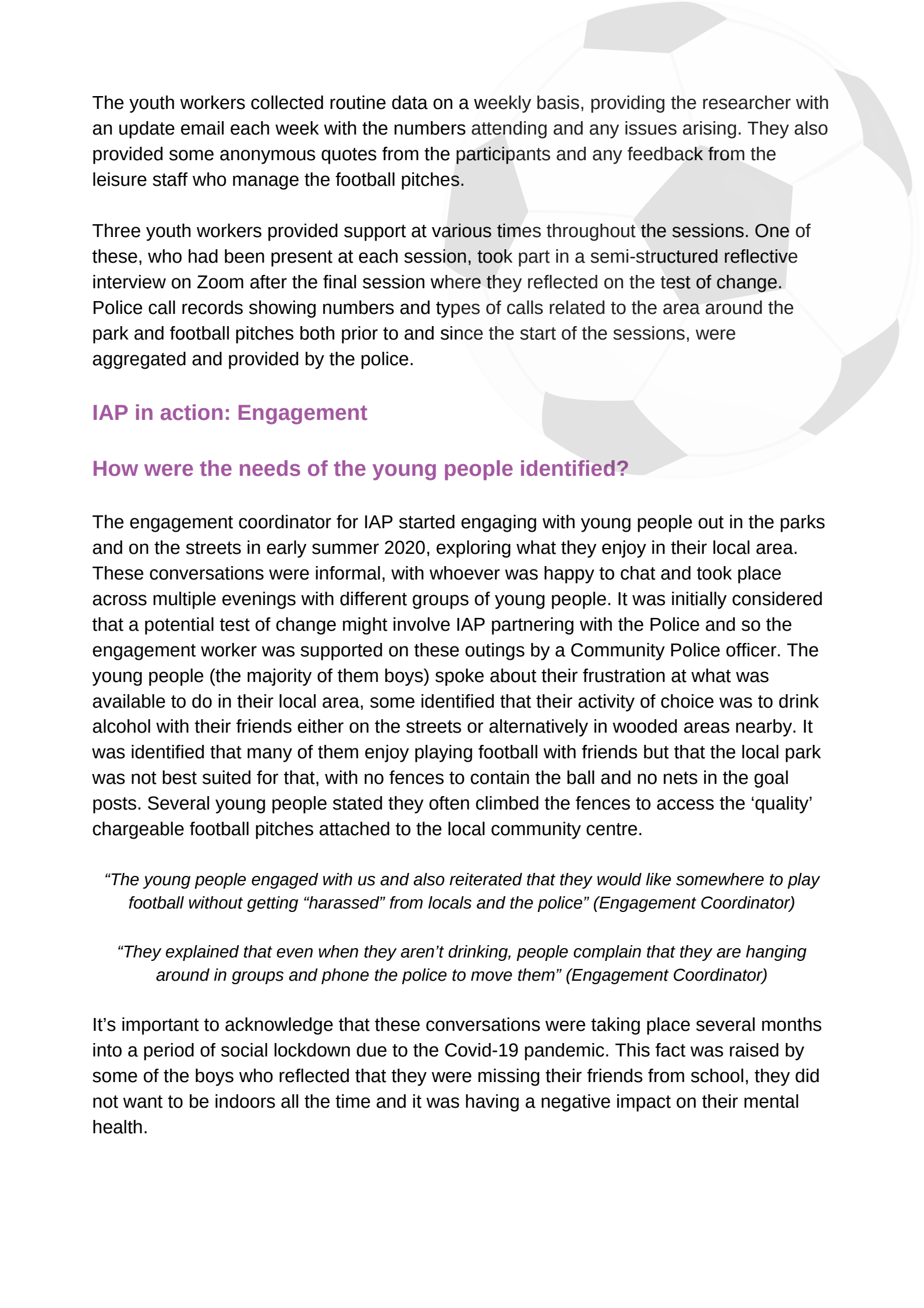
This report is intended to describe how and why IAP chose this test of change, describe how the test of change worked in practice, and present evidence of its impact. It also aims to highlight to stakeholders and decision makers the ways a relatively simple change could be adopted or adapted across South Lanarkshire, or indeed other local authorities, to divert young people away from greater police contact.

Methodology

The IAP evaluation was granted ethical permission from the University of Strathclyde ethics committee, which strives to protect the rights, dignity, safety and well-being of all of those involved in research.

Two short surveys were carried out with children aged between 12 to 17 years of age attending the football sessions. Survey one focused on their thoughts about the football sessions and if they would attend again, while survey two explored previous behaviours, police contact and their reflections on the football sessions now they were ending. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face working, these surveys were carried out using an online website called Kahoot! which can be accessed using a mobile phone without the need for downloading any software. This method allowed the researcher to ask questions in an informal way while providing anonymity to the respondents. The website is designed to limit questions to multiple choice responses which limited the breadth of the survey. However, despite this limitation the benefits of using of an anonymous online site, accessible by mobile phone which would be quick, easy and unobtrusive was felt to counter balance this. Children were introduced to the surveys by the youth workers and the children were given time to complete the survey during a snack break from playing football if they wanted to participate.

The youth worker who supported each survey stressed to participants that the survey was voluntary, young people were not required to take part. It was also clear that not all children would have their mobile phone with them or online access, in that case they were advised that if they wanted to participate after the session they could do so for up to a week afterwards by using a 6 digit code and a simple website address. Survey one was carried out in week three and resulted in six responses, survey two was carried out in week 16 and resulted in 15 responses. As these surveys were anonymous the responses to each survey were not matched further.



The youth workers collected routine data on a weekly basis, providing the researcher with an update email each week with the numbers attending and any issues arising. They also provided some anonymous quotes from the participants and any feedback from the leisure staff who manage the football pitches.

Three youth workers provided support at various times throughout the sessions. One of these, who had been present at each session, took part in a semi-structured reflective interview on Zoom after the final session where they reflected on the test of change. Police call records showing numbers and types of calls related to the area around the park and football pitches both prior to and since the start of the sessions, were aggregated and provided by the police.

IAP in action: Engagement

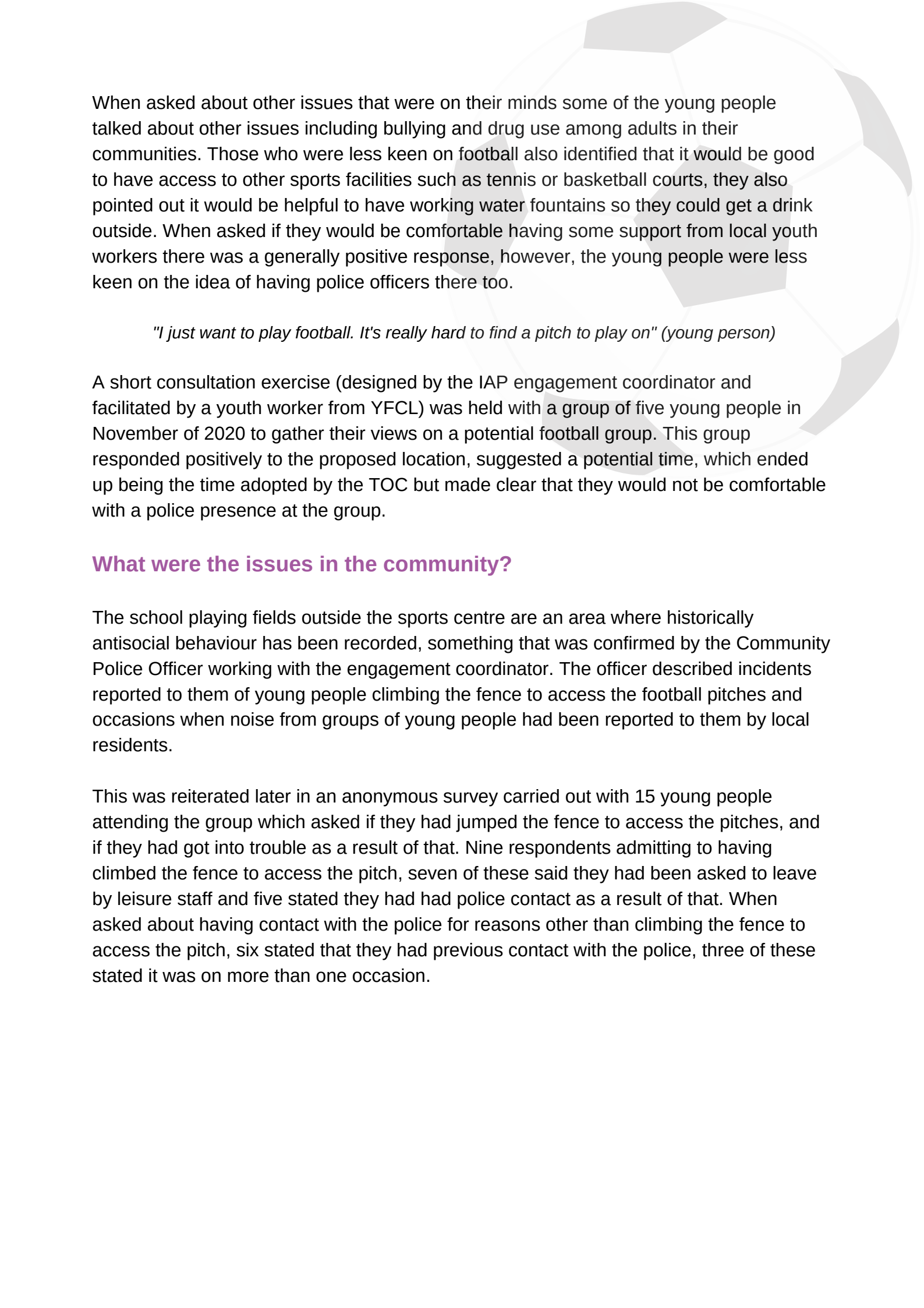
How were the needs of the young people identified?

The engagement coordinator for IAP started engaging with young people out in the parks and on the streets in early summer 2020, exploring what they enjoy in their local area. These conversations were informal, with whoever was happy to chat and took place across multiple evenings with different groups of young people. It was initially considered that a potential test of change might involve IAP partnering with the Police and so the engagement worker was supported on these outings by a Community Police officer. The young people (the majority of them boys) spoke about their frustration at what was available to do in their local area, some identified that their activity of choice was to drink alcohol with their friends either on the streets or alternatively in wooded areas nearby. It was identified that many of them enjoy playing football with friends but that the local park was not best suited for that, with no fences to contain the ball and no nets in the goal posts. Several young people stated they often climbed the fences to access the 'quality' chargeable football pitches attached to the local community centre.

"The young people engaged with us and also reiterated that they would like somewhere to play football without getting "harassed" from locals and the police" (Engagement Coordinator)

"They explained that even when they aren't drinking, people complain that they are hanging around in groups and phone the police to move them" (Engagement Coordinator)

It's important to acknowledge that these conversations were taking place several months into a period of social lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This fact was raised by some of the boys who reflected that they were missing their friends from school, they did not want to be indoors all the time and it was having a negative impact on their mental health.



When asked about other issues that were on their minds some of the young people talked about other issues including bullying and drug use among adults in their communities. Those who were less keen on football also identified that it would be good to have access to other sports facilities such as tennis or basketball courts, they also pointed out it would be helpful to have working water fountains so they could get a drink outside. When asked if they would be comfortable having some support from local youth workers there was a generally positive response, however, the young people were less keen on the idea of having police officers there too.

"I just want to play football. It's really hard to find a pitch to play on" (young person)

A short consultation exercise (designed by the IAP engagement coordinator and facilitated by a youth worker from YFCL) was held with a group of five young people in November of 2020 to gather their views on a potential football group. This group responded positively to the proposed location, suggested a potential time, which ended up being the time adopted by the TOC but made clear that they would not be comfortable with a police presence at the group.

What were the issues in the community?

The school playing fields outside the sports centre are an area where historically antisocial behaviour has been recorded, something that was confirmed by the Community Police Officer working with the engagement coordinator. The officer described incidents reported to them of young people climbing the fence to access the football pitches and occasions when noise from groups of young people had been reported to them by local residents.

This was reiterated later in an anonymous survey carried out with 15 young people attending the group which asked if they had jumped the fence to access the pitches, and if they had got into trouble as a result of that. Nine respondents admitting to having climbed the fence to access the pitch, seven of these said they had been asked to leave by leisure staff and five stated they had had police contact as a result of that. When asked about having contact with the police for reasons other than climbing the fence to access the pitch, six stated that they had previous contact with the police, three of these stated it was on more than one occasion.



IAP in action: Improvement and Designing the Test of Change

What were the aims of this test of change?

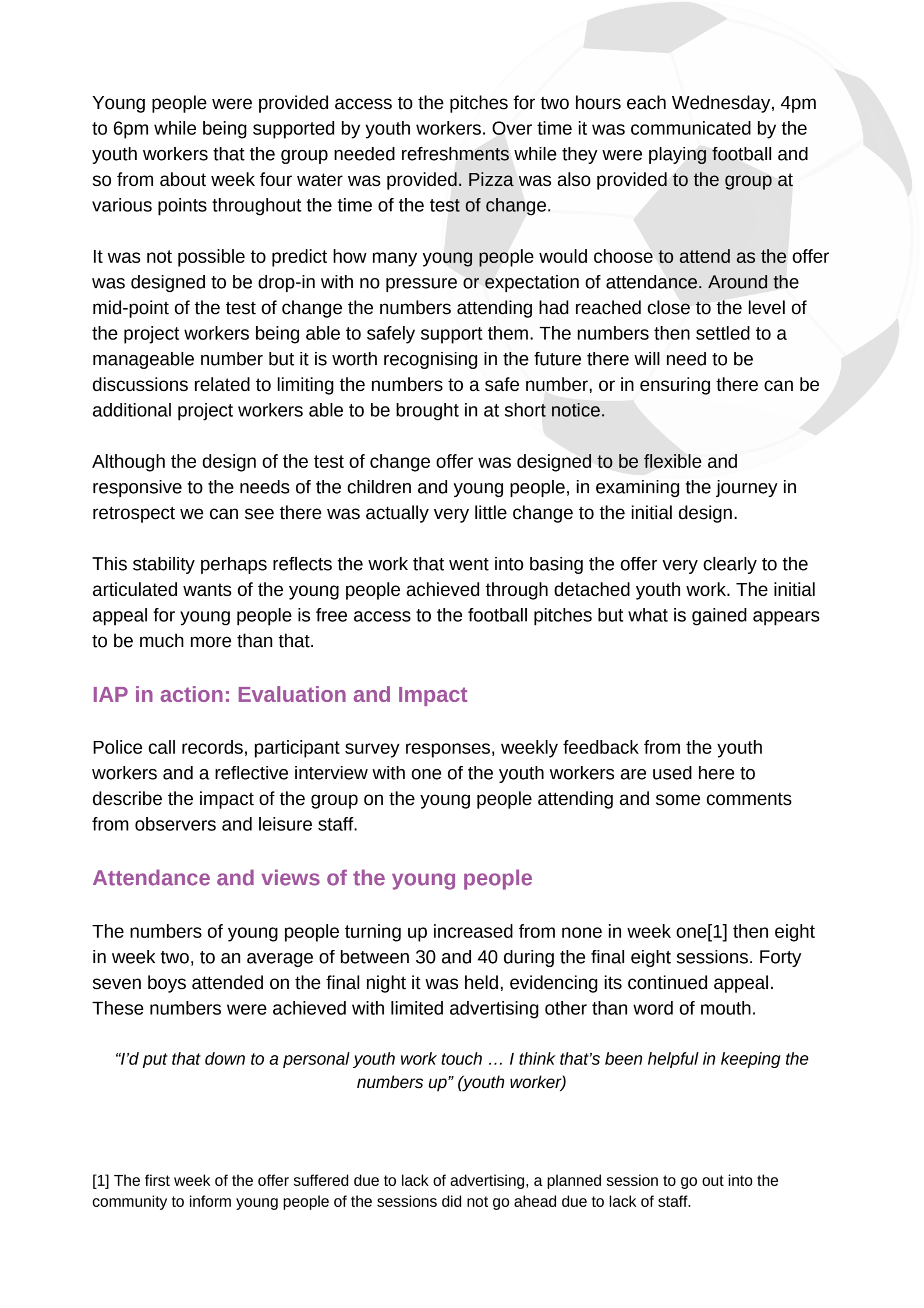
The early work carried out by the engagement coordinator brought valuable knowledge to the initial design of a 'test of change'. Throughout conversations taking place in summer 2020 the young people had identified that they would like to be able to access the football pitches and have 'a kick about' without getting into trouble with leisure staff or the police. Covid-19 restrictions halted this work until lockdown restrictions allowed more face to face group work.

By the summer of 2021 it was felt that the time was right to respond to this need and support a test of change, and IAP reached out to Youth, Family, Community Learning (YFCL) within South Lanarkshire Council to discuss how this could work in practice.

The test of change was a relatively simple one. Young people who would otherwise have no organised activity and who would potentially be getting involved in behaviour that caused the community concern, or resulted in police contact, would instead be given free access to the football pitches for two hours every week, supported in a 'light touch' way by youth workers. This could potentially result in more prosocial activity, increased and/or stronger friendship groups forming and the chance to share skills and interests. It was intended that this should not be a 'training session' for football as these already exist in the area, but be more flexible, informal and open to those who just want a kick-about, as well as those who are more serious about the sport. It was felt to be important that this should remain a drop-in session with no expectations or commitments and that young people could choose to bring their friends along to subsequent sessions. Having YFCL youth workers supporting the group would provide both adult supervision to ensure the sessions ran safely, but also crucially to allow relationships to form between them and young people they may not have previously encountered. This informal relationship could open the door for youth workers to suggest other groups or organisations where they could continue their interests, thus linking young people into their community in an informal way.

The Journey of the TOC

In June 2021 a partnership was formed to support the test of change, this partnership between IAP who would fund the costs of hiring the football pitches, initially for eight weeks, although this was later extended to 16 weeks, and YFCL, who would provide youth worker support. The informal drop-in group for young people (at this stage all boys) to play football, was based at the outdoor pitches at the leisure/community centre at the local High School.



Young people were provided access to the pitches for two hours each Wednesday, 4pm to 6pm while being supported by youth workers. Over time it was communicated by the youth workers that the group needed refreshments while they were playing football and so from about week four water was provided. Pizza was also provided to the group at various points throughout the time of the test of change.

It was not possible to predict how many young people would choose to attend as the offer was designed to be drop-in with no pressure or expectation of attendance. Around the mid-point of the test of change the numbers attending had reached close to the level of the project workers being able to safely support them. The numbers then settled to a manageable number but it is worth recognising in the future there will need to be discussions related to limiting the numbers to a safe number, or in ensuring there can be additional project workers able to be brought in at short notice.

Although the design of the test of change offer was designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the children and young people, in examining the journey in retrospect we can see there was actually very little change to the initial design.

This stability perhaps reflects the work that went into basing the offer very clearly to the articulated wants of the young people achieved through detached youth work. The initial appeal for young people is free access to the football pitches but what is gained appears to be much more than that.

IAP in action: Evaluation and Impact

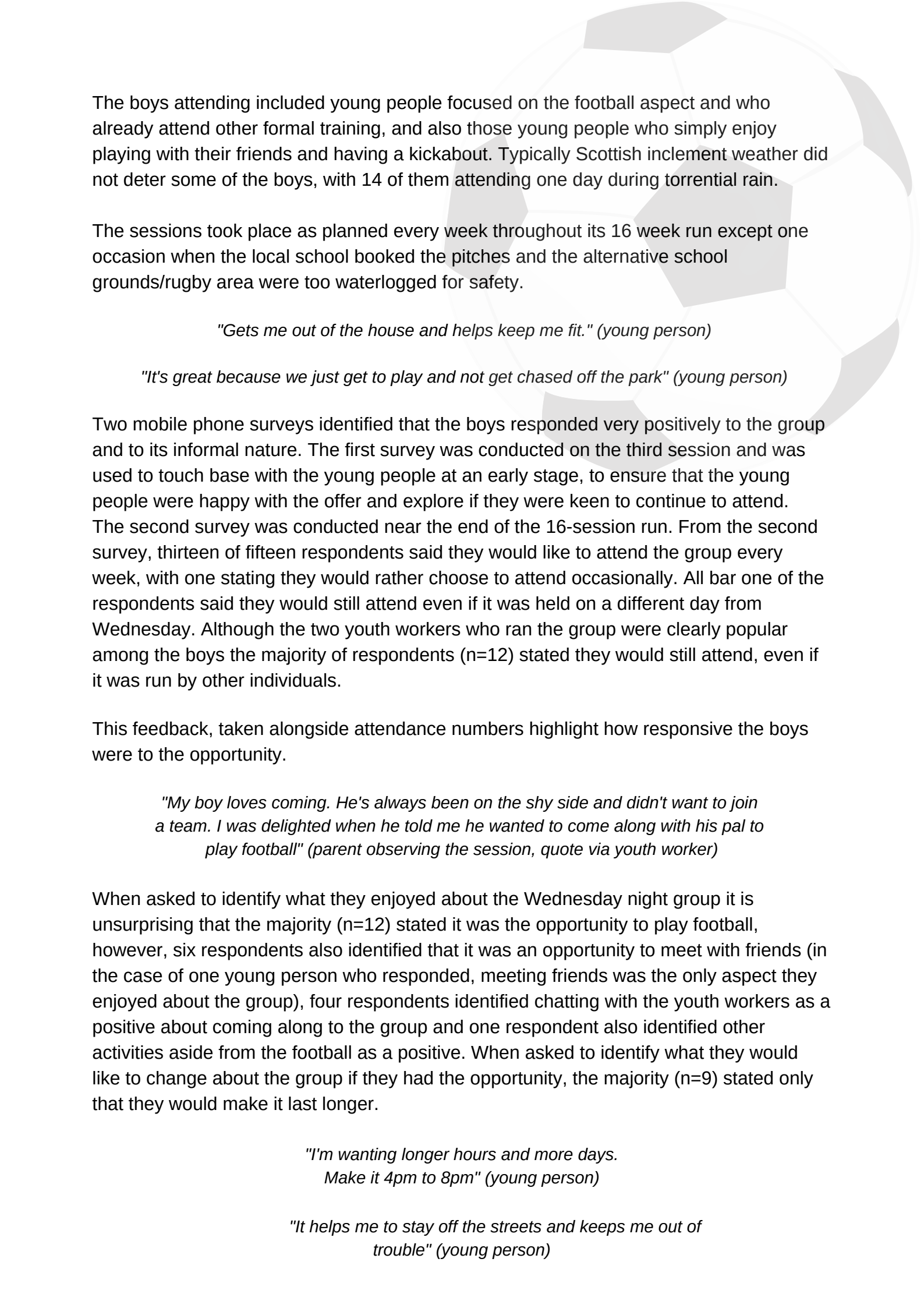
Police call records, participant survey responses, weekly feedback from the youth workers and a reflective interview with one of the youth workers are used here to describe the impact of the group on the young people attending and some comments from observers and leisure staff.

Attendance and views of the young people

The numbers of young people turning up increased from none in week one^[1] then eight in week two, to an average of between 30 and 40 during the final eight sessions. Forty seven boys attended on the final night it was held, evidencing its continued appeal. These numbers were achieved with limited advertising other than word of mouth.

“I’d put that down to a personal youth work touch ... I think that’s been helpful in keeping the numbers up” (youth worker)

[1] The first week of the offer suffered due to lack of advertising, a planned session to go out into the community to inform young people of the sessions did not go ahead due to lack of staff.



The boys attending included young people focused on the football aspect and who already attend other formal training, and also those young people who simply enjoy playing with their friends and having a kickabout. Typically Scottish inclement weather did not deter some of the boys, with 14 of them attending one day during torrential rain.

The sessions took place as planned every week throughout its 16 week run except one occasion when the local school booked the pitches and the alternative school grounds/rugby area were too waterlogged for safety.

"Gets me out of the house and helps keep me fit." (young person)

"It's great because we just get to play and not get chased off the park" (young person)

Two mobile phone surveys identified that the boys responded very positively to the group and to its informal nature. The first survey was conducted on the third session and was used to touch base with the young people at an early stage, to ensure that the young people were happy with the offer and explore if they were keen to continue to attend. The second survey was conducted near the end of the 16-session run. From the second survey, thirteen of fifteen respondents said they would like to attend the group every week, with one stating they would rather choose to attend occasionally. All bar one of the respondents said they would still attend even if it was held on a different day from Wednesday. Although the two youth workers who ran the group were clearly popular among the boys the majority of respondents (n=12) stated they would still attend, even if it was run by other individuals.

This feedback, taken alongside attendance numbers highlight how responsive the boys were to the opportunity.

"My boy loves coming. He's always been on the shy side and didn't want to join a team. I was delighted when he told me he wanted to come along with his pal to play football" (parent observing the session, quote via youth worker)

When asked to identify what they enjoyed about the Wednesday night group it is unsurprising that the majority (n=12) stated it was the opportunity to play football, however, six respondents also identified that it was an opportunity to meet with friends (in the case of one young person who responded, meeting friends was the only aspect they enjoyed about the group), four respondents identified chatting with the youth workers as a positive about coming along to the group and one respondent also identified other activities aside from the football as a positive. When asked to identify what they would like to change about the group if they had the opportunity, the majority (n=9) stated only that they would make it last longer.

*"I'm wanting longer hours and more days.
Make it 4pm to 8pm" (young person)*

*"It helps me to stay off the streets and keeps me out of
trouble" (young person)*

Views of the youth workers

The workers who support the group reported that they found it a useful way to build relationships with boys who they often struggle to make contact with and workers described signposting some of the boys towards other organisations/local services that they might be interested in. The youth worker interviewed for this report identified the type of boys who attended the sessions were often not those who would typically be involved in out-of-school activities. However, the group was mixed in that it included some boys who were doing well in school and wouldn't necessarily come across the path of youth workers, while also including others who were not doing so well including with their attendance at school.

'You're seeing relationships forming and building, it's all very natural. It's [the football] organised, there's set activities [...] you can see relationships start to flourish naturally, it's very light touch ...' (youth worker)

"You hit the nail on the head about what young people need in this area" (youth worker)

When asked what he felt worked well in this test of change the project worker identified the partnership with IAP, highlighting that this gave him the freedom to work the way he likes to work with young people.

He also articulated what he saw the group to be; that it was an informal football group and he felt very strongly that informality should be retained. In reflecting back on the 16 weeks, he says by weeks 5 and 6 it already felt to him like a great success, that were a lot of young people turning up each week and he had noted there were relationships and trust building within the group.

"You do your best kind of youth work and your best kind of learning when it can be informal especially with an audience that can typically be quite averse to that formal learning, very much against that authoritarian-, I'm a believer in discussing these things with the young people and formulating rules collectively and take ownership of their own learning" (youth worker)

Simply providing an activity for young people to stop them hanging around the local shops or indeed isolated in their homes was seen as a positive by the youth worker to reduce social isolation.

"They are getting much more out of the engagement, the team work and the camaraderie [rather than working towards achieving youth awards]" (youth worker)

The group secured a large number of attendees without a formal strategy to invite young people. The group formed relatively organically, the youth workers did not feel the need to call or text them in advance to see if they were coming and each week a small group would be waiting for the session to start.

Reduction in anti-social behaviour

Police call records^[2] to the location of the football pitches and area around the pitches throughout 2021 were examined for reports of antisocial behaviour made by members of the community. From January to June 2021 (when the football group began) there had been 14 calls made by eight members of the public (these would be individuals who live near the area). In addition in this time period there had been four crime reports made regarding damage to the pitches, this damage totalling £1700.

Throughout the duration of the football group sessions (the sessions ran from July to November 2021) there were no crime reports made regarding damage and only one call made by a member of the community regarding a group of five or six young boys accessing the pitches over the weekend, who were not causing damage but were being noisy. The police attended and the boys left the location.

"I think it's great. I stay just across from the park and see kids constantly jump the fence to play. The trouble is they can be drinking and just be a bit of a nuisance. The fact that this is on for them and costs nothing is brilliant, it's obviously popular with them" (community member, quote via youth worker)

The youth workers have reported that there have been no serious behavioural issues that they have had to manage throughout the 16 weeks that the group was running. In addition, leisure staff have affirmed to the youth workers that they have noted 'a massive reduction' in young people illegally accessing the pitches.

This additional feedback is important because not every intrusion to the pitches would necessarily warrant a call to the police and so adds greater weight to the police recorded reduction in calls related to antisocial behaviour in and around the football pitches.

"It's an amazing thing you are running here. The kids really don't have much to do around here, especially if transport and money are an issue." (community member via youth worker)

'It's the fact that it's all completely free and it's organised and it's on rain or sunshine [...] the community really like that down here and they know you're doing it for the community' (youth worker)

In conversations with the boys the youth worker reported that although some of the boys attending the group will still access the park on other nights, since the start of the group they will disperse when challenged by staff at the pitch rather than retaliate or without staff feeling the need to call the police. The youth worker credits this shift with increased positive 'relationships' or a new 'shared respect', possibly linked to a feeling of not wanting to jeopardise the group sessions.

[2] Phone calls can be recorded within the police database systems as relating to three distinct locations; the High School, the leisure/community centre and to the playing fields adjacent to the High school

Potential next steps

As the test of change was nearing the end of the 16 week run a meeting was held between IAP and YFCL to explore the alignment of our aims and to identify our shared aims from the work. This was structured around two objectives: 1. to allow both groups to reflect on the impact of the test of change and 2. to gauge interest within YFCL in continuing to support the football group in a sustainable way, either in the same locality or more broadly across South Lanarkshire.

The youth worker made the point that already some of the previous attendees of the group might be at the point of being supported to be able to return in a volunteering role within YFCL and potentially work towards more formal youth achievement awards. It was identified by the youth worker that their involvement with the football group was providing a really strong platform to work from and this would benefit the young people and also YFCL.

“We’re now consulting with the group about [...] pitching the idea of running an informal boys group out of the universal connections building, it’ll be a lot of relationship building and then picking apart some of the issues and barriers we can start working towards and address and filter some of these young people into different opportunities our service can provide” (youth worker)

“Getting to know these young men and putting them into different opportunities, that’s the biggest thing for me, it’s being able to start advertising, for example what Rutherglen or Cambuslang Universal Connections, what kind of groups they have going on and then filtering those boys into those groups, that’s the biggest personal benefit is for me” (youth worker)

“I think there’s a clear need for it [this group] I don’t know why we keep needing to reinvent the wheel and we’ve got it here, it can only get bigger, it’s just in terms of how many nights do you want to run it?” (youth worker)

In conclusion, this test of change found ...

- That young people like to play football but that it's more than that, meeting friends is extremely important to young people, particularly during the pandemic as other forms of socialising were hugely reduced for everyone.
- That relationships both between the group of young people and between young people and youth workers were positive and literature tells us this is important for social inclusion. The example provided by the youth worker, of a small number of the group responding more appropriately to being asked to leave the pitches at times they are closed, suggests a feeling of group responsibility and a desire not to jeopardise the provision.
- The mix of young people attending appears to have worked very well in this test of change, the group including some young people with no school attendance concerns and reporting no contact with the police and some young people who were beginning to come to police attention for allegations of antisocial behaviour, some of whom may not have engaged in more formal types of intervention from youth workers.
- The light touch, informal nature of the group was felt to work really well with this group of young people and although it can be more difficult to document achievements, attainments and skills compared to more formal staged work, the skills, relationship building and bonding that goes on in this type of informal group is as important - if not more so.
- When police call data for the year is examined before and during the test of change there is a reduction in calls relating to antisocial behaviour, and although there may be other additional explanations for that, there has additionally been a concurrent reduction in damage to the football pitches. These reductions may relate to a greater feeling of ownership and a responsibility to keep the pitches in good condition and not to risk losing the group.
- The boys attending reacted extremely positively and are keen for the group to continue after a winter break.
- That the evaluation of the test of change has made the argument for it to be continued in South Lanarkshire.

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