



HEADSTRONG

EST. 2021

The HeadStrong Youth Gym Project Results from Initial Trial - October 2021

Introduction

HeadStrong is a youth gym project that invites young men aged between 13-18 to become strong through power lifting over a period of 11 weeks.

Over three sessions per week, students are trained in how to lift weights safely and with growing confidence and ability. As they work together as part of a cohort of students, they learn to rely on each other and grow as a community of young men who look out for each other, becoming stronger as part of a 'brotherhood'.

The four **aims** of HeadStrong are as follows:

CORE

Building CORE strength. Physical strength carries over to well-being, feeling able, feeling positive

COMMUNITY

Building COMMUNITY. Brothers/family - a sense of belonging without judgment

CONFIDENCE

Feeling a greater all-round CONFIDENCE, but specifically an increased confidence in speaking (up) and athleticism

CAPACITY

Increasing CAPACITY in growing resilience and the mental capacity to overcome adversity.

HeadStrong began when a team of people from Ashford Vineyard came together, acutely aware of the mental health challenges facing so many young people (particularly teenage boys) today. This has been made worse by the pandemic. In a survey of 2,438 13-25 year olds carried out by Young Minds, 67% of respondents believed that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health. A report on data gathered by the Millennium Cohort Study (following the lives of around 19,000 young people) said that, *"when the 17-year-olds from the cohort were asked if they had ever hurt themselves "on purpose in an attempt to end your life", 7% replied yes. When asked if they had self-harmed during the previous year, 24% responded that they had."* As for teenage boys and young men, research by the University of Manchester around suicide in under-25s that examined 922 suicides in this age range, a staggering 76% of those were male.

We believe that by inviting young men into a 'gym' type space and working with them around the four aims detailed above, a difference can be made.

The Trial

The core team delivered a trial over a period of four weeks with six young men aged between 14-17. The trial was held at Ashford Vineyard's warehouse on Cobbs Wood Industrial Estate and ran on Tuesday and Thursday evenings (6-9pm) and on Saturday mornings (9am-12pm). The trial was staffed entirely by volunteers and the equipment used was leased for a period of 6 months and some other equipment was leant free-of-charge to the project.

The six students (there were actually 10 in total, but four didn't start at the beginning so for the purposes of this report, their data is not being included) were able to attend most sessions with some able to attend them all. There was no fee for them to attend or take part.

The sessions always began with a check-in where students, coaches and investors (volunteers) alike would say how they're doing, what their day has been like and how they are feeling about training. It was then necessary to set out the equipment, which took around 15 minutes. Then each student would begin their training according to the programme that had been uniquely devised for each student. Once formal training was completed, there was the chance to 'play', by trying out some other weights and lifts. To close, the gear was all packed away and then there was a check-out where coaches students and investors were able to say how they were now feeling and how they felt their training went.

The Results

Students were given four assessments upon entry and then again on the final session. These were as follows:

CORE

Baseline weight that could be lifted or AMRAPs (as many reps as possible) within a given time

COMMUNITY

This was measured using a wellbeing wheel with questions drawn from a wide variety of sources

CONFIDENCE

This was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the wellbeing wheel

CAPACITY

This was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale and the wellbeing wheel

The assessments were carried out by each student with no input from any of the coaches, investors or other students.

After four weeks, the results were as follows:

	Entry	Exit	Change	%
CORE	1330	1795	465	35
COMMUNITY	60	91	31	52
CONFIDENCE	173	233	60	35
CAPACITY	123	153	30	24

As a team, we were enormously pleased with the results and we were able to share preliminary results with the students. Particularly noteworthy for us, was the result for 'feeling a sense of community' (feeling supported, part of something bigger than yourself, having people to go to if you needed them etc) and

also capacity. While capacity shows the lowest improvement, for young men to feel that they are 24% more resilient after just 4 weeks, is hugely significant for this as an ongoing project.

The Costs

We were able to keep costs extremely low for this trial thanks to already having the premises that we could use and Ashford Vineyard was able to further donate the overhead costs, such as heating, lighting, security, first aid, safeguarding training, DBS checks etc. Therefore, for this first trial, the main cost was £500 to lease the bulk of the equipment for six months. Everyone gave their time as volunteers and so there were no staff costs either.

The Future

Ultimately, we see HeadStrong as being part of a youth complex where many youth needs are met to help strengthen them in the same four aims. However, to get from where we are to there is going to take maybe 3-5 years. So, the next stepping stone to move us forward is going to be another trial (stage 2) that is planned for Easter '22 and is as follows:

- Doubling the length of time from 4 weeks to 8 weeks
- Doubling the number of students from 6 to 12 (and engaging some of the first trial cohort as trainee coaches)
- Inviting a life-coach to give the students access to coaching sessions to help them become stronger in the four aims
- Increasing the amount of equipment, including purchasing bench press/squat rack combinations (this is to replace some of the privately borrowed equipment, plus more students means more equipment is needed)
- Include some agility and stamina coaching, as well as the power lifting

Finances Needed for Stage 2

We have an existing grant for £1000 that has been used to offset the cost of hiring the equipment and Ashford Vineyard is willing to offer the premises and overheads at a very low cost for the second trial (stage two). Approximate costs would be as follows:

Proposed Costs for Stage Two

ITEMS	COSTS
Weight benches x2	£ 2,400.00
Assorted weights and bars	£ 5,000.00
Life Coaching	£ 600.00
Branded material (T-shirts, hoodies, banners etc)	£ 1,000.00
Hosting contribution	£ 1,000.00
Total	£ 10,000.00

From any grant monies, there would be a nominal contribution of 10% to Ashford Vineyard to cover the hosting and associated overheads. Further costs beyond the equipment would include the life-coaching sessions, T-shirts and some branded materials. We are looking to raise £10,000 to cover these costs. Of course, once the main equipment has been purchased, (and we are purchasing competition standard equipment) it belongs to the project, becoming a long-term asset.

Further Ahead

Stage three will see us focus more on securing premises that are right for this project. Using an established gym won't work, because many gyms don't let under-16s in. Also, the time we would wish to be using the gym, is the gym's busiest time and it wouldn't allow us to spend time focussing on using life-coaching to develop the capacity (resilience) of the students.

Further into the future, and once a permanent home has been found, we will be developing a business model that allows for personal trainers to use the premises during the day and enable us to offer sessions for ladies and seniors during the day. As well as power lifting (to help maintain and grow muscle mass) we would envisage self-defence classes and, of course, the four aims would still be in play. It is our intention to also create sessions for teenage girls as well. We can also see links with schools, that could include visiting schools and leading assemblies, having students referred to us and more.

Future Results

For stage 2, as we double the length of time and the number of students, we expect to see similar results to this first trial. They will, of course, be different students coming in, but the data is strong enough that we are predicting similar gains in all areas. However, what we are not expecting is for the gains to be doubled just because the time is doubled. If that were the case, this would suggest that we could all become Olympic champions if we just keep doubling our time in the gym!

We are expecting to see further gains in the aim of **community** as the students spend longer with each other and have the chance to develop stronger relationships. One of the strategies of HeadStrong has always been to invite alumni back on the Saturday session to be a part of what's going on and keep a connection with the coaches, investors and other students.

Conclusions

We embarked on this project because of the assault on young people's mental health and how much many of them are struggling. We believed that by helping them to become physically strong through power lifting, we could also improve their mental health by giving them greater confidence, a greater sense of community and greater resilience for when the harder times come.

We believe, that as evidenced above, HeadStrong has the capability to grow and impact many more teenagers helping them to become 'head - strong' and embark on adulthood from a more secure base. The data shows us that HeadStrong has a future and a definite role in helping young men to become strong in their bodies, strong in their thinking and strong in their connection.

We are now working on securing £10k funding for stage 2, while also ensuring we continue to work with the volunteers we have who have reported getting a lot out of the project. We are also offering some KiT days (keep in touch) once a month to the cohort from this first trial.

In the background, we are also working on what stage three looks like and a viable business model for how to take this project full-time and make it everything it can be.

Further Information

www.ashfordvineyard.org/headstrong

Page contains this report, photos, video, information flyer

headstrong@ashfordvineyard.org

The core team:

Chris Kimmance - Senior Pastor at Ashford Vineyard

Herbie Sherman - Experienced power lifter and works with teenagers with behavioural difficulties

Dawn Wright - Works in Early Help for KCC

Josh Brown - Leader at Ashford Vineyard & entrepreneur

Jon Aird - Fitness enthusiast with past experience of leading teenagers

Quotes

“A lot of people here weren’t feeling too good...everyone was just down and not hitting the things they wanted to hit. We came here and with encouragement from [the coaches]... we improved a lot” - Student

“One thing that really helped was with our mental health. A lot of the time we checked in and checked out [and] a lot of the time we came in feeling quite bad and then we feel quite energised and everything. Another way it helped is with our discipline around lifting...” - Student

“The check-in and out really helps where you can be honest with other people about how your day was” - Student

“I’ve just been amazed at the effort these guys have put into their training. It’s been superb watching them improve each week” - Investor

Images

