

# #CoachMate Connectors: Kallam's Story

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## Introduction

One of the most prominent themes in the Coaching Plan for England (Sport England, 2016) is the aspiration to diversify the coaching workforce and reduce the real and perceived barriers to learning and development. This has created an incentive to develop alternative solutions to learning that provide opportunities for those who may not have been previously encouraged to develop their potential as a coach. One such approach is the development and delivery of the #CoachMate Connectors programme supported by StreetGames.

#CoachMate Connectors is aimed at supporting the development of young coaches aged 16-25 who live and coach in areas of recognised deprivation. Coaches were identified for the programme via partner projects of StreetGames which they were either part of, or signposted to, as a participant, referral or existing volunteer.

The #CoachMate Connectors programme evolved out of an earlier pilot developed and delivered by StreetGames in 2017 and 2018, and research published in a previous edition of this journal (Smith and Leflay, 2018).

An evaluation of #CoachMate Connectors is underway and is designed to measure the impact of the programme on participating coaches. This paper presents a summary of the evaluation findings presented at the 2020 UK Coaching Applied Research Conference. It includes a case study of one participant and presents the implications for coaching, drawn from the research.

## Background

The #CoachMate Connectors programme has engaged with over 20 coaches located across England and Wales, from 2018 to date. Most coaches on the programme were beginners, working at a community level coaching a range of sports, including Multi-sports,

football, boxing and netball. Each coach was provided with a bespoke learning programme which involved a combination of:

- peer mentoring
- access to local courses and CPD opportunities
- team teaching
- formal coaching qualifications.

The mix of learning opportunities were dependent on the motivations and intended outcomes of each coach. The coaches were supported by a mentor (known as a CoachMate). These mentors were carefully selected to undertake a diverse peer mentoring role, including regular meetings with each coach, accompanying coaches to CPD events and coaching qualifications, delivering coaching sessions with, and alongside the coach, and supporting each coach via digital communications.

### Method

The experience of each coach on the programme was captured via an online questionnaire. Coaches completed a questionnaire at the start of the programme and then further questionnaires at each learning experience or interaction with their mentor. The questionnaires were completed face-to-face by the coach and the mentor, and logged on the online platform. The questionnaires contained a series of questions that measured confidence, competence, character, connection and creativity. Images were also used to capture progress.

Drawing on the data collected to date, five case studies have been developed. These case studies are narratively based and describe the experience of the coach. The case studies were developed using data from the online questionnaire and through interactions with the mentor.

### Results

For the purpose of this paper, one case study is shared. The case study shows the impact of the programme on Kallam and demonstrates how a bespoke coach mentoring scheme can literally change a life.

#### Kallam's story

Kallam is from a family involved in serial criminal activity. After building a relationship with his mentor, Kallam disclosed that he wanted to change his own future and become a coach and role model in his community. Over a 10-month period, Kallam engaged in over 40 hours of support. These 40 hours mostly comprised of both digital and face-to-face peer mentoring by his mentor. He also undertook a Level 1 coaching qualification in football and a Level 2 qualification in Multi-sports, as well as a safeguarding course and first aid qualification. He is now a qualified and paid community coach working with other hard to reach young people. Recently, Kallam was recognised by West Midlands Police as a community role model. The #CoachMate Connectors programme has been instrumental in enabling Kallam to change his life and influence the lives of others.

Self-report data from the questionnaire showed an improvement in Kallam's confidence and competence to coach. In Kallam's own words:

*"I never knew this could be a job, and although many people wanted me to fail, being rewarded and recognised for making a difference is something I'm really proud of."*

*"[Recognition by the Police] made me feel that somebody took notice in the hard work that I was doing, and everything that I was doing was for a reason."*

### **Implications for coaching**

Analysis of the data captured to date, and evidence drawn from other research, suggests several implications for coach learning and development:

- Coach learning and development can be considerably enhanced through a mixture of different activities that are constructed around the individual needs of the coach.
- Formal coaching qualifications could be enhanced by other forms of support and opportunities, to initiate significant change in coaching practice.
- The skill and expertise of the mentor is significant, and additional resource and investment into their learning and development would benefit coaches.
- Consideration of how this personalised support can be scaled up to reach larger audiences of coaches is an important issue for the sustainability of such a programme.

### **Next steps**

The #CoachMate Connectors programme is continuing to grow and evolve. As it does, more lessons will be learnt, and as more data is captured, further analysis will be undertaken and findings shared. The programme is striving to make a difference to the lives of those who are most disadvantaged. This means developing a sensitive and flexible approach to coach learning and development that is tailored to everyone.

### **References**

Smith, R. and Leflay, K. (2018) Evaluation of the Coach Mate Connectors Programme. *UK Coaching Applied Coaching Research Journal*, 2: 10-17.

Sport England. (2016) *Coaching in an Active Nation, The Coaching Plan for England: 2017-2021* [online]. Available from: [https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/coaching-in-an-active-nation\\_the-coaching-plan-for-england.pdf?rpexaSlivuYWJL6DaenRiR6981vYAAj](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/coaching-in-an-active-nation_the-coaching-plan-for-england.pdf?rpexaSlivuYWJL6DaenRiR6981vYAAj)

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