

FIT FOR LIFE

Using sports as an educational tool for
the inclusion of young people with fewer op-
portunities

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INCLUSION
RESOURCE CENTRE



Education and Culture

FIT FOR LIFE

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SALTO-YOUTH STANDS FOR...

...‘Support and Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities within the **Youth in Action** programme’. The European Commission has created a network of eight SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres to enhance the implementation of the EU Youth in Action programme, which provides young people with valuable non-formal learning experiences.

SALTO’s aim is to **support the implementation of the European Youth in Action Programme with regard to** priorities such as Social Inclusion, Cultural Diversity and Participation. SALTO also supports co-operation with regions such as EuroMed, South-East Europe or Eastern Europe and The Caucasus and co-ordinates all training and co-operation activities, as well as information tools for National Agencies.

In these European priority areas, SALTO-YOUTH provides **resources, information and training** for National Agencies and European youth workers. Most of these resources are offered and disseminated at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net. Find online the European Training Calendar, the Toolbox for Training and Youth Work, the database of youth field trainers active at European level (Trainers Online for Youth or TOY), links to online resources and much, much more...

SALTO-YOUTH actively **co-operates** with other actors in the European youth field, among them the National Agencies and Co-ordinators of the Youth in Action Programme, the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, European youth workers and trainers and training organisers.

THE SALTO-YOUTH INCLUSION RESOURCE CENTRE **WWW.SALTO-YOUTH.NET/INCLUSION/**

The SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion Resource Centre (based in Belgium-Flanders) works together with the European Commission to support the inclusion of **young people with fewer opportunities** in the Youth in Action programme and through that to contribute to social cohesion in society at large. SALTO-Inclusion also supports the National Agencies and youth workers in their inclusion work by providing training, developing youth work methods, disseminating information via its newsletter, etc.

Besides this focus on inclusion, the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre also carries out **horizontal tasks** on behalf of the whole SALTO network, such as the Trainers Online for Youth (TOY) database, SALTO-YOUTH.net website developments, publications (for example Making Waves booklet about visibility, dissemination and exploitation of project results).

 For more information and resources, have a look at the Inclusion pages at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Inclusion/

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“Sport” is a simple word, yet it encompasses a **huge variety of activities and processes**. Around the world sport is generally regarded as a positive force.

Sport plays an important role in helping people of all ages maintain a high level of overall health and well-being.

INTRO WHY A SPORTS





BOOKLET?

Children and young adults can benefit from sport in two ways. Sport can improve physical fitness but it can also teach valuable social skills and promote personal development. Sport, physical activities and games simulate many of the challenges found in everyday life. Through sport activities, young people can learn the life skills they need to deal

appropriately with such challenges. Sport teaches important lessons like winning and losing, fair play, being part of a team, co-operation, leadership, discipline and working towards long term goals. Therefore sport can do much more than just make young people physically “fit”; as an educational tool it can help them become “fit for life”.

This is especially true for **young people with fewer opportunities** who, for a variety of reasons, need extra support to develop their identity, their social skills and their ability to cope with life’s challenges. Sport can be an attractive method to use with this target group and can be extremely effective in stimulating the process of social inclusion. However, educators and youth leaders working with this target group often have little or no experience in using sport as an educational tool. Many do not know how to maximise the potential of sport as a method within their regular work.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Until recently there has been little co-ordinated effort on European level to explore the educational potential of sport. In response to this need, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament declared 2004 as the “**European Year of Education through Sport**” (EYES 2004). The main objective of the campaign was “...to sensitise the public to the importance of sport in an educational context...” Within this frame, the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre organised two **training courses on Inclusion through Sports** in April and May 2004 in Deinze, Belgium. The training courses brought together youth workers from across Europe to share and be trained in methodologies for using sport as an educational method to reach specific aims with fewer-opportunity target groups. The training course also gave the participants a chance to develop European sport-themed activities for young people with fewer opportunities through the European YOUTH programme.

“**Fit for Life**” is based on the outcomes of these two SALTO training courses.

Documentation of the courses can be found at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/TCsports/

- 👉 This booklet provides **youth workers and youth educators** with background information and practical tips designed to help them use sport and outdoor activities as an educational tool in their work with young people with fewer opportunities.
- 👉 The booklet can also help **funding bodies and European institutions** become more aware of the need to promote sport activities with a strong educational dimension as an important tool in the process of social inclusion.

Sport as an activity can help keep young people physically fit, but sport as an educational tool can serve to make them truly “Fit for Life”.

STRENGTHENING LINKS BETWEEN SPORT AND YOUTH WORK

At first glance, the worlds of Sport and Youth Work may appear completely unrelated. A “**typical**” **sports club** might consist of groups of young athletes running laps around the track, pumping weights in the fitness room or listening to a pep talk from the coach. A “**typical**” **youth club**, on the other hand, might be made up of groups of youngsters doing homework, taking part in graffiti art workshops, surfing the Internet and listening to the latest hip-hop music. These stereotypical images are so different from one another - is there any relationship between the two?

Organisations working with youth usually tend to define themselves as belonging to **one camp or the other** – either they consider themselves as a sports organisation or as a youth organisation. This **split** can often be seen among young people as well as. Youngsters who attend youth clubs are usually not attracted by the activities offered by sport organisations while young people who are heavily involved in sports are usually not interested in the activities of local youth organisations.

In reality these two worlds have much more in common than first meets the eye. Sport and youth organisations share many of the **same basic philosophical aims**. For example, each side encourages the health, general well-being and personal development of young people. They both strive to reinforce positive values like health, discipline, honesty, fair play, solidarity, etc. Each of them provides a space for young people to meet and interact; the social element in both worlds is very strong.

The **distinction** becomes even more blurred when one stops to consider how many youth organisations include sport and outdoor activities as part of their regular programmes. In some youth organisations such activities can form as much as 70-80% of their regular programme. But does this make them a sports organisation?

Have a look in your own context:

How are youth and sports organisations defined?

What are the criteria for being registered as a youth or sports organisation?

What are the differences and similarities in your country?

Sport as an aim... or a method?

With so many **philosophical and practical similarities**, it would be easy to conclude that there are few real differences between Sport and Youth Work. In many ways, they are two branches of the same tree. However, the most important difference between them lies in their specific objectives and the methods they use to reach them.

This **difference** can be seen in the following example:

Type of Organisation	A Local Swim Club	A Neighbourhood Youth Club
Specific Objectives	The pursuit of competitive excellence in swimming and encouraging young people to follow an athletic lifestyle.	Improving the overall quality of life for young people in the neighbourhood
Methodology	Training and competitions supplemented by dry land activities (e.g. weight & fitness training)	Arts & crafts, homework club, internet café, photography, weekend disco, sports (football, skateboarding, swimming , etc.)

The diagram illustrates exactly where Sport and Youth Work separate from one another. A sport organisation exists to pursue and promote sport for its own sake. In this example, the swim club exists for swimming. Their specific objective is to help young people gain skills and improve their proficiency in swimming in order to win competitions. Sport is the means as well as the goal. By contrast, a youth work organisation uses a much wider range of methods which might include sport but is by no means limited to sport. The local youth club in this example offers swimming as one of many activities. Swimming is one part of a larger programme designed to improve the quality of life for youth in the neighbourhood. In this case sport is the means but not the goal.

WHY IS THIS DISTINCTION IMPORTANT?

Each of the approaches described above can be of great value. **Both ways of working can benefit young people** in their physical and social development. While the activity used in this example is the same in both the youth club as well as in the sport club, the use of that method involves different processes and leads to different goals. Therefore when youth educators and youth workers consider using sport, it is important to understand the difference between using sport as an educational method and using sport as a means to its own end. In simple language: are we going swimming because we think it is important for young people to swim... OR do we see a way to use swimming in order to achieve other learning objectives?

👉 Try out the quiz on page 11 to see where you stand

A NEED FOR BRIDGES BETWEEN YOUTH WORK AND SPORT

Today the Sport and Youth Work sectors face serious **dilemmas**. On the **financial** side, they are under pressure to do more with less – government funding for youth activities is being slashed, yet the need for activities to promote the physical health and social well-being of young people continues to grow. On the **political** side, youth and sport structures are under pressure to do more in the fight for social inclusion – to make their activities more accessible and to try to reach new target groups.

Are these goals realistic?

Can these two worlds respond to these challenges without jeopardizing their core activities?

The answer to both questions is “yes”, but in order to do so, there is a need to build new bridges between Youth Work and Sport which will encourage both sides to share their expertise, learn from one another and ultimately open themselves up to new methods. An important part of this process is to recognise the strengths and the learning needs on each side.

Educators working in the world of sport are often trained as sport coaches. As such, they have a wealth of knowledge about playing and organising sport activities. However, traditional sport organisations are made up largely of youngsters with a talent for sport, whose families actively support their participation and who have the financial means to pay for it. As a result, sport coaches and sport organisations usually have little experience in dealing with young people from fewer opportunity backgrounds (for example from poorer backgrounds, with low or no motivation for sport, who have mobility issues, who are unable to cope with too much structure, etc.) So while they are well-placed to encourage physical development, sport coaches often lack the training and know-how to cope with the personal development needs of individuals from this target group.



By contrast, many **youth workers** work with young people with fewer opportunities on a regular basis. They are mostly trained to recognise the social needs of individuals and to propose methods which directly respond to those needs. But youth workers are usually not experts in sport. While they may use traditional activities like football, basketball or excursions to the swimming pool to supplement their programme, they are generally not trained to steer the learning processes which come out of sport activities. Further, youth workers are often limited by their own experience of sport. They might not be aware of alternative sport activities which could benefit their young people. They may not have the knowledge to implement new sports or games; they may not have access to the appropriate facilities or equipment.

Clearly, there is a **need for more links** between the worlds of Youth Work and Sport. The good news is that the process of bridge building has already begun. Many youth work organisations are expressing interest in learning how to introduce new types of sport methods as part of their work with young people with fewer opportunities. At the same time, sports organisations are dedicating themselves to broadening their target groups in order to include new profiles of young people and to open up to more socio-educational activities in the margins of the sport. Educators and professionals on both sides have much to learn. But what one side lacks can often be found in abundance on the other. By **learning from each other**, these two sectors can make young people **fit... for life**.

CROSSING THE BRIDGE FROM ONE SIDE

Building a bridge between Sport and Youth Work will undoubtedly create a huge potential of new learning possibilities for young people with fewer opportunities. The “**Fit for Life**” booklet concentrates on crossing this bridge from one side, namely on exploring how youth workers can use **sport as an educational method** to reach specific aims with the fewer-opportunity target group. The information, exercises and tips provided here aim to encourage youth workers to initiate new and/or more sport-themed activities as part of their work with youth on local and on European level.

Sport coaches and sport educators working on “the other side of the bridge” are also invited to read through “**Fit for Life**”. The advice given here may demonstrate how sport organisations can build more elements of personal and social development into their regular sports programmes. Through this booklet, sport educators may begin to define a new role for themselves in the social inclusion process.

Before proceeding further, it can be useful to take a closer look at the target group known as “young people with fewer opportunities”. Which profiles of young people are included in this term? What types of obstacles do they face? Becoming better acquainted with their needs is the first step in gaining more insight into how sport can be used to help these youngsters along the path to social inclusion.

 **Find more practical publications about Social Inclusion at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/inclusionforall/**

QUIZ – WHAT’S YOUR VIEW?

The short quiz below is designed to help people recognize their own views and opinions of sport and how it can best be used with young people.

Answer the questions by marking an “X” next to the answer which you feel most closely matches your own point of view. At the end of the quiz, total your answers for both the “A” and the “B” column.

Column A	A	B	Column B
Sport should be seen as the most important activity for young people.			Sport is just one of many potential activities for young people.
All young people should be actively encouraged to become more involved in sports, no matter what type of sports activity.			Sport is interesting for some youngsters, but not for all. If they have little interest in sport, they should not be pushed.
Sport should be open for everyone.			Sport should target specific groups of young people.
Young people should take part in whatever sport activities are offered by the organisation.			The organisation should develop a programme of sports activities based on the interests of the young people.
There is no need to monitor the outcome of sport – just doing the activity is already enough.			Sport is a method, therefore it is vital to monitor what comes out of it.
Sport activities can best be taught and implemented by professional sport coaches who understand the physical needs of young people.			Sport can best be taught or implemented by youth workers who understand the social needs of young people.

Column A	A	B	Column B
As more young people suffer from serious health problems (obesity, depression, etc.) the quantity of sport is more important than the quality.			How much sport young people do is irrelevant; what really counts is the quality of what they are doing and what they learn during the activity.
Sport does not have to be linked with other instances (schools, youth clubs, social work, police, etc.)			Cooperation between sport and other sectors (schools, youth work, social work, police, etc.) is needed to achieve the learning aims.
Sport should exist for itself.			Sport should be part of a larger development policy.
Sport should be an offer – whoever comes, comes.			Sport should be provided on request – only when young people ask for it should an activity be organised.
TOTAL A			TOTAL B

If you scored higher under the “A” column, then you are someone who regards sport as an aim in itself. You may feel that the benefits of sport are reason enough to take part in sports activities. This point of view is in line with the “**Participation Model**”, an approach used by many sport clubs.

If you scored higher under column “B”, they you are likely someone who sees sport as a means to achieve other goals. You might think that sport as an activity is fine, but that it should fit inside some kind of strategy or plan leading to other aims. This view matches the “**Integration Model**” often used by youth clubs and youth organisations.

Participation Model of Sport

Characteristics:

- sport for the sake of sport (for movement, fitness, general health...)
- sport is for everyone – all members of the community should participate and have access to sport
- cooperation with other institutions is possible, but not necessary

Advantages:

- costs are relatively cheap (only costs are to implement activities, no follow-up is needed)
- attracts heterogeneous groups

Disadvantages:

- young people who are not interested or who have little aptitude for sport may not be attracted by this model
- the model does not take full advantage of the learning that comes out of sport

Integration Model of Sport

Characteristics:

- sport is a means to achieve something else (other learning goals)
- focuses on problematic youth and problematic areas
- focuses on “trendy” activities in order to attract the youngsters
- cooperation with other institutions is necessary to achieve learning goals

Advantages:

- Sport is used as a lure – a fun and safe way to attract young people to the organisation. From here they may get involved in other activities
- sport is used for both physical fitness as well as for the development of personal and social skills

Disadvantages:

- costs are higher due to monitoring and follow-up of the young people
- by focusing on specific groups of youngsters there is a slight risk of making the group too homogenous

Based on the models of neighbourhood sports (buurtsport) as put forward by M. Theeboom. (1999)

Young people in Europe today face high unemployment rates, a decrease in the equality of opportunity in education as well as social marginalisation and increasing discrimination.

WHO ARE WE TALKING THE TARGET GROUP



ABOUT?

Every young person faces considerable challenges as they grow to independence and adulthood. While some individuals are able to meet these challenges, many others lack the skills needed to do so. Certain young people face obstacles of a more serious nature and require external support to overcome them. Such youngsters are often referred to as “**young people with fewer opportunities**”.

WHO ARE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES?

The **definition** of young people with fewer opportunities is purposefully very broad. – on purpose. The realities of the different countries around Europe (and sometimes of regions within these countries) is too diverse to have a very specific definition. e.g. a ‘poor’ person in Scandinavia might be considered ‘rich’ in Eastern Europe, a gay person in Cologne probably faces less discrimination than in a small countryside village in the Balkans, and so on. That’s why within the European Youth in Action programme the target group is defined by the **obstacles** they face. The term “fewer opportunities” means that certain young people have fewer possibilities than their peers. This can be for a variety of reasons:

1. **Educational:** young people with learning difficulties, early school-leavers and school dropouts, etc.
2. **Social:** (ex-) offenders, (ex-) drug addicts, young and/or single parents, orphans, youngsters in a precarious or unsatisfactory and frustrating private/educational/ professional situation, young people who face discrimination, etc.
3. **Economic:** low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system, long-term unemployed, etc.
4. **Mental:** young people with a mental, cognitive or psychiatric disability, etc.

5. **Physical:** young people with a physical or sensory disability, with a chronic health problem/illness, etc.
6. **Cultural:** young immigrants or refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, youngsters belonging to a national or ethnic minority, young people with linguistic adaptation problems, etc.
7. **Geographical:** young people from remote rural or hilly areas, small islands, urban problem zones, etc.

Fewer-opportunity youngsters are young people who, largely due to their personal situation and sometimes also due to the choices they make, face different and/or more difficult obstacles in their lives than other young people.



In many cases, individuals may **fit into several of the categories** described above at the same time (e.g. a teenage mother who lives in a remote village and who suffers from alcoholism). This compounds their difficulties still further.

Obviously, an individual should **not automatically be included** in the “fewer- opportunity” group simply on the basis of one or two characteristics. For instance it would be a mistake to include a youngster in the fewer-opportunity group just because they come from an immigrant background. Similarly, it is incorrect to presume all single parents or all youngsters with disabilities automatically have fewer opportunities.

- 👉 Find the European Commission’s Inclusion Strategy for the Youth in Action programme (2007 – 2013) at [www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionStrategy/](http://WWW.SALTO-YOUTH.NET/InclusionStrategy/)

CONSEQUENCES OF FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Fewer-opportunity youngsters often miss out on many opportunities that other young people take for granted. As a result, they miss out on important **socialisation processes**. This in turn can have a negative impact on their **personal development**.

Young people in this target group need to improve their **practical skills** (i.e. to improve their chances of finding employment) but much more urgent than this is their need to build up their **social skills**. Young people with fewer opportunities often suffer from social problems such as:

- **A low level of self-confidence and/or self-esteem**– the youngsters may have repeatedly come up against situations or obstacles where they were blocked or where they “failed”. They may not have had many chances to succeed in their lives, either in school, within their family or among their peers. As a result their self-confidence may be extremely low; they may think they are “worthless” or “good for nothings”.
- **A lack of identity** – some young people may have little or no sense of self. They may never have had the opportunity to discover who they are, what they can do, and, consequently, what their value is.
- **A lack of self-discipline** – young people in this group often lack the ability to set and observe boundaries or to work towards long-term goals. As a result they are drawn to quick fixes and immediate gratification. This can have serious consequences for both themselves and for others around them. (For example, it is easier to earn money selling drugs than to go to school to train for a job.)
- **Difficulties in their social relationships** – this can take many different forms. For instance, some youngsters may be very mistrustful of people due to bad experiences, mistreatment or abuse in their past. Other youngsters may have difficulties functioning in group situations. Still others may be afraid of “outsiders” who are physically and/or culturally different from their own group.

These examples are only some of the most important needs of young people in this target group. The **lack of these social skills** often leads to complicated problems which can affect individuals as well as society as a whole. For example, young people who lack self-confidence are much more likely to feel intimidated or frightened by “outsiders”.

Youngsters who are mistrustful of others may have difficulty in making friends. As a result they become more isolated and in turn their self-confidence level can drop. In this way young people are easily caught in **vicious circles** where their personal difficulties are compounded anew and their situation made more complex at every turn.

One important distinguishing characteristic of youngsters with fewer opportunities is that they often cannot **see ways to improve** their own situation. They are unable to take control of their own lives. This is not due to a lack of interest or will, as is sometimes suggested, but is much more likely due to the young people's inability to examine their own situation and propose realistic solutions. They may not be aware of their options or they may find themselves in such complex situations that they have no idea which steps to take first to help themselves.

Although the examples given here are just the tip of the iceberg, they do show the **complex nature of the difficulties** facing young people belonging to the fewer-opportunity groups.

When developing strategies and methods to use with these young people, youth workers and educators should always keep the following two points in mind:

1. The term “fewer opportunities” refers to the **situation** of young people; it does not refer to their abilities or to their future potential. Young people are not their labels and they will not carry the same label forever.
2. Within the fewer opportunity target group there is a **huge range of variety**. The young people included in this group are not in the same situations. They face their own specific obstacles and they do not all share the same needs. Because of this, it is important to consider each youngster as an individual.

It is not possible to examine each individual sub-group of fewer opportunity youngsters in great detail in this booklet. Instead, “**Fit for Life**” looks at the fewer-opportunity group as a whole and speaks of the needs of this group in general rather than in specific terms. It must be acknowledged that some of the advice and methods given here may need to be adapted to meet the needs of specific profiles and age groups. Youth workers and educators are encouraged to use the information given here as a base and to adjust methods or activities as needed in order to best suit their local situation.

- 👉 To address this issue, the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre created some **target group specific information pages online** about international youth work ideas and opportunities at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/inclusionforall/

Exercise – The Young People in Your Context

“Fewer-opportunities” is the term used to here to describe a specific group of young people. Others call this group by other names – “disadvantaged youth”, “young people with alternative skills”, “youngsters with special needs”... some even call them “good kids”.

1. What terms are used in your context or in your language to describe these young people? What kind of messages do these titles communicate about the young people?
2. What are the most important issues or obstacles facing these young people
 - a. In your town?
 - b. In your region?
 - c. In your country?
3. Ask the young people in your organisation what they feel are the most important issues (facing themselves or others in their area)? Is there any difference in your points of view?

*a new sport:
How long is your laugh?*

RESPONDING TO THE



NEEDS

SOCIAL INCLUSION

Helping young people in this target group to overcome their obstacles, empower themselves and become included in society at large is a part of the process of “social inclusion”. **Social inclusion** involves providing opportunities for those members of society who do not enjoy the same level of privilege as others and striving to ensure that all aspects of society are “open to all”.

This is fine as a working definition, but what does social inclusion involve on a more **practical level**? Just what kind of “opportunities” need to be provided for young people in the fewer-opportunity group? Politicians and policy makers often think of higher education or jobs as the end-goal of inclusion. But for young people with fewer opportunities, these are longer term aims. Fewer-opportunity youngsters are at a much earlier stage in the inclusion process. They are not yet “**fit to take on challenges**” at such a high level. They need first to develop their social aptitudes and life skills before they can move on to the next phases.

Social inclusion is **difficult to quantify**. How can it be said with certainty that someone has been “included” and what is such a conclusion based on? We are often lead to expect that inclusion should be a big achievement – a kind of “hallelujah” moment where all problems are solved and the individual lives happily ever after. Professionals working with fewer-opportunity youngsters know that inclusion, especially in the early phases, can take much simpler forms and is an ongoing process.

A young person can be said to be “included” when they...

- smile
- voluntarily take part in an activity
- can concentrate on a task
- observe the rules
- ask for help
- contribute to a discussion
- show patience
- take their own initiative
- make friends
- are accepted by the rest of the group
- show up on time
- help or praise another youngster
- are not afraid of physical contact
- are happy

Some of these examples may appear to be “small” or insignificant achievements, but it should be remembered that achievements which are easy for so-called “regular” young people can be major accomplishments for young people from the fewer-opportunity group.

As seen in the previous chapter, the fewer-opportunity target group is very diverse and different profiles of youngsters have their own **specific types of needs**. Therefore the goal they are trying to reach and the process leading to it will take a different shape and a different length of time for each individual. Often a step-by-step approach, starting with small goals and achievements leading to bigger ones, works best. But there is no one way or one specific method of achieving social inclusion.

Exercise – Inclusion

1. Discussions around young people with fewer opportunities often speak of the need to “include” this target group in society. What precisely does this mean? Consider the following questions:

1A Inclusion... in WHAT?

1B. Inclusion... WHY?

1C. Within the inclusion process... WHO includes WHO?

2. Within your specific context, think of ways that you could recognize whether or not a young person is “included” (for example in a group, in a team, in school, among their peers, etc.) List five (5) concrete indicators that show you when a young person is successfully included.

HOW CAN SPORT AS A METHOD LEAD TO INCLUSION?

For many years sport has regularly been put forward as a way of **combating social exclusion**. There has been particular interest in how sport can be used as a tool in extreme cases, for example with youth at risk to address issues like truancy, substance abuse, and criminal behaviour. But it would be naïve to think that complicated problems like drug abuse can be solved just by playing a few football matches or by spending a few more afternoons at the local swimming pool.

Sport can only go so far in improving complex negative behaviours. On its own it cannot solve intricate social exclusion issues. However, it is a very important link in the chain. Sport provides a **fun context for learning** where young people can learn life skills away from the authority and structure of formal education systems.

Sport is not a solution for exclusion... but it can be a catalyst for inclusion.

Sport can serve as a starting point for stimulating the development of an **individual's social skills**. For young people in the fewer-opportunity group, this starting point is crucial. Without the opportunity to improve these skills, long-term inclusion goals like beating addictions, stepping away from criminal behaviour, living independently, moving in to higher-level education and finding employment will remain unattainable.

It is therefore vital that youth workers planning to use sport as an educational tool start off with **realistic expectations**. Social inclusion is a process which takes time and there are no quick fixes. In order for the process to be effective, youth workers need to accurately judge where their young people are starting from, what their needs are and then choose appropriate activities which can best respond to those needs.

Although this booklet aims to promote the use of sport as an educational tool for social inclusion, it should be stressed that sport is just one of many tools available to youth workers. Inclusion needs to be approached from different sides depending on the needs of the individual. Some youngsters may benefit far more from conventional youth work methods like games, excursions, photography, arts & crafts, cooking, etc, than from sport. Youth workers should not be afraid to experiment with sport methods, but neither should they prioritise their use over other educational tools.

When is sport an appropriate response? How can sport help young people in this target group develop their social skills and move closer towards social inclusion? To answer these questions, we first need to clarify what is meant by “sport”.



UNDER SPORTS

STANDING

A well-known English expression says that “**a picture paints a thousand words**”. It would be just as accurate to say that some words can paint a thousand pictures. “Sport” is definitely one such example. “Sport” encompasses a wide range of activities, experiences, lessons and processes. Because the scope of sport is so large, it is not always easy to see the forest for the trees – it can be difficult to know which activities to use in what situations for which purposes.

Many people’s vision of sport consists of **conventional activities** like football, basketball, volleyball or swimming. But it should not be forgotten that the world of sport is made up of a huge variety of activities as diverse as horseback riding, ice hockey, fencing, bowling, surfing and even darts.

This diversity can pose a challenge for youth workers, who are normally not trained sports instructors. Their own experience in sport may be limited to activities they did when they were young or during sport lessons at school. As a result, youth workers may have a somewhat limited vision of what sport is, what it can look like, and what it can do.

What is “sport”?

“Sport is a universal language... At its best it can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status...when young people participate in sports or have access to physical education, they can experience real exhilaration even as they learn the ideals of teamwork and tolerance”.

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations (Nov 5, 2004)

What, in essence, is sport? Is it a game, a battle, an exercise or an activity? Formal education systems answer this question by dividing sport activities into **two categories**: those that involve competition and those that do not. If an activity is competitive, it is considered a sport. If it does not, it is seen as a “game” or a “hobby”.

Such a division may be helpful for sport pedagogues, but it poses a problem for youth workers. Defining sport solely on the basis of **competition** places an overly high value on performance and on the importance of winning. This is a somewhat exclusive approach which reinforces the stereotypical image that the world of sport is only open to young people who are “athletic” or who have “sporty” personalities. Other youngsters who don’t fit this profile receive a clear message that the world of sport is not the place for them.

This approach also runs the risk of imposing a kind of **hierarchy within sport**. It implies that some activities are “good” or “better” than others. For example being on a track team is good, because it is sport, but going jogging every morning is “just a hobby”. In this way it places more value on “sport” than on “games”. Such an approach also excludes many activities which involve a lot of physical activity but are not necessarily competitive (tai-chi, hiking and dancing are just some examples).

Is there hierarchy in sport?

Seen on a gymnast’s T-shirt: “If gymnastics were easy... it would be called football.”



CHANGING OUR PERCEPTION

Competition has its place in the world of sport, but if youth workers give too much importance to the **competitive element**, they risk alienating many of the youngsters they are trying to reach. The youth work field needs to approach sport from a different angle, one which is less divisive and which provides more room for **diversity and creativity** under the title “sport”.

A good starting point can be found in the following **definition of sport** as put forward by the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers:

“Sport” means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.

Revised European Sports Charter (2001)

More information about the European Institutions and Sports at

👉 <http://ec.europa.eu/sport/> (European Commission)

👉 www.coe.int/sport/ (Council of Europe)

This definition demonstrates that “sport” is a far-reaching **inclusive concept**. Sport embraces both the **physical and mental dimension** of activities. Its structure can be formal or informal. Sport gives equal recognition to the importance of both the competitive and social elements.

This definition leads to several conclusions:

1. The world of sport is much **larger** than may previously have been supposed. It reaches far beyond the conventional-type activities of football or basketball.
2. The distinction between whether an activity is a “sport” a “game” or a “hobby” is **irrelevant**. What is much more important is the extent to which an activity contributes to a young person’s mental and physical fitness as well as to developing their social skills.
3. There is no such thing as one sport being “**better**” than another; there is room for all and each activity should be recognised and valued for its own strengths.

It is extremely important that youth workers involved with the fewer-opportunity target group learn to make a **shift in their perception of sport**, its form and its function. Seeing sport from this inclusive point of view allows them to step away from traditional stereotypes surrounding sport and to open the doors to an exciting world of new methods and huge creative potential.

Exercise – What is Sport?

What do you think – are certain activities more “sporty” than others? Where would you draw the boundaries? You can do this exercise individually, but it can be very revealing if done with a group of colleagues or friends.

Choose a short list of activities. Within your group, try to come to a consensus on whether or not the activity should be seen as sport. (Be sure you have justifications for your answer.)

Example:

Activity	Yes, it's sport because...	No, it isn't because...
Formula 1		
Juggling		
Chess		
Fishing		

Based on people's answers it is possible to see what aspects or dimensions of sport are most important to them. For instance, is competition more important than good sportsmanship? Is physical fitness more important than mental fitness?

See if your justifications can hold up when compared with other sports (e.g. you might feel that Formula 1 is not a sport because it is more about the machine than the man. What does this imply for other motor sports or even for skiing or cycling (also heavily reliant on technology...)?

If this version is too easy, try discussing other activities like camping, dancing, tai chi, bridge or weight lifting.

BENEFITS OF SPORT FOR THIS TARGET GROUP

It is safe to say that sport can benefit all young people, no matter what their situation or background. The **health benefits** of sport are obvious, but the impact of sport on an individual's **personal development** can also be profound.

Just as young people with fewer opportunities have their own specific needs, they stand to benefit from sport in specific ways. Sport can benefit youngsters in the fewer-opportunity target group by:

- **Encouraging a healthy lifestyle** – sport teaches youngsters to respect their bodies and to work to preserve their physical and mental health. It establishes positive patterns which can be followed for a lifetime.
- **Offering a positive way to spend free time** – youngsters in the fewer-opportunity group often lack positive outlets for their energy and positive environments where they can enjoy themselves and have fun. Sport offers a fun alternative to inactivity, boredom, and, in more extreme cases, to filling in time through negative anti-social activities (e.g. substance abuse, criminal activity, etc.)
- **Breaking through social isolation** – sport provides a context where young people can be together, spend time with friends and meet new people. Sport can function as an icebreaker – a non-threatening way to bring people into direct contact with one another. This can be expanded to making contact with people from other groups and cultures and thereby working against racism and xenophobia.
- **Creating a sense of personal identity** – participation in sport allows youngsters to become more aware of their talents, strengths and weaknesses. It also allows them to experiment and challenge their own borders. All of this contributes to the beginning of a sense of value and knowing who they are.
- **Creating a sense of belonging** – by taking part in sports, young people create their own subculture (on group level, team level, etc). Sport gives them a chance to share experiences which in turn develops helps youngsters share common ground. This can give them feeling that they are truly a part of the group and develop a sense of community.

- **Changing thinking patterns from “me” to “we”** – sport often puts young people into situations where they can see how their actions affect others and how the actions of others affect them. This is an important part of the socialization process, teaching values like team work, co-operation and respect as well as demonstrating the importance of leadership. This can stimulate youngsters to become more responsible and help them shift their attention from themselves to other people around them.
- **Helping to learn to deal with emotions** - sport offers an environment where young people can learn to safely release their emotions (aggressions, frustrations, etc.) and in its place teaches better self-control and self-discipline.
- **Providing structure** – even the simplest sport activity is defined by some kind of framework or rules. Sport activities help young people learn to follow procedures, obey rules and to deal with authority.
- **Teaching not to fear the “new”** - Sport encourages play and play encourages experimentation. Sport actively shows young people that learning, trying new things, encountering new people, and stepping into new situations can be fun rather than a threat.
- **Teaching to embrace challenge and accept limitation** – sport urges young people to move out of their comfort zone, to take on challenges and confront their own borders. This in turn can increase their self-confidence and self-esteem. At the same time, sport is a good means of demonstrating that everyone has their own limitations. Recognizing limits is an important aspect of building personal identity.
- **Experiencing winning AND losing** – sport provides an opportunity for young people to excel and succeed outside the more formal structure of school. This form of affirmation and recognition can be extremely valuable, especially for those who have had limited successes in their lives. Sport also teaches valuable lessons about losing. It is not possible to succeed at everything in life, so young people must know how to learn from losing and use that knowledge to improve in future.
- **Positively reinforcing specific values** – there are no secret elixirs or magic potions in the world of sport. If you want to reach a goal, you have to work for it. Sport reinforces values like commitment, perseverance, patience, and discipline.

One positive effect of sports stands out from all the others. Along with all the positive aspects for a person's personal development, **sport provides young people with a way to have fun.** This element is often underestimated, but it is certain that if an individual is not having fun and enjoying themselves in sport, they will search for a better alternative. Sport is a way to de-stress from daily life. It offers an escape, even if only for a short period of time. Sport allows young people to temporarily forget problems, put their worries to the side and just... enjoy.

English:

"He's a good sport." = He's a good fellow, a nice guy.

French:

"Il va y avoir du sport" ("there's going to be some sport")
= things are going to get difficult.

Dutch:

"Een sport van iets maken" ("to make a sport of something")
= to bring in an element of fun or competition.

German:

"Sport is Mord" = Sport is Murder.



BARRIERS TO SPORT FOR THIS TARGET GROUP

Obviously, the list of the positive effects and benefits of sport for the fewer-opportunity target group is extensive. Yet in spite of all these benefits, more and more young people from this group seem to be **turning their back** on sport. Why?

There seem to be very real **obstacles** which either impede the young people's access to sports or else negatively affect their view of sport in general. Such obstacles can take quite different forms:

- ★ **A general lack of interest and motivation** – some youngsters may be more interested in passive hobbies like computer games and watching T.V. than in sport. They may not have positive role models who can demonstrate that sport can be fun. In extreme cases, young people can see sport as a hassle, a disturbance or a threat to their regular rhythm of life.
- ★ **A lack of alternatives** – some young people may enjoy sport in principle, but they are demotivated by factors like too much competitiveness or a lack of democracy within the structures. It is also often the case that young people grow tired of “traditional” sports, but they do not know of any other alternatives.
- ★ **A lack of accessibility** – some young people may be blocked from taking part in sport by a lack of transportation, facilities, money, equipment, and so on. Some youngsters may also be discouraged from taking part in sport by their family or their culture.
- ★ **A lack of recognition of real needs** – many of those involved in facilitating sports activities have no background in working with young people in the fewer-opportunity group. As such, they are unprepared to cope with their needs and do not know what steps to take to assist them.

Obstacles such as these are considerable and are not easily overcome. Faced with such barriers as well as a general disinterest among young people, how can youth workers persuade their youngsters of the **value of sport activities**?

Youth workers need to **actively demonstrate** how participating in sport will help a young person's learning process. Youngsters need to concretely see how a sport method can help them improve their skills, become socially "fit" and move forward in their lives.

- 👉 Find a list of **benefits of sports** on page 29 they can inspire you for getting young people on board.

The learning process does not begin simply because a young person starts riding a bike or going jogging. A sport method has to directly relate to an individual's long term goals as well as to their learning needs. Therefore it is necessary to link between a young person's *social learning processes* with the *social learning elements* present in sports activities.

SOCIAL LEARNING ELEMENTS IN SPORT

When an individual takes part in sports activities or sport methods they are involved in a **multi-dimensional learning process**. The most obvious dimension is of course the physical learning (how to run, jump, climb, maintain balance, co-ordination, etc.) however there are also a variety of **social learning processes** taking place (for example learning to be part of a team, to co-operate, to trust, sportsmanship and so on.)

Compared to the physical side, the social learning dimensions are far more **intangible** and are harder to recognize. Youth workers need to focus on this dimension because it is the social learning elements in sport which can directly respond to the **social learning needs** of their young people.

Social learning elements are present in **all sports**, no matter what sort, but certain sports are better placed at bringing across specific learning elements than others. For example, consider the element of learning "respect for one's opponent" in the context of football and judo. Both sports promote respect but it can be argued that this element is much more prevalent in judo than in football. Similarly, the element of "safety" is present in all sports to some degree, but "safety" takes on a totally different dimension in a sport like rock climbing than in a sport like tennis.

Type of Sport	Strong Social Learning Elements
Archery	Precision, self-control, concentration,
Chess	Strategy, observing rules & procedures
Figure skating	Creativity, expressing emotions
Swimming	Independence, coping with challenge
Fishing	Patience, self-discipline
Football	Teamwork, co-operation

To make the link between the social learning elements in specific sport methods or activities and the social learning needs of their young people, youth workers can ask **two simple questions**:

1. Which social skills does the individual need to develop?
2. What type of sports methods can help in developing those skills?

It is not always easy to determine which sports methods are the “best” in **developing skills** but fortunately it usually not necessary to choose just one. Specific social learning elements can be acquired through several kinds of sport activities. For example, teamwork can be learned through volleyball, handball, field hockey or doubles ping pong. It is not a case of choosing one “best” method to use, but rather of knowing which sport methods can be used towards what ends. Instead of choosing just one method, it can also be interesting to combine related activities to add extra dimensions to the learning process. Beyond this, it is up to the young people to determine which activity **interests or appeals** to them the most.



Example 1 – Outdoor activities

A non-governmental organisation in Estonia uses outdoor activities (specifically hiking and camping) as a tool in the work with young offenders who have spent extensive periods in prison. When the youngsters are released, they are no longer used to taking their own initiative or functioning independently.

Although a method like camping may not seem like the most vigorous physical activity, it serves to help these youngsters slowly learn to become **self-reliant**, to **make their own choices**, to manipulate and shape the world around them and to **determine their own future**. Camping and outdoor activities teach how to become more **independent** while at the same time teaching how to place **trust** in others. The young people become accustomed to **freedom** but also learn that it brings **responsibility** along with it. Camping and outdoor activities also teach a healthy **respect** for the natural world.

Example 2 – Scuba Diving

A youth project in Iceland uses scuba diving as a method with young people who have aggression issues and other behaviour problems. These individuals have difficulty in coping with their stress and frustration. They often lash out in anger at inappropriate times.

As a first step, the participants practices meditation techniques in order to learn to control their breathing. This is in preparation for diving where breath control is an essential part of safety, but it also forms part of the youngsters' personal development.

The meditation method teaches how to physically and mentally relax. The breathing exercises teach **self-control**. Once they are ready to dive, they learn the importance of **co-operation** and **respect** for the water environment. After completing their dive, the youngsters enjoy a feeling of **personal accomplishment and success**.

The two examples shown here demonstrate that within any sports method there is more going on than just physical activity. There are a range of different social learning elements inside each kind of sport activity so it is essential for youth workers to have a clear idea of what they plan to do and why they choose certain methods over others.

Understanding the theory behind using sport as an educational method is one thing – actually getting started and **implementing sport methods** is something else again! Youth workers can rest easy; it is not necessary to be a professional sport coach in order to start using sport as a method with the fewer-opportunity target group. It is necessary, however, to determine what kinds of learning goals the young people need to reach and to **structure a plan** that can help them get there.

show me and
i'll remember!

USING AS A METHOD



SPORT

A FOUR-STEP PROCESS

Using sport with fewer-opportunity youngsters involves a four-step process:

Step 1 – Identify the individual’s learning needs. Where does the young person want to go in their life? For example, do they want to find a job, gain formal qualifications, live independently...? What is stopping them from getting there? Which skills do they need to develop or improve? (This could include building up their self-confidence, becoming more independent, improving their interaction with others, trying to leave negative influences behind, and so on.) As it starts to become clear what kind of goals the young people want to set for themselves, it becomes more obvious what steps need to be taken to help them get there.

Step 2 – Consider which (sport) methods are best placed to help them. It goes without saying that sport methods are only one way to help a young person develop their social skills. But if youth workers do choose to use sport methods, they need to remember that the world of sport is very large and diverse. They should look closely at different activities in order to select those which are best placed to respond to a youngster’s social learning needs. In doing this they should also take their own real possibilities and resources into account. They should think carefully about what equipment and facilities are readily available and affordable. It is important to avoid launching activities which cannot be maintained over the long term due to lack of expertise or financial resources.

When selecting sport methods, the wishes of the young people should always be taken into account. Young people will not take part in sport activities unless they have fun while doing so, therefore it is crucial to offer activities that match with their interests. There is little sense, for instance, in proposing to start a badminton league when the young people really want to learn to skateboard.

Step 3 – Start implementing activities. This seems straightforward, but it is not always as easy as it sounds. In best-case scenarios, implementing sport methods can be as easy as calling an individual to join the football game on the pitch. But this is often not the case and it might be necessary for youth workers to think creatively and develop strategic approaches.

Example: Getting young girls involved in Latino dance sometimes requires several steps. The first step is to pique their interest by taking them to see a performance (this does not need to cost a lot of money). If they seem enthusiastic they are then invited to a practice session where they can experience the atmosphere, hear the music and learn some basic steps. If they enjoyed themselves during their first session, they are invited to join the group and start learning more complicated routines. This soft approach is much more effective than suggesting to the girls outright to start dancing.

No matter what method is proposed, youth workers must strive to keep the atmosphere light and the activity fun for the youngsters. If they enjoy themselves, there is a much better chance that they will keep up with the method.

Step 4 – Review and evaluate the social learning process. If the sport method is proving effective, let it continue on its own steam as long as the young people are still making progress. It can be helpful to “stir things up” once in a while by proposing other methods, but this is not always necessary. If the young people have acquired the skills they need, then it is time to look forward to the next steps in their learning process. This does not have to mean that the sport method should be abandoned. As long as they enjoy what they are doing, encourage the youngsters to keep it up.

If by contrast it seems that the sport method is not delivering the hoped for results, consider offering a different type of activity as an alternative. (For instance a young person who is getting bored with swimming might be more enthusiastic about water polo or underwater hockey.) Keep in mind, however, that it might take some time for the young person to develop their proficiency in the sport itself – this has a big influence on the extent to which they can enjoy the activity, so do not be too quick to drop one method in favour of another. Also keep in mind that sport activities are not everyone’s cup of tea. If an individual truly seems uninterested and unmotivated, try a non-sport method instead.

For this four-step process to be successful, it is vital that the individual **young person play as active a role as possible**. They should be consciously aware of the goals they are trying to reach and understand how taking part in sport methods aims to help their learning.

Young people also need to be part of the **review and evaluation stage** of this process. It can sometimes be difficult for youngsters from the fewer-opportunity target group to recognize their own learning and whether they are making steps forward. An individual's personal development may be obvious to their youth worker but this is of little value unless the young person can see their own progress as well. If they cannot, there is a real danger that the individual will lose interest in the methodology because they cannot see how taking part is of any benefit to them.

It is particularly difficult to judge something as intangible as the growth of social skills (self-confidence, self-identity, relations with others, etc.). Young people may not be fully aware of their development in this area. They often need help from their youth workers to gauge their own development. One way youth workers can **make a young person's learning more visible** to them is by means of an approach called "experiential learning".



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

*Tell me, and I will forget.
Show me, and I may remember.
Involve me, and I will understand.*
- Confucius

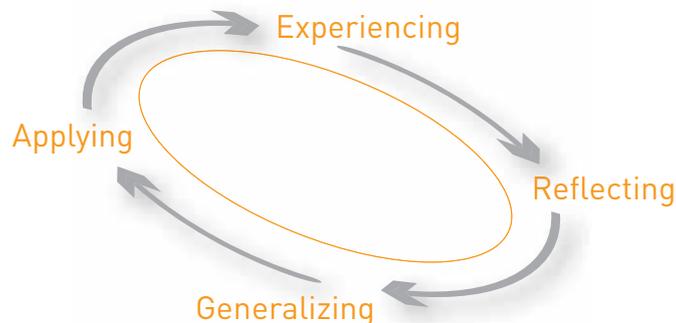
It is often presumed that taking part in an experience or a process is the equivalent of learning about that experience or process. Experience, however, is only one part of learning. Learning can happen automatically, even unconsciously, but experience on its own leads only to learning on a certain level. Learning can be maximised by **actively involving the participant in the process** as much as possible. This requires that an individual step back, analyse their experience, draw conclusions and try to apply the lessons learned in future.

Expressed in another way:

Experience + Reflection = Learning

This process is often referred to as “**experiential learning**”. One advantage to experiential learning is that it makes individuals active participants in their own learning process. This can be very powerful when applied to the fewer-opportunity target group.

The model below demonstrates how the experiential learning process works:



Based on the model by David A. Kolb, 1984

Another more simplified approach to this model is to ask the three following questions: “**What?**”, “**So what?**” and “**Now what?**” Although they are worded slightly differently, the underlying approach of the two examples is the same. An individual takes part in an experience (“what?”) They are then encouraged to reflect on what they have done, seen, felt or said during that experience (“so what?”) Next they are helped draw conclusions from this experience and finally they try to apply those conclusions in future situations (“now what?”)

In the world of sport, **sport coaches and trainers** often make excellent use of experiential learning. Sport coaches know that in order for an athlete to improve, they must be made acutely aware of what has happened to them, of what actually took place during the experience, in order to do better in future. For example, after running the 1500 metres, an athlete will spend some time discussing the development and the outcome of the race with their coach. Did their race strategy work? What went well in the race and what went wrong? This then leads to drawing conclusions: What needs to be changed for the next race? What changes will be made to the training regime? Finally, the athlete will have a chance to test those assumptions in future races.

This kind of experiential process is not just for coaches and athletes; it can also be applied by **youth workers** to help their young people determine whether or not they are moving forward and successfully developing their social skills.

Case Study – Experiential Learning in Youth Work

R. has difficulty in controlling his emotions; his frustration often gets the better of him. From time to time he has **violent aggressive outbursts**. R’s youth worker has been helping him to try to express his anger differently and to control his temper. R. recently started playing basketball with other youngsters from his youth centre and this seems to be helping the process.

One day R. and the other young men are playing on the court. The game starts to get rough and before long one of the other players begins **taunting** R. and trying to start a fight. R. does not start fighting (his usual reaction), but he does verbally abuse the other player for several minutes.

R’s youth worker could just leave the situation as it is, presuming that R can learn from the experience on his own, or he could decide to make a point of **discussing the experience** with him. What happened? What led to the conflict? Why did R. choose not to fight but rather to swear at the opponent? How is this situation different from the past? Does R. feel this is progress or not? What conclusions can be drawn – what does R. still need to improve in his behaviour? How can this be done? This process of reflecting and concluding can move R. beyond just being part of a situation and help him to examine the experience and then learn from it. If he faces similar situations in future, he can try to apply the learning gained here.

The reflection involved in experiential learning can be very effective for youngsters because it involves a holistic approach – the **learners are engaged** intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically in their own learning. The individual is a participant rather than a spectator. They should be actively involved in posing questions, investigating, being curious and creative, assuming responsibility and solving problems.

In the case study, R is helped to **step away from the experience** in order to understand how the situation developed and what impact it had on his emotions. He can be helped to judge to what extent he is improving – what does it mean to choose not to fight but still to verbally abuse someone? It is debatable how far R’s learning could go if he was left to just “experience” the situation. Through **reflection**, however, he has a chance to go deeper, to examine cause and effect, and to consciously decide how to improve himself and move forward.

In examples like this one, the **experiential learning process** can also be helpful for the youth worker. They can try to determine to what extent the method (playing basketball) has had an influence on R’s social skills – is he just playing basketball, or is something coming out of it? And if so, is the learning process going in the desired direction? It is not easy to find clear answers, but it is possible to get some **indications**. For instance, how does R feel his behaviour has changed since he started playing basketball? What has his involvement given him – does he feel different or see himself differently? Can he give some examples of how basketball has influenced him, for better or worse? This can help the youth worker to decide whether the method of basketball is helping R to move forward or whether another method is needed.

Sport methods are just one example - youth workers can **apply experiential learning** to all sorts of methods and learning processes. Trying to determine how far or in what way an individual is improving their social skills is one of a youth worker’s most difficult tasks. Experiential learning is a useful tool because it helps make the abstract more tangible.

Experiential learning is **not so much a method as it is an approach**. Experiential learning can be applied “formally” (for example, a group discussion where everyone participates in the reflection and analysis) or “informally” (for instance a short talk one-on-one with a youth worker). Exactly how experiential learning can best be applied depends on the situation. Some youngsters may feel uncomfortable sitting at a table and talking about “their learning” while others might respond very well.

Similarly, an **experiential analysis** does not have to go on at length; sometimes a good reflection can take only 5 or 10 minutes. (For an example, see the description of the method “Street Football” where players evaluate their own conduct in the “dialogue zone” – see page 68.)

What counts in experiential learning is neither the structure (formal/informal) nor the length of time spent discussing and reflecting. The most important aspect to keep in mind is that the individual should play an **active part** in their own learning. Remember:

Experience is not what happens to you, it is what you do with what happens to you.

EXAMPLES OF USING SPORT ON LOCAL LEVEL

This section presents **some brief examples** of how organisations in different European countries use sport as an educational method to make their young people “fit for life”. Each of the examples given can be linked to the approach seen in the “Integration Model” (p 13), which is to say that sport is not seen as the goal in itself but as a tool that can stimulate the development of a young person’s social skills.

EXAMPLE 1 - SWIMMING, THE NETHERLANDS

A local women’s project has started a programme to encourage teenage girls and young women from immigrant backgrounds to **learn how to swim**. The Netherlands is a country of open water - seas, lakes, rivers and many small canals or ponds right in suburban living areas. As a result many Dutch children learn to swim when they are very young. Women and girls who have emigrated from dry countries like Turkey or Morocco may not have had the opportunity to learn to swim; as a result they are often quite frightened by water. The fact that they cannot swim excludes the young women not only from sport activities but also reinforces the idea that they are “different” from others in Dutch society and are limited in their possibilities.

Through their women’s project, they young girls and women take part in special “**women’s only**” **swimming lessons**. In keeping with their cultural traditions, some of the women design their own swim suits that cover them up to the neck. Some keep their head scarves on in the pool instead of swim caps. Lessons are spread over a period of 8 weeks. In that time, swimming is also used as a **platform to start discussions outside the pool** on other topics like general health, nutrition, and body image but also on subjects like the place of women in sport activities and the different points of view between Dutch society and other cultures. At the end of 8 weeks, the women take the final test for their swim diploma. This process not only improves the women’s physical condition but also helps them to take a big step towards feeling that they are more a part of mainstream Dutch society.

EXAMPLE 2 - SOFT-BALL AEROBICS, HUNGARY

An **alternative school for teenagers** who have dropped out of the regular school system has developed a method of using soft-ball aerobics with mixed groups of boys and girls. The youngsters in the school have a history of years of “failure” in regular schools and are badly in need of activities that build up their **self-confidence** and give them a feeling of self-worth.

Soft-ball aerobics is a kind of aerobics which uses inflatable soft balls as a central tool. The role of the balls is very important. The pupils may be resistant to trying the aerobic routines because they are afraid of looking foolish or being teased by the other students. The ball provides them with a kind of prop to hide behind. Adding the ball to the exercises can often be enough “protection” to encourage the young people to take the step to try the exercises. Over time, the pupils progress from doing simple aerobic exercises with the balls up to complex choreographies. They **learn to be creative** by choosing their own music, designing their own routines, telling stories and expressing emotions through aerobics and dance moves. When they are ready, the pupils perform their routines at school assemblies and celebrations. The applause from teachers, parents and peers is very important in giving them a **feeling of accomplishment and success**.

EXAMPLE 3 – SAILING TALL SHIPS, GERMANY

A project in Germany uses sailing as a method for stimulating personal development. Young people in the project spend a period of time **living on a tall ship and sailing** from port to port. Daily duties on board include learning how to steer, how to raise and lower sails, how to catch the wind, how to watch the weather, and so on. Tall ship sailing is quite different from other boating activities (rowing, canoeing, etc) because it involves not only the competitive sport element but also a great deal of **hard work** (repairs, cleaning, cooking, and so on).

Sailing a tall ship is a unique experience and as such it teaches the young people many useful **life skills**. Tall ship sailing requires discipline - there are duties that have to be done on board every day, whether you are motivated to do them or not. While sailing the young people are given a great deal of responsibility for the safety of the ship and the rest of the crew. They learn to work as part of a team and to take responsibility for one another. Sailing can also build up an individual’s **feelings of independence, pride and self-worth** as they learn to do things that few others can do (for example navigating and steering the tall ship through a night watch). Above all, sailing tall ships provides many analogies for real life. The young people learn that they are steering their boat and no one else. They choose where their boat will go. They make the decisions and need to take responsibility for the outcomes. On this level, tall ship sailing is all about individual empowerment.

The examples above show why it is important to match the social learning needs with the most appropriate method. The examples given here are just the tip of the iceberg – the possibilities for using sport as an educational tool on local level are truly endless.

OTHER CONTEXTS FOR USING SPORT

When preparing to use sport as a method, it is common to look first for ways that young people can learn through “playing” or participating in sports activities. However, young people in the fewer-opportunity group can **benefit from sport without having to join teams** or play games each day of the week. Sport can also be used as a tool in other ways.

1. **Sport can be used as a lure.** It is not always easy to reach young people in the fewer opportunity target group and this makes it a challenge to get them involved in the regular programmes offered by youth organisations. In such cases, sport can be an attractive non-threatening way for youngsters to get to know an organisation. Young people are likely to be interested by sport because it is fun and very accessible. If the youngsters start to make the association that playing sports at the youth centre is fun, therefore being at the youth centre is fun, they are more likely to want to get involved in the organisation’s other activities. Sport can serve an important introductory purpose by simply opening the door into youth organisations.
2. **Sport can be used as a “shake-up”.** Some sports methods can best be applied in a regular and long-term context (e.g. practising with the football team three times per week), but others (e.g. caving, white-water rafting, canyoning, etc.) are effective as one-off or short-term methods designed to shake young people out of their comfort zone. The advantage of such activities is they help young people to test their limits and become more open to trying new experiences (“If I can do that, I can do anything!”) Youth workers can then take advantage of this more open state of mind and follow up by encouraging the youngsters to take steps into other challenging methods and processes.
3. **Sport can provide roles for non-players.** Some young people are simply not interested in taking part in sports activities, no matter what their form. Yet these youngsters can benefit from sport in another way. Their social learning can be linked to sport through different external roles. For example, rather than playing on the football team, these youngsters might be more interested in designing banners and brochures to make publicity. Instead of playing in the basketball tournament, they might be more interested in helping to organise transportation for the team.

Rather than take part in gymnastics, they might be more interested in organising an end-of-season party. These activities also contribute to a young person's social skills. Clearly, sport does not just benefit those who "play" but also those in a wide variety of external roles as well.

4. **Sport can launch discussions.** Sport is a context that young people can easily relate to. As such, sport can provide a good backdrop for launching discussions on larger issues which impact young people in the fewer-opportunity group. For example, drug scandals in sports like cycling can lead to discussions on the dangers of substance abuse. Incidents of hooliganism can start discussions on racism and social injustice. Naturally, such discussions do not always have to result from negative events. For instance, international competitions like the World Cup or the Olympic Games can lead to discussions on different countries and their cultures. All of these examples provide interesting and accessible learning opportunities which can help teach positive social behaviours.



Movie of the Week – “Bend it Like Beckham”

“Bend It Like Beckham”, directed by Gurinder Chadha, tells the story of Jess, a girl from a traditional Sikh family living in the UK, who is crazy about football and her hero David Beckham. While Jess dreams about football, her family is more concerned about her becoming a “proper woman”(i.e. finding a husband and learning to cook.) Jess becomes friends with Jules and together they play on a local women’s football team. But when her family forbids her to play, Jess has to find a way to balance her own dreams with the expectations of her family, friends and culture. The story comes to a head when the most important game of the year falls on the same day as Jess’s sister’s wedding.

“Bend It Like Beckham” can be used as an educational tool for launching discussions on a variety of topics. The film is very good at highlighting issues related to the world of sport (for example the lack of exposure, respect and equal opportunities for women’s sport), but it also shows many other themes which relate to situations in daily life (e.g. inter-racial relationships, cultural diversity, coping with expectations from family and community, gender roles, religion, homosexuality, and so on). The issues will quickly be recognized by almost any audience.

 <http://www2.foxsearchlight.com/benditlikebeckham/>

ISSUES LINKED TO USING SPORT

When using sport as a method with the fewer-opportunity target group, youth workers need to be aware of several potentially sensitive issues:

- **The competitive element** - while some youth workers feel that it is better to choose non-competitive sport activities, it is not realistic to try to avoid competition all together. Competition exists in all parts of life, not just in the sport context. Learning how to win and how to lose is an important life skill. Young people need to experience both extremes and to learn how to behave appropriately in each situation. The feeling of “winning” in a sport context can be additionally valuable for young people in the fewer-opportunity group as many of these youngsters may not often experience success in other aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, if youth workers are using competitive sports activities it is crucial to keep a close eye on the effect of competition on individual youngsters. Spending too much time on the losing side is extremely de-motivating. If there is not a realistic balance between winning and losing, the young people may become disenchanted with sport in general.
- **The gender element** - although it is not always the case, there can be a considerable difference between how young men and young women regard sport methods and activities. While taking part in sport is usually self-evident for boys, young girls can often feel pressured to conform to external expectations of what is “feminine”. Girls can sometimes be less enthusiastic about taking part in sports activities in mixed groups because they feel they need to be “as good as the boys”. One solution can be to offer some sports methods in boys- or girls-only groups. Youth workers should also strive to find sports methods for mixed groups which require a combination of different physical and mental skills. Another option is to adapt the “traditional” rules and set-up of specific activities in order to level the playing field and make the activity inclusive for both genders.
- **External influences and cultural expectations** – family, friends and community play an important role in a young person’s life. If these parties do not share the view that sport methods can benefit a young person’s personal development, their influence can have an adverse effect. One example is the tendency among traditional immigrant cultures to see sport as something for boys; girls and young women are not encouraged to take part. Some other families see sport as just “play”, so they feel the young people can make better use of their time by studying, working or helping out at home.

If a young person happens to part of a “non-sporty” circle of friends, their peers may question the sense of the sport activities and urge the youngster to do what the rest of their group is doing instead. Youth workers need to be aware of the impact of such external influences. In such cases it is normally not effective to force the issue – try instead to open up a dialogue with the young person and the people around them to see what other types of sports activities or other kinds of methods might be more acceptable.

There are also other **traps** to be aware of. Youth workers need to remember that their actions speak louder than their words so they should be prepared to **act as role models** in the sport context whenever possible. They need to demonstrate to youngsters that it is not necessary to be an expert athlete in order to learn from and enjoy sports methods. Youth workers can show that it is OK to not know all the rules, to make mistakes, to not be the best yet still have a lot of fun. Young people are guaranteed to be put off sports activities and methods if they feel the adults around them are lazy, unhealthy or unwilling to take part in the activities, too.

Another common **pitfall** is when youth workers **make assumptions** on behalf of their young people. Oftentimes they may assume that the young people can't do a certain type of method or activity (because it is too complicated, because they have never done it before, they don't know the rules, they don't have the skills, they are too out of shape, etc.) or that the young people are not interested in a specific type of activity (for instance girls don't like to play football, boys would not be caught dead in a yoga class, etc.) There is a **risk in over-generalising**. Making such presumptions severely limits the young people and may prevent them from discovering new types of activities in which they might excel. It is more useful to offer possibilities to the youngsters and then let them make their own choices and impose their own limits.

USING SPORT IN THE YOUTH IN ACTION PROGRAMME

Sport methods and activities are not limited in their impact to just local level. There are also a range of other possibilities available for sport-themed activities and learning opportunities on European level through the **Youth in Action programme**.

The European Youth in Action programme has prioritised the **inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities** within its activities. The programme recognizes that taking part in European-level activities can provide a big boost to the personal development of individuals in this target group.

The European Year of Education through Sport (2004) offered a rare chance to experiment with sport as a theme or method in **European-level projects**. Today there is a high degree of interest in exploring the potential of sport themes and methods in the European context still further. Using sport themes and sport methods is not a brand-new idea within the Youth in Action programme, but it is an area which is currently **underdeveloped**. Proportionally, sport-themed projects make up only a small percentage of the programme compared to social- or cultural-themed projects.

The Youth in Action programme wants to support organisations **using sport as an educational tool**. This by no means limits participation in the Youth in Action programme only to youth organisations. Sports organisations can also apply for funding for European-level projects. It can be particularly interesting for sport organisations to become more involved in the Youth in Action programme, as they have contacts with other profiles of young people that youth organisations normally don't manage to reach.

When putting forward **project proposals with a sport theme**, organisations should remember that the main focus of the project should be placed on the social learning element rather than on training for athletic performance. Project proposals relating to the fewer-opportunity group should clearly demonstrate how sport will be used as a method to assist or accelerate the social inclusion process (see the integration model page 13).

When developing new ideas for projects, it is important to be aware that the programme imposes **certain restrictions** which must be observed. For instance:

1. Youth in Action programme funding **cannot** be used to finance **sport events or sport competitions**.
2. The Youth in Action programme promotes accessibility and equal opportunities, so sport-themed projects, no matter what their nature, must be open to all young people
3. Projects proposed under the Youth in Action programme should not require the young people to have any **special skills** (i.e. no particular skills or talent in a specific sport or in any other areas).

“**Equal opportunities**” within the Youth in Action programme means that young people should not be excluded from taking part on the basis of their profile, their skills or their level of experience. Although the programme promotes equal opportunities, it is still possible to custom-design a project for **specific sub-groups** (e.g. a group exchange on the theme of racism between

two football clubs or a girls-only group exchange). In such cases organisations must explain and justify the choice of group.

Below are some **examples of Youth in Action programme projects** that use sport as a method or a theme and which actively aim to help the young people in the project to develop their social skills.

GROUP EXCHANGES

A group of youngsters from Portugal travelled to Slovenia to take part in a group exchange on the theme “Nature Preservation and Orienteering”. The eight-day programme offered a mix of outdoor sport activities including orienteering and hiking which allowed the participants to get to know the beautiful natural surroundings of Slovenia. The sport activities were then used to link in with important social issues like ecology, environmental protection, pollution, and the destruction of natural areas. Through this project the youngsters learn different social skills like respect for the environment, self-control, team work, independence, and co-operation.

EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE

In the city of Dresden, Germany, many different cultures live side by side. There are often clashes between youths from the different cultural groups. A project has been launched which uses rugby as a way to help local young people break down stereotypes and make contact with one another. An EVS volunteer has been invited to help implement this project. The volunteer’s tasks include teaching rugby to school pupils and assist in setting up rugby leagues and matches. The volunteer is not required to know how to play rugby beforehand; they can learn the sport in the first days of their stay. Using sport as a method in this context teaches the EVS volunteer social skills like taking on responsibility, being independent, working as part of a team and respecting others.

YOUTH INITIATIVES

In Lithuania, a group of young people living in a remote village were concerned that they had no place to spend their free time. They came up with an idea to create their own small fitness centre, but in their village there was no suitable place for training or storing equipment. Through Action 3, the young people were granted funding for the renovation of a local building. For the duration of the project, the young people took on the responsibility of planning the renovation, purchasing supplies, carrying out the renovations, making publicity in their area and preparing to open the centre. Through this sport-themed project the participants gained skills in strategic thinking, goal-setting, planning, and management. They learned social skills like teamwork, responsibility, and discipline.

Using sport as a method on European level opens up **new possibilities** for young people to get to know one another and the world around them. Sport is a good way to **overcome barriers** which might exist between groups from different countries (language, different cultural expectations, etc.) because it provides the youngsters with a common basis. From there, the young people can start to explore their **similarities and their differences**. This can ultimately lead to better contact and a deeper level of understanding.

👉 More info about the **European Commission's Youth in Action programme** at http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm or asked for by contacting the National Agency in your country (see the list at http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth/contacts_en.htm)

FINAL TIPS – SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

In the hope that youth workers have found inspiration and ideas on how to use sport as an educational tool with fewer-opportunity youngsters, “Fit for Life” offers some final words of advice.

Whether using bobsledding, break dance, horse riding or high jump, whether on local or European level, youth workers planning to implement sports methods and activities with their youngsters should remember to always bear the following points in mind.

When using sport with the fewer-opportunity target group:

Do...

... remember that whatever methods you use, FUN should always be the top priority

... make a clear link between the sport method and the learning needs of the individual

... listen to the interests of your young people; respect what they want to do and aim to include them in all phases of the activities (planning, implementation, and evaluation).

... invest first in sport activities/methods you are already using in your organisation;

Don't...

...push the young people into activities that they are not interested in. This will not help their learning process.

... be distracted by the external appearance of an activity; concentrate instead on the social learning elements inside the activity.

...insist on sport as a method. Recognize that there are some youngsters who simply are not interested in sport, no matter what its form.

find ways to maximise their effects before launching into new activities

...experiment and feel free to be creative. Adjust and adapt sports and games to suit your target group if necessary. Remember: it's not what the method looks like but the learning that counts.

... keep a close eye on the competitive element. Winning should not be given more value than participation.

... try a mix of different methods in order to keep the learning fresh and let the youngsters try a wide variety of different activities.

... ask for advice or assistance in implementing activities if you need it.

... encourage the young people to reflect and draw conclusions from their experiences

... use sport as a way to link in with larger discussion topics and other types of learning processes.

...strive to set a good example – showing the young people that it is OK to take part in sports methods can go a long way in giving them the confidence to try it for themselves.

...let the sport method or activity become the end rather than means. Keep the young people focused on the learning process.

... overwhelm the young people with an overload of new sports activities.

... make generalisations or get stuck on stereotypes; don't presume that the young people "don't want to" try activities or "aren't able to do" certain things. It is better to offer possibilities and then let the young people make their own choices and impose their own limits.

... under-estimate the importance of other influences on the young people (family, peers, culture, religion, etc.) If the proposed sport activities meet with resistance, don't force the issue. It is more effective to start a dialogue in order to see what other kinds of methods might be more acceptable.

... set unrealistic expectations. Remember that small inclusion goals are of as much value as larger longer-term ones (if not even more!)

Above all, remember that sport cannot solve all of a fewer-opportunity young person's problems but it can provide them with a fun context for learning and with a **real chance to become Fit... for Life.**

For those youth workers and educators who are new to planning and implementing sports or outdoor activities, this section presents some examples of **easy-to-implement methods**.

METHODS FOR GETTING



STARTED

These exercises were selected because they are simple to use and require little if any extra equipment. Each one is accessible and can be used with a variety of different age groups – feel free to **experiment and adjust** them to suit your own group of youngsters.

The **types of exercises** presented here vary – some can be used as one-off introductions to physical activity, while others can be implemented over the long term. Each one has its own unique combination of social learning elements and can be used to develop a variety of social skills.

Good luck and have fun!

☞ These and other inclusion methods can be found in the **SALTO Toolbox for Training** at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Toolbox/

1. ENERGIZERS

Description Energizers are short exercises designed to inject some energy and fun into groups. Energisers can be a way to get things started (for example, to start off an activity, to gather the youngsters together, to get everyone’s attention,), when there is some “down time” (e.g. waiting for people to arrive, during breaks), or at the end of a day (e.g. a final group activity before going home).

1. ATOMIC TAG

Equipment: None

Instructions: Ask all the players to find a partner and hook one arm together. Standing together, the partners should spread out over the room or playing field. Each couple is an atom. Choose one couple and separate them – one person becomes the chaser and the other becomes the chased. The chaser tries to tag the other person, but the chased can find safety by hooking on to one side of the standing atoms.

Description

If this happens, then the partner standing on the opposite side of the pair has to break away. They then start to chase the chaser (who switches roles and becomes the chased). If someone gets tagged, simply pick another couple and start again.

- ★ **Tips:** it is not unusual for the players to get confused about who is supposed to chase who, especially if they are new to the game, but this is part of the fun. Don't get too stuck on formality, just go with the flow

Variations: younger children especially enjoy a variation called “The Princess and The Dragon”. In this version the chaser is a dragon (who growls and roars) and the chased is the beautiful princess (who shrieks and squeals in fear). The roles change whenever the princess finds safety next to a partner.

2. CARROTS

Equipment: None

Instructions: Pick one or two players to be the “farmers”. All the other players are the “carrots”. They form a circle, lie down on their stomachs and join hands (or link arms). The farmers have to harvest the carrots by pulling on the players’ legs until they are pulled out of the circle. Whenever the circle is broken, the remaining carrots should close the hole by rejoining hands. Any carrots that are harvested then become farmers and help pull out the remaining players. The game ends when all the carrots are pulled out of the ground.

- ★ **Tips:** the game works better indoors on gymnasium floors – it is difficult for people to slide on grass. Both the farmers and the carrots need to be careful not to hurt one another. Be sure that carrots don't grip each other's hands or arms too tightly. This is a popular game among younger children, but young adults enjoy it too.

<i>Description</i>	3. COOL RUNNING Equipment: None Instructions: Line up the players at a starting line. Mark out a finish line (10, 15 or 25 m away, depending on the age of the group). The players will race to see who crosses the finish line first BUT... in this race the objective is to “run” as slowly as you can. So the slowest person is actually the winner. ★ Tips: this exercise encourages creativity and originality. It’s a good one to use with youngsters who are not very fit and who don’t like traditional running or tag games. Be sure that running “slowly” doesn’t mean just standing in one spot – the players have to move forward with each step they take. Variations: You can run the race several times by adding in new dimensions. For example, run a race where the objective is to run as slowly as possible while looking as “cool” or as “crazy” as possible. You can also ask people to jump rather than run to the finish line and do this as slowly as possible – very funny!
<i>Duration</i>	These exercises generally run from 10-15 minutes each.
<i>Social Learning Elements</i>	Fun; creativity; social contacts; accessibility; challenge; strategy.
<i>Group</i>	These exercises work well in groups from 10-25 persons.
<i>Material Needed</i>	You don’t need any extra material for these energisers, but it is a good idea to check the ground or floor for small hazards before starting the exercises.
<i>Further info/Source</i>	The exercises listed here were presented by various participants during the SALTO “Inclusion Through Sport” training courses (2004) – www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/TCsports/

2. GAMES FOR THE SWIMMING POOL

Description Everyone enjoys an outing to the swimming pool, but after 10 minutes of splashing around, young people might start looking for something more interesting to do. Here are some suggestions for easy activities that the whole group can take part in. All of these exercises can be adapted to suit swimmers of different ages and abilities. Group leaders can choose to lead the exercises from dry land but the truly brave can also join in themselves!

1. CHINESE WHISPERS

Equipment: None

Instructions: Two or more teams swim relay-style from one side of the pool to the other. The leader whispers a message into the ear of the first swimmer. They then have to swim to the other side and whisper the message to the next swimmer. The second person then swims back across the pool and whispers what they heard to the next person. This continues until every person on the team has had a turn. At the end the last swimmer has to speak the sentence out loud and see whether the original message survived.

★ **Tips:** Swimmers may not whisper the message between one another. To make sure there is no cheating, have those swimmers who have already had a turn move to the side of the pool. The game can be played in shallow as well as in deep water. If children are not strong swimmers, have them run/bounce/jump through shallow water to their team at the opposite side.

You can set this game up as a relay (going from one side of the pool to another), but it does not have to be a race. Try setting the teams up in a large square (send one team to each corner of the pool, or else have them stand in chest-deep water).

Description **2. SHARK TALE**

Equipment: None

Instructions: The swimmers make pairs. They should link arms and find a place together in the middle of the pool (leave some space between each pair). One of the couples splits - one person becomes the shark and the other becomes the minnow. The shark's job is to try to catch the minnow for his lunch. The minnow can take shelter by hooking on to a free arm in one of the other pairs. If this happens, then the roles change: the shark becomes the minnow and has to swim away. The partner on the other side (where the minnow did not link on) now becomes the shark and they have to catch their lunch. If the shark catches the minnow, start the game again with a new couple.

★ **Tips:** this game works well in shallow water where the players can choose to swim, run or bounce as they like. It also works in deep water, but weaker swimmers might soon tire. If the group is big enough, you can also make the game more interesting by having two sharks and two minnows but make sure you have enough room for everyone to move about.

3. FILL THE BUCKET

Equipment: One bucket for each time plus one kickboard for every player.

Instructions: Two or more teams play against one another. The players on each team form a circle. One person stands in the middle and holds an empty bucket over their head. On the signal, all the other players on the team use kickboards to try and fill the bucket with as much water as possible. The first team to fill the bucket wins.

★ **Tip:** instead of kickboards the players can also try to fill the buckets by splashing with their hands and/or feet.

*Description***4. ROMEO AND JULIET**

Equipment: None

Instructions: Choose two swimmers; one is Romeo and the other Juliet. They start off at diagonally opposite corners of the pool. The rest of the group spreads out in the middle. Romeo and Juliet have to try to reach each other in the middle of the pool while the other swimmers try to stop them. The swimmers in the middle may not build a chain or dunk Romeo or Juliet under the water. Once the two meet in the middle, they have to swim together as two and catch two other persons – these two then become the new Romeo and Juliet.

★ **Tips:** this game works extremely well in shallow water. This way Romeo and Juliet can walk towards each other. Playing this game in deep water is much more difficult and can be tiring for weaker swimmers.

5. RELAYS

Equipment: The type of equipment depends on the type of races. Think of using objects like balls, kickboards, T-shirts that can get wet... and whatever else your imagination can come up with!

Instructions: Split the group into teams. Each team should have an even number of persons (min 4, max...?) Divide the teams in half – send one half to the other side of the pool. The first swimmer from each team starts. When they reach the other side (and NOT before!), then the next person on the team can swim. This continues until the last person has had a turn.

Variations: relays are very versatile. Have the swimmers try different kinds of strokes (freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, and butterfly). You can also use other methods. For example, have the swimmers cross the pool by kicking with a kick board or only using their arms. To make the relays even more fun, add some crazy tricks like making two people hold hands and swim together or ask the swimmers to swim with a ball in front of them.

Description A great favourite is the T-shirt relay where the first person starts off wearing a shirt, then passes it to the second, third and so on (be sure people actually put the shirt on – just over the head or one arm in is cheating!)

★ **Tips:** relays are the most fun if the teams are evenly matched, so pay attention to how you divide the group. If one team is too strong, mix up the teams again. Switching the type of race is also a good way to give everyone a turn at winning.

Duration Any one of these exercises on their own are quite short. The best approach is to mix and match a series of methods together. An enthusiastic group can go on for anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. Don't fill the entire day at the pool with structured games – let the swimmers do their own thing as well.

Social Learning Fun; social contacts; challenge; strategy; teamwork; co-operation.

Elements

Group The group can be any size – it is possible to adapt these games for groups from 8 to 60 persons.

Material Needed Except for the materials mentioned above, these games require no extra equipment. Safety should always be kept in mind in the swimming pool – don't let games become too rough or get out of hand. Be sure a lifeguard is always present.

Further info/Source The exercises “Chinese Whispers”, “Shark Tale”, “Fill the Bucket” and “Romeo and Juliet” were taken from the book *Spiele im Wasser* (part of the series “Praxisbücher Sport”), A. Lange / S. Sinning, Limpert Verlag GmbH, Wiebelsheim, 2005.)

3. WALKING

Description

It's healthy and relaxing, you can do it anywhere and the only thing you need is a good pair of shoes. People who walk regularly are less likely to fall ill, have better concentration and feel more mentally fit. Walking is a low-impact activity which stimulates the body without exerting too much stress on muscles or joints. Walking is a very social activity with plenty of opportunity for participants to talk and get to know one another while getting fit.

Various walking methods:

Hiking is currently enjoying a steady increase in popularity. Regular hiking helps to build up good physical condition and allows you to chalk up longer distances. Starters may want to aim for 5 km (roughly one hour) and build from there up to 10, 15 or 20 km. Fanatic hikers may want to try the “Nijmegen Four-Day Walk” (held each July in the Netherlands) where participants hike a distance of 30, 40 or 50 km per day for four consecutive days.

Nordic walking, sometimes called “fitness walking”, is an adaptation of cross-country skiing. This form of walking involves long strides and is assisted by two hand-held poles. This method is less taxing on the joints and burns more calories. It also helps to condition the upper body.

Speed walking is an official Olympic sport. Participants walk as fast as they can. The rule in speed walking is that one foot must always be on the ground (in contrast to running). You may need a few practice sessions to get the technique under control.

Brisk walking has come to Europe from America. Brisk walking involves walking at a fast pace with the arms and legs moving together in rhythm. It improves condition and strengthens the muscles. Brisk walking is especially good for people who want to get back into sport after a long period of being inactive.

Description ★ **Tips:**

1. Keep your routine fresh by walking several different routes. Short distances can be done around your neighbourhood; information on longer routes (for hiking, etc.) can be found on Internet.
2. Some people find it difficult to keep up with walking if they do not establish some concrete goals for themselves. To monitor your progress, set yourself a long-term goal. E.g. choose a city or town several hundred kilometres away from where you live. Pretend you are “walking” to that town and keep a log of your distance every day. Hold a mini-celebration when you “reach” your target. This can also be fun to do in a group.

Duration Choose for frequency and regularity rather than for extreme distances – it is better to walk for 30 minutes five times per week than 25 km in one day. Build up the length of time or the distance as your condition improves.

Social Learning Elements Fun; social contacts; perseverance; discipline; independence; strategy; respect for the environment.

Group Walking can be done on your own or in groups; it is suitable for all ages.

Material Needed Walking requires little else than a sturdy pair of sport shoes or hiking boots and a planned route. For short distances you should be able to plot out an easy route which follows main streets through your area. If you want to go slightly longer distances, or walk outside your neighbourhood, it is a good idea to take along a map. For distances over 7-8 km, you should probably take along a bottle of water.

Further info/Source Descriptions of walking methods taken from the article “Loop je Fit!”, health, Nr. 3 summer 2005 (Netherlands)

More information on walking methods and techniques can be found on the following Internet pages:

Speed walking:

www.healthatoz.com/healthatoz/Atoz/hl/fit/card/speedwalking.jsp

Nordic walking: <http://walking.about.com/cs/soles/a/nordicwalking.htm>

Brisk walking: www.aarp.org/health/fitness/walking/walking_techniques_to_keep_up_the_pace.html

4. ORIENTATION MARCH

Description This activity is a simplification of orienteering. Set up a route around a wide area (for example through a park or a small wood). Mark the route by hanging arrows on trees, signposts, etc. A series of envelopes are placed at strategic places along the route. The participants follow the route together as a group. As they find each envelope, they have to complete the challenge hidden inside before moving on to the next stage. The aim is to walk the entire route and successfully complete all the tasks.

Some examples of challenges you can use:

1. First envelope: One person pretends to be blind and the others must lead him/her to complete some kind of physical task.
2. Second envelope: One person is chosen as leader. The rest of the group then pretends to be blind and the leader has to help them complete some kind of physical task.
3. Third envelope: The group must support two members to perform a climbing challenge or some other kind of physical activity.
4. Fourth envelope: One person in the group pretends to have broken his/her leg. The others in the group must safely carry this person for 50 steps.
5. Final envelope: The group must give a reward (e.g. a piece of candy) to the person they think has been the most helpful in the group.

★ **Tips:**

- A. At the start of the exercise explain that to successfully complete the tasks everyone must work together as a team. It is not a race; co-operation is what counts, not competition.
- B. Always make sure the exercise leader or an assistant is close by to offer support if the group does not understand how to do a task.
- C. Do not tell the group what to do – make them solve the problem by themselves.
- D. Adjust the tasks to suit the participants' age (nothing too childish for older groups, nothing too advanced for younger groups).
- E. You can organise an Orientation March indoors as well as outdoors but going outside has the advantage of encouraging young people to enjoy fresh air and experience the natural environment around them.

Duration The time required for this exercise depends on the length of the route and the nature of the challenges – estimate between 1 – 1 ½ hours. You can adjust the length of time as necessary – shorter for young children, longer and more complicated for young adults.

Social Learning Elements Leadership; creativity; challenge; accessibility; teamwork; co-operation; strategy; responsibility; trust; communication; safety; success.

Group You could have anywhere from 5-10 persons in a group, but if you have more participants then make several smaller groups and have them start at different points along the route.

Material Needed The exercise can be run with a minimum of materials. It does not require a sports facility or any special equipment. You will need paper and pens to mark the route (arrows) and to write out the challenges. If you are playing outdoors, you may need some plastic sleeves to protect the paper from getting wet. If you develop more advanced challenges, you can also build in other materials as needed.

Further info/Source This exercise was demonstrated by Bozena Legenc (PL) and Valdis Vanags (LT) during the SALTO “Inclusion Through Sport” training course (2004) – www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/TCsports/

5. MINI-OLYMPICS

Description A Mini-Olympics combines a series of different activities together. There are five activities – one for each of the coloured Olympic rings

BLUE: FRISBEE DISCUS

Equipment: Frisbee, chalk or equivalent to mark distances

Instructions: From a designated starting point have each participant throw the Frisbee as far as they can. Place a marker at the point it first touches.

RED: BEAN BAG SHOT-PUT

Equipment: Beanbags, chalk or equivalent to mark distances

Instructions: Same as above

*Description***GREEN: STANDING LONG JUMP**

Equipment: Chalk or equivalent to mark distances; tape to mark starting point, measuring tape to measure distances (optional)

Instructions: Designate your starting point by placing a length of tape on the ground at your chosen location. Standing with two feet on but not over the tape, the participant must jump forward as far as she can. Place a mark at the point her first heel touches down. If you chose to measure distances, measure from the edge of the tape to the back of the heel.

YELLOW: CRAZY GOLF

Equipment: Depending on whether you choose to play this indoors or outdoors you need to be creative when choosing your equipment. Bean Bag, Frisbee or equivalent; something to make the holes e.g. if indoors, use indoor-chalk, cardboard cut-outs, paper cups. If outdoors, you could truly design a golf course and use your surroundings like trees, fence posts, rocks, door frames, etc.

Instructions: In this version of golf, participants don't hit a ball; rather they throw the bean-bag/Frisbee along the course. To set up, lay out your course leaving two to three throws between your tee and your first hole and every subsequent hole until you reach the end of your course. Vary the direction and don't be afraid to place obstacles to challenge the children. Starting at the first tee, each participant takes as many throws as they need to putt their "ball" into the first hole. The first hole then becomes the second tee and it continues until the participant finishes the course, keeping score as they go.

- Description** **BLACK: RELAY**
- Equipment:** Maltesers (or any kind of lightweight candy), one straw per child
- Instructions:** Line up in a relay formation. At the end of the hall, have a chair facing each team with a number of Maltesers on a plate on each chair. Also have a chair beside each team with an empty plate on it. The first person on each team runs to their chair at the opposite end of the hall, sucks a Malteser up with their straw and attempts to bring it back to the team plate without dropping it. The game continues until all the Maltesers have been removed and brought back to the team's plate.
- ★ **Tips:** Of course each of the “athletes” who takes part deserves a medal for their efforts – try iced cookies or biscuits tied around a piece of ribbon or wool.
- Duration** Estimate a minimum of 1_ - 2 hours for a Mini-Olympics based on 5 stations. Be sure to leave enough time at the end for the “medals presentation”.
- Social Learning Elements** Fun; social contacts; challenge; success; discovery; accessibility; creativity; communication; sportsmanship; safety; leadership.
- Group** This version of the Mini Olympics is designed for young people aged 11 years and older. Each station should have a small group of 6-10 people. If you are working with older children (15, 16, 17...) then 5 stations may be too few. Feel free to build in extra activities.
- Material Needed** In addition to the material mentioned above, it can be useful to have an assistant present at each station to explain how the exercise works, organise equipment, etc. You also need at least one person to act as timekeeper and make sure that the groups move between stations at the appointed time.
- Further info/Source** Taken from the “Bouncing Beyond 90 Years of Guiding” Activity Programme, The Girl Guides.

6. STREET FOOTBALL FOR TOLERANCE

Description “Street Football for Tolerance” was started as a pilot project in the province of Brandenburg, Germany in 2000 and has since expanded to include tournaments within Germany as well as in Poland and Slovakia. The central aim of street football is to develop the social as well as sportive talents of children and youth.

HOW TO PLAY:

Each team consists of four players (at least one must be girl) and one substitute. The substitute may switch with players on the court as often as desired but the substitution rule is always “first one off, then next one on”. The game is played without any goalkeepers (players on defense may not touch the ball with their hands). In the case of a “hand ball”, the opposite team is awarded an unobstructed penalty shot on goal.

The game starts and ends in the “dialogue zone”. Both teams meet in the zone approximately 3 minutes before the start of the game in order to agree on additional fair-play rules. (For example, any goal scored by a girl counts for two points; if a player commits a foul against another player, that team loses one point, etc.) There is no referee in street football – the young people must enforce the agreed rules themselves. At the end of the game, both teams meet together in the dialogue zone to evaluate the game.

At the conclusion of the match, the teams can also win other points as follows:

For fair play

An additional maximum of 3 points (one point per category) may be granted for:

- Active participation of all players during the evaluation in the dialogue zone and the observation of the additional rules
- Engagement of a female player for the entire duration of the match
- Observation of the agreed Fair Play rules (as agreed at the start of the match)

Duration **Street football games are much shorter than regular football matches – the advantage is that this allows more teams a chance to play. You can experiment with the length of time per match depending on the age of the players. A guideline could be 2 x 10-minutes of play.**

Social Learning Elements Street football is accessible for all, requires little organisation and offers age-appropriate opportunities to practice conflict management, tolerance, teamwork, and civil courage.

Group Each team is made up of 4 players (at least one must be female) and one substitute. Street football tournaments divide players into two age groups. The first is all ages up to 14 years and the second is 15 years plus.

Material Needed A regulation football; a playing field (court) measuring 15 metres long and 10 metres wide. The goals should be approximately the same size as ice hockey goals.

Further info/Source Additional information, contacts and details on upcoming tournaments can be found under www.strassenfussball.de (German-language only)

7. OUTDOOR TEAMBUILDING ACTIVITIES

Description The activities below involve a lot of physical movement. These methods are good for bringing participants closer together or for preparing them to work together as a team.

A. Syllables (name game) – each person presents his/her name with a movement (as many movements as there are syllables in the name). The group repeats the name and the movements together.

B. Tennis Ball Route (name game and more)

Step 1 - a tennis ball is thrown from one person to another, passing through every one as it follows a route chosen by the participants (each person gives the ball to another that didn't have it before until everybody has had a turn and returns the ball to the starter)

Step 2- check to see if the participants can pass the ball around again following the same route

Step 3- introduce more balls; follow the same procedure but this time with 2, 3, or 4 balls... or as many as the group wants to try (or as many balls as you have at hand). Start the balls one after the other.

Step 4- The time element can also be introduced. See how much time is needed to pass one or more balls through the route.

*Description***C. Eye contact – Scream** (communication game)

Participants stand in a circle. The facilitator leads the exercise and says “look down” or “look up”. At “look down”, everyone looks down at the floor. While looking down, each participant imagines one other person they will make eye contact with when they look up. At the command “look up”, everyone looks up and those who establish eye contact with each other will scream or shout as loud as they can. After shouting, those participants “die” and leave the circle. The game continues on as the circle grows smaller and ends when everybody “dies”.

D. Change Places (communication game)

Participants stand in a circle. One person stands in the middle. Without speaking, each person tries to establish eye contact with someone else and change places. The person in the middle tries to take a free place while the others are changing places. Whoever is left over becomes the new person in the middle.

E. All Aboard (communication and cooperation game)

Depending on the size of the group, place 2 or 3 flipchart papers on the floor next to each other. Ask the group to stand on the flipcharts without touching the bare floor. As a next step, remove one flipchart and ask the group to stand on the remaining papers. As a final step, remove one more flipchart or fold the last flipchart in half. The group must try to stand only on the paper and not touch the floor. It is up to the group to organise themselves. Maybe some people can sit piggyback or hang on someone else’s neck. N.B. – the group leader should pay attention to safety!

F. Ball in the Air (co-operation game)

This game requires a blanket and a rubber ball (not too big). Participants line up around the sides of the blanket and hold it with both hands. The ball is placed in the middle of the blanket. The group’s task is to keep the ball in the air by pushing it up with the help of the blanket as many times as they can without dropping the ball on the floor. The group should count as loud each time the ball lands on the blanket.

- Description** **G. The Worm** (co-operation game)
Participants stand in a circle. Each person turns right (or left) and makes the circle smaller until everyone's feet are touching (toes of one person touch the heels of the person in front). The task is to sit down on each other's knees, hand placed on the shoulders of the person standing in front. NB – the facilitator should pay attention to safety: knees must be kept together when sitting down.)
- ★ **Tips:**
1. The methods work very well as ice-breakers or energisers.
 2. It is important to make sure that each participant can be included in each type of game, so facilitators need to be aware of participants who may have restricted physical mobility and find creative ways to adapt the methods as necessary.
 3. The exercises can be done anywhere; playing outdoors is better but indoors is fine, especially if the weather is bad.
- Duration** **The individual methods are very short – 10-15 min. each. The impact on the group is stronger if the methods are put together in such a way as to build on to each other and form a sequence. It is not necessary to do all the exercises at one time.**
- Social Learning Elements** Fun; social contacts; teamwork; communication; co-operation; creativity; challenge.
- Group** **The exercises can be used in groups of anywhere from 8-25 persons. If you have more people, considering splitting into several smaller groups of 10-15 people.**
- Material Needed** You only need very basic materials: tennis balls, flipchart papers, a blanket, a rubber ball, etc.
- Further info/Source** **This exercise was demonstrated by Mihaly Kocsis (RO) during the SALTO “Inclusion Through Sport” training course (2004) – www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/TCsports/**

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Tony has been working as the co-ordinator of the SALTO Inclusion Resource Centre in Belgium-Flanders since it was created in 2000. Besides developing training courses for different target groups “with fewer opportunities”, Tony also co-authored several educational publications such as two of the T-Kits and a variety of SALTO publications. One of his goals is to create opportunities for all and hopefully this booklet contributes to that.

REFERENCES, RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Some more SALTO “Inclusion for All” publications:

- **Fit for Life (2005)** – using sports as an educational tool for the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in youth-work
- **Village International (updated 2010)** - setting up international projects in rural and geographically isolated areas
- **Inclusion & Diversity (updated 2008)** – how to make your youth-work and youth projects more inclusive and reach more diverse target groups
- **No Barriers, No Borders (updated 2008)** – organising international mixed ability projects (including people with and without a disability)
- **Over the Rainbow (updated 2008)** – creating sensitive projects with young LesBiGays and young people questioning their sexual orientation
- **E.M. power (2008)** – empowering Ethnic Minority young women through international youth projects
- **Youth and the City (2008)** – developing meaningful international projects with young people in disadvantaged (sub)urban areas
- **Inclusion in Practice (2008)** – inspiring examples of inclusion projects within the Youth in Action programme
- **Going International - Inclusion for All (updated 2009)** – practical methods and advice for youth workers organising their first international project for young people with fewer opportunities
- **Use your Hands to Move Ahead (updated 2009)** – using practical tasks to increase participation by young people with fewer opportunities in short-term EVS projects
- **Inclusion by Design (2009)** – manual for youth NGOs to approaching inclusion in a strategic way
- **Making Waves (updated 2010)** – greater impact with your youth projects through visibility, dissemination and exploitation of your project results
- **Images in Action (2010)** – running a positive image-building campaign for inclusion groups
- **Working for Work (updated 2010)** – how to use the Youth in Action programme with young unemployed people
- **Let's Youthpass it on for All! (updated 2010)** – recognition of non-formal learning through the Youth in Action programme for young people with fewer opportunities
- **Inclusion Through Employability (2010)** - youth work approaches to unemployment

👉 Find them all at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/inclusionforall/

Looking for youth work and training methods on Inclusion and other topics?

Browse through the SALTO Toolbox for Training at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Toolbox/



- **T-Kit Series:** *Thematic easy-to-use training-kits for use in youth work training and study sessions.* **Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission on European Youth Worker Training**
- Social Inclusion
- Project Management
- Organisational Management
- Intercultural Language Learning
- Intercultural Learning
- International Voluntary Service
- Under Construction... Citizenship, Youth and Europe
- Training Essentials
- Funding and Financial Management
- Evaluation
- Euromed Cooperation
- Training Essentials

☞ Downloadable from www.youth-partnership.net or www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/Toolbox/

- **ARCTOS – Anti-racism tools:** the German Sports Youth developed a ‘talk kit’ to work on discrimination and racism in sport. Originally designed for the training and further education of trainers, coaches and sports instructors, these tools can also be applied by youth workers using sport as an educational tool.

☞ The talk kit and accompanying videos can be downloaded from the website:

www.youth-sport.net

- **SALTO Youth Initiatives - Coaching Guide (2006):** this is not a manual on becoming a better sports coach, but rather about using coaching as an approach to support young people in setting up their own projects. This guide has lots of tools, methods and advice on how youth workers, youth leaders & support persons can coach real youth-led participation projects, without taking over.

☞ Download the Coaching Guide from www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/CoachingGuide/

ONLINE RESOURCES

More inclusion links and resources online at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/inclusion/

- **European Commission’s Inclusion Strategy for the Youth in Action programme (2007 – 2013)** at www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/InclusionWorkingGroup/
- **European Commission and Sport:** sports studies, legislation influencing sports, links <http://ec.europa.eu/sport/>
- **Council of Europe and Sport:** sports ethics, sports for all, anti-doping, spectator violence www.coe.int/sport/

- **ENGSO** – European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation: guidelines for children and youth sport from different countries - www.engso.com
- **International Academy for Sports for All**: sports as a school for life - www.iasfa.org
- **International Sport and Culture Association**: sports as a tool for international understanding and social development - www.isca-web.org
- **EU Sports Office**: best practice of sports, history of sports & EU - www.eu-sports-office.org
- **European Women and Sport**: equal opportunities in sports, lobbying - www.ews-online.com
- **Sports Development UK**: background texts about sports and social exclusion, crime, policy papers, specific target groups - www.sportdevelopment.org.uk
- **Disability View – Sports**: stories about disability sport activities, advice for giving sports a go, examples of different adaptable sports - www.disabilityview.co.uk
- **EGLSF** - European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation: conferences, studies, contacts
www.gaysport.info
- **Sport and Development**: worldwide development project database, experts and organisations, exchange forum - www.sportanddev.org

SOME SPORTS INSPIRATION ONLINE

Maybe you are looking for **different types of sports** – or why not can create your own!

- **Beach Volleyball**: any patch of sand will do - www.beachvolley.it
- **Foot Volley**: mixing football and volleyball - www.footvolley.com
- **Golf on Ice**: Who needs a green anyway? - www.golfonice.com
- **Mobile Phone Throwing**: or you could probably throw anything...
www.savonlinnafestivals.com
- **Sand or rockboarding**: you don't always need to go to fancy winter resorts for boarding
www.sandboard.com - www.rockboarding.com
- **Street Football**: the fun of football but without the expensive equipment, anywhere anytime
www.sits.org - www.streetfootballworld.org
- **Swamp Soccer**: playing football in the mud; practical when you don't have a proper field
www.swampsoccer.co.uk
- **Timber Sports**: all things you can do with a few chunks of wood - www.timbersports.com
- **Volotennis**: a mix between volleyball, tennis and badminton, which is played with... a children's paddle and ball - www.volotennis.com
- **Wife Carrying**: maybe it doesn't need to be your wife?
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wife_Carrying
- **Zorbing**: roll down a slope inside a padded hamster ball - www.zorb.com

The aim of this section is not to give an extensive overview of different existing 'sports', but more to stimulate creativity for those that don't like or cannot afford the traditional sports.

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SALTO Inclusion cares about the environment. This booklet has been printed on environmentally friendly recycled paper. Order or print this publication only if you really need it. The Earth says 'Thank you!'

Sport is a lot more than just physical activity. While sport can help young people develop healthy lifestyles it can also teach valuable life skills and help with an individual's personal development process.

This is especially true for young people with fewer opportunities. Sport methods and outdoor activities can help youngsters in this target group to develop a wide range of social skills. In this way sport helps these young people become much more than fit – it can help make them truly “Fit for Life”.

Based on the outcomes of the SALTO “Inclusion through Sport” training courses (2004), this practical booklet aims to inform youth workers, youth leaders and European institutions of the value of sport as an educational tool for the fewer opportunity target group. The theory behind using sport as a method is made concrete through real-life examples. An extensive list of methods is also provided to help youth organisations take the first steps towards implementing sport as a learning method on local as well as on European level.



This booklet is part of the SALTO “Inclusion for All” series. Download them for free at: www.SALTO-YOUTH.net/FitForLife/



‘Youth in Action’ Programme