Case Study: Safeguarding in the Caribbean

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Background

The Caribbean Sport and Development Agency (CSDA) (formerly the Trinidad and Tobago Alliance for Sport and Physical Education or TTASPE) has emerged as a leading advocate and activist for sport for development (Sfd) in the Caribbean region. The CSDA position themselves as a ‘regional hub’, supporting organisations and governments to advance their delivery and organisation of sport and recreation through training and organisational support. The CSDA work in collaboration with a plethora of local, national and international organisations in 13 member states under the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Organisation of Eastern Caribbean states (OECS) umbrellas respectively. These partners include but are not limited to the Australian Sports Commission, United Way, UNICEF and the Government departments of Youth, Sport and Education within a variety of Caribbean countries.

Accompanying the CSDA’s emergence as a leading advocate of Sfd in the Caribbean, CSDA has also become a prominent activist for safeguarding and keeping children safe within sport and recreation. The CSDA have concentrated a significant portion of their efforts into developing general understanding of safeguarding in sport and recreation. Furthermore they have made considerable efforts to influence the political landscape within the Caribbean for the advancement of child safety and child development.

Much of this work has been based on the CSDA’s advancement of their own knowledge through the US based National Alliance of Youth sport and their ongoing membership in the working group for the development of international standards for safeguarding children in sport. As part of this, CSDA participates in an international learning set (ILS) to share challenges and examples of good practice. This has acted to develop CSDA’s understanding of safeguarding and influenced their work on safeguarding which focuses on four areas:

1) Policy development

Assisting the development of policy in the Caribbean has been a significant emphasis of CSDA. CSDA provides policy support to several non-governmental sport for development organisations within the Caribbean, while also working with Health, Education and Sport government departments to influence their policy creation and development. This work has been influenced by CSDA’s involvement in the International Standards for Safeguarding Children in Sport project. As a founding member of the working group, and a participant of an international learning set, CSDA’s work has been heavily informed by their involvement in this project. Not only has the standards provided guidelines for safeguarding children in sport, but CSDA has also benefitted from materials which have been shared by peer organisations. These resources have been adapted such that they are culturally sensitive to the Caribbean. Furthermore, the self-audit tool has facilitated a period of reflection whilst providing a baseline against which progress can be measured. This has guided a mapping process to help organisations to understand how a safeguarding
policy may be constructed and developed. In some cases such work has been conducted as a compliance guideline from funders, with CSDA helping to ensure that organisations have the appropriate policies and procure in place to deliver Sfd projects, while providing an objective means of ensuring funders can conduct due diligence on sporting organisations.

The significance of this work cannot be understated as it provides organisations and governments with a framework to work from to establish clear guidelines and regulations on safeguarding practice. Furthermore, it can in some cases encourage the development of policies and regulations which act as a deterrent for poor practice in sport and recreation. However, the region specific research base for such political advancements is lacking, as such there is limited empirical support for many of the advancements that CSDA promote. This has contributed to a lack of will and previously limited support in pushing the safeguarding agenda. As such this can be identified as an area of improvement, which has encouraged research such as the present study, although until such research base has been amalgamated, the objective support for political advancements will be playing catch up.

2) Capacity building

CSDA recognises that along with policy advancements, capacity building is essential to the advancement of the knowledge and practices of sport for development agencies, and programme deliverers in the Caribbean. As such CSDA have developed two workshops with an explicit focus on safeguarding within the Caribbean, Safeguarding Awareness and Safeguarding Foundations. These workshops seek to increase awareness of safeguarding and child protection issues, discussing its necessity in sport. Furthermore, the workshops provide an open forum to discuss the obstacles that may inhibit implementers from providing adequate safeguarding.

Both of these workshops have been influenced by the CSDA’s involvement in the International standards project, particularly by the training the CSDA received from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC: a UK based charity) in September 2013. The workshops are informed by this training, and utilises the materials shared by the NSPCC. The CSDA have delivered the workshops in several islands in the Caribbean (e.g. St Lucia, Belize and Dominica). This has transpired through their work with the departments of sport and physical education in these countries.

3) Safeguarding systems

Based on previous research and continued engagement with organisations such as the NSPCC and UNICEF, CSDA acknowledged that the absence of standardised formal background checks for implementers was a significant barrier. As such the CSDA has developed a safeguarding system to provide organisations with a registry of safe implementers. This registry contains information about implementers who have met the minimum standard of safeguarding, which makes them appropriate to work with
children. This information includes whether individuals have attended safeguarding training, the results of their background checks and any self-declarations they have made. This system is supported by the Trinidad Directors of Sport as well as several regional sporting organisations. The website is due to be officially launched in May 2014.

4) Research
The CSDA have made it a priority to ensure that their ongoing development is guided by empirical research. In a bid to address the paucity of relevant research, the CSDA have invested in both internal and external research. For example, recently they published an internal case study on safeguarding in sport and physical education. This outlined the need for safeguarding within the region, the need to review legislation and enforce the mechanisms which support safeguarding, and to educate and up skill both implementers and beneficiaries on their rights and responsibilities. In order to make this change possible, the report called for three main changes, the creation of a national database which would hold police records, information on previously attended training and previous employment, for organisations to develop safeguarding policies and for the reporting of child abuse to be made mandatory within organisations and individuals being held accountable for failing to report abuse. Accompanying this research, the CSDA have also invested in external research such as the present study. The CSDA have identified this as a key area of improvement. As such they plan on extending their research repertoire through internal staff and external partners.

While CSDA is a prominent activist for safeguarding in sport, they have lacked the regional specific evidence base to support their efforts. As such this research project was conducted to examine the need for child protection in Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia and Dominica, while simultaneously providing the empirically backed guidance of CSDA’s work in relation to safeguarding. Data was collected using interviews and focus groups with CSDA staff, government representatives, beneficiaries of sport and physical education initiatives and implementers. These were supported by observations made at a number of delivery events.

The lens through which safeguarding was explored was through one of CSDA’s regional programmes Engage 360 (formerly Game on). This is a Physical education programme for elementary school children (up to 11 years old). This inclusion based programme is delivered within the state school setting, aspiring to provide children with the opportunity to engage in sport and physical education in a safe and enjoyable manner. The principles prescribed to coaches on this training are also applicable to the older age groups to whom sessions are also delivered for the ministry of sport outside of school based settings.

Challenges

Throughout this research project several participants were questioned on what they believed the most significant challenges to implementing safeguarding practices were in their region. The following section provides a summary of the most pertinent responses.
Lack of a National Framework - When interviews were conducted with CSDA staff, the most prominently discussed challenge was the absence of national safeguarding policies and systems. A senior member of staff suggested that in the absence of safeguarding policy, arbitration occurs with great difficulty and there is little to convince organisations that safeguarding is to be taken seriously. Additionally, there is nothing to guide individuals that encounter malpractice or abuse. A senior member of staff discussed when the CSDA were initially introduced to the concept of safeguarding by the American based International Alliance of Youth Sport. Safeguarding was introduced in the context of an American system that ensured that coaches that consistently demonstrate malpractice can be listed on a national database accessible to the public that lists them as an unsuitable coach for working with children. This not only acted as a deterrent to malpractice and abuse, but it also supported organisations to ascertain the suitability of implementers before hiring them. Although without such systems in the Caribbean, CSDA recognise that the effectiveness of safeguarding initiatives are somewhat limited and organisations are forced to use their own initiative to establish credibility, the quality of which will vary heavily. Such is the significance of this issue that previously, some CSDA staff have refused to sign company policies on safeguarding until adequate systems are put in place to support it, owing to feelings of a lack of competence to safeguard against, identify and deal with abuse, and an absence of supporting systems to support the management of identified cases. In this instance the member of staff did not refuse to report abuse as such, but to sign a document that they felt would place them in jeopardy, in absence of supportive national and organisational systems and training.

Lack of a Case Management System - As a subsequent manifestation of this issue, there is also difficulty in ascertaining who to report malpractice or abuse to. While CSDA insist all staff attend safeguarding training, there is not a dedicated Child Welfare Officer. A senior member of staff suggested that although CSDA deliver training to up-skill implementers and organisations, it is often difficult for organisations to be clear on what to do when they encounter abuse, and which agencies to report it to. A member of staff conceded that it was a significant challenge for CSDA when they began to campaign for safeguarding, so it’s understandable that other developing organisations would feel the same. This is made difficult by the absence of adequate guidance or systems from the national government.

Government officials

Lack of a National Policy - When interviews were conducted with senior officials from the Dominican Sports, Health and Youth divisions respectively, government officials were in unison with CSDA in their belief that the absence of a policy of safeguarding greatly limits the work that can be done. Government officials also argued that it is difficult to encourage the public to take safeguarding seriously without policies and procedures from above. They also expressed an understanding that organisations and deliverers have little basis upon which to develop their practices. One government official said ‘policy is really a challenge because without the policy you are acting on your own and you are at the mercies of consumers of sport. People can either accept what you are doing or not, but if there’s policy that guides what you should do then it becomes a lot easier’.
Lack of Organisational Integration - Another unanimously discussed challenge was the poor integration of government services and lack of information sharing. This meant that if one government department possessed crucial information on a child that may affect their safety and wellbeing, it was highly unlikely to be communicated to the sporting ministry, or vice versa. Officials from all divisions of the government suggested that a more integrated working relationship would benefit all parties and ensure that knowledge could be shared more efficiently. A senior officer from the department of youth admitted ‘we are not really as integrated as we could be’, while officers from the department of health suggested that improved integration may encourage departments to develop a better understanding of safeguarding. One way in which this understanding could be improved is by each department broadening their knowledge of safeguarding issues.

Diverse Definitions of Safeguarding – This research highlighted that Government departments all defined safeguarding differently. For example, officials from the Department of Health discussed safeguarding in relation to the physiological appropriateness of individuals for physical activities. This was noticeably different from the way in which the official from the ministry of sport defined it, choosing to focus on boundaries in the coach athlete relationship, while the Department of Youth services official prioritised the significance of having male and female coaches. In some senses this can be seen as an example of good practice and the use of situation specific safeguarding. However, there seemed to be limited knowledge on safeguarding in its broader sense. For example, officials in the Department of Health were not so cognisant of the risks within the implementer and practitioner’s relationship. This seems to be a consequence of a lack of guidance and education on safeguarding in its wider sense. While officials were aware of the safeguarding issues that are most pertinent in their roles, there was somewhat limited knowledge of the safeguarding issues that may be less obvious, or more difficult to acknowledge.

Lack of Facilities and Equipment - Other challenges that were identified were the difficulty in attaining appropriate facilities and equipment. All ministers conceded that such is the mountainous terrain of Dominica that often having a safe area to enjoy sport is an issue. One senior official from the Sports division said ‘the terrain is often a lower image of the mountains; there are a lot of rocks on it and a lot of wear and tear’. Ministers argued that this is a natural challenge of safeguarding within the Caribbean and in Dominica. It was also discussed as a catalyst to the speed at which equipment can deteriorate. In conjunction with a lack of resources to continuously update facilities and equipment, officials believed having the resources, equipment and the facilities to safely implement sports provision is a substantial challenge.

Denial of Abuse in their Country - Interestingly, all parties discussed the general lack of acceptance that abuse can occur in their country. Officials argued that when attempting to implement safeguarding procedures, they were often faced with resistance due to a general disbelief that abuse can occur in their country. Officials gave examples of cases when their attempts to question employees about their conduct resulted in conflict. For example one official discussed an attempt to challenge a physical educator tightly embracing a student following a tournament victory. The official said that the implementer asked ‘what’s the big
deal?’ and failed to understand why such behaviours should be reprimanded. This was discussed as potential manifestation of the absence of policy and guidelines, while providing a demonstration of the need for a public campaign on acceptable behaviour. Thus, there is no denial that abuse can occur but there is a denial that it does happen in their country.

**Implementers**

Abuse is a Taboo Topic - Similar to the findings with government officials, the general lack of acceptance that abuse occurs within the Caribbean society was discussed by implementers as a barrier to implementing safeguarding procedures. In the safeguarding workshop in Trinidad, representatives from The Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago (SPORTT) discussed issues like child protection and abuse as taboo. One deliverer said ‘Child protection is taboo in the Caribbean in general, things like religion play a big factor and people don’t want to acknowledge these things’. This was not too dissimilar from the assertion from implementers in Dominica who suggested that ‘people do not like discussing such things’, and that the failure to discuss such issues has encouraged the belief that they simply do not occur in the region. Indeed three deliverers themselves argued that child protection is not a particular concern for the Caribbean or Dominica specifically with one saying ‘on the field of sport it’s something we haven’t heard of, we have never heard of something like that, this is not a problem for us’.

Other implementers argued that because of such beliefs, the Caribbean as a whole has developed a negligent attitude towards the safety of children. Implementers in Trinidad believed this extended to the dismissal of genuine reports of abuse. Implementers offered an example of a recent case in which a child was being sexually abused by her father, and reported it to a teacher. The teacher was said to be disbelieved to the extent that he was detested for making such allegations.

Relaxed Attitudes to Safeguarding - Implementers in Dominica also admitted to a somewhat lax attitude towards safeguarding. One implementer gave the example of coaches being able to ask a friend to deliver their session for them as they had other responsibilities. In lamenting such actions, one implementer said ‘we don’t even know who this friend is, you may think you know him, but do you really know him?’. Although despite implementers expressing their concerns about such actions, they expressed that they are commonplace.

Lack of Safeguarding Training - In what seems to be a consequence of attitudes towards safeguarding in the Caribbean, implementers were unanimous across both focus groups that there is a need for further training in the identification and management of abuse, particularly as a fear of the consequences was said to hinder the likelihood of children reporting abuse themselves. Implementers argued that there is poor understanding of how to effectively safeguard, or crucially, how to identify an abused child and that teachers and implementers delivering projects like Engage 360 could be better trained at identifying traumatised or abused children.

Implementers argued that they are often put in vulnerable situations and would like more guidance on safeguarding themselves. For example being left alone with a child, ‘If a session
finishes at 6 and the parent turns up at 6.15 for example…that can be a long time to be left alone with a young girl every other day’. This was exacerbated when discussing safeguarding children with disabilities. An implementer said ‘We have limited understanding of safeguarding and in my sport we are dealing with young people that are mentally challenged and that adds another layer of difficulty’.

**Changing Cultural Norms** - In terms of the government backed policies that may supplement such training, implementers were divided in their views. While the majority were adamant policy should be put in place, implementers in Trinidad in particular were more concerned with creating cultural change. One officer from the Children’s Authority said ‘it shouldn’t be that the fear of a fine makes you report it, you should just want to report it anyways!’ Other implementers agreed, though there was some disagreement about the cause and effect of policy and culture. That is, whether policy creation would cause cultural change, or if cultural change would cause a strong adherence to the policies.

Culture featured heavily in both focus groups and in interviews with members of staff at schools delivering Engage 360. The general consensus was that attempts to re-educate physical educators should be culturally sensitive and involve a strong degree of cultural realism, taking into account the inevitable challenges of the Caribbean. For example implementers discussed the inevitability of facilities being somewhat dangerous due to the terrain, or a lack of facilities, which may be safety utilities. As such implementers were wary of foreigners who come in to offer safety based advise without acknowledging such barriers. This also includes the way people interact with each other. One implementer said ‘the children are very loving and we are a small community. When they see you they want to hug you, but what are we to do, should we push them away? So any safeguarding initiatives should take our culture into account’.

**The Child’s Voice**

**Focus on Physical Injury** - This research project conducted focus groups with children from two primary schools in which Engage 360 trained physical educators delivered sport. While the children were adamant they loved sport in their schools, they discussed their biggest worries in sport as the potential to fall over and break bones. Children unanimously identified the surfaces they play on as being hard, and said that they were most concerned about falling. One child discussed a previous incident, saying ‘I fell down hit my head after a child pushed me and I didn’t see anything after that’. ‘The last thing I remember that I was falling to the ground and I don’t remember anything else’. Similar to the children that witnessed this incident, the child expressed fear of falling following the event. One challenge, therefore, is to ensure that the risk of physical injury is mitigated. Furthermore, there is a need to broaden children’s awareness of how their broader psychological, emotional and social well-being can be protected and enhanced through sport.

**Solutions**

As illustrated in the above section, this research project identified several challenges to safeguarding in the Caribbean. Although through interviews, focus groups and observational
data collection, some solutions were identified. This section provides an overview of those solutions.

**Developing a National Policy** - One of the most significant solutions to a challenge was the CSDA’s efforts to bridge the policy and systems gap that seems to be hindering safeguarding in the Caribbean. Having led discussions on Safeguarding in the Caribbean in the OECS and CARICOM, the Trinidad government is in the process of drafting a safeguarding policy. Not only is this a significant step towards improvements in the quality of safeguarding initiatives in Trinidad, but in the Caribbean as a whole as this will be distributed across all member states. This will be particularly advantageous as it will provide a solution to the issue discussed by implementers of individuals performing indiscretions and simply move to a neighbouring island to continue working with children.

**Safestamp** - The CSDA’s development of the Safestamp system for coaches and organisations is also a significant step in the right direction, and will support the policy that is due to be developed. It provides an excellent opportunity for organisations, parents and implementers to ascertain the suitability of organisations or implementers.

**Safeguarding Workshops** - The CSDA’s two workshops (safeguarding foundations and safeguarding awareness) also provide examples of solutions to the lack of awareness, lack of knowledge and lack of guidance on safeguarding that was expressed across all levels. As part of these workshops, CSDA can provide a solution to the lack of knowledge regarding the International standards by incorporating knowledge attained from the process of the development of the standards in these workshops. Furthermore, they have adapted training on safeguarding to the contexts of organisations and sporting bodies. It must be noted that in the absence of the systems that may support safeguarding procedures this work is somewhat limited, though it is clearly of value.

**Implementing Preventative Measures** - Other solutions were presented by the implementers such as the adaptation of session procedures with the inclusion of a roll call before sessions. This provided a simple solution to combat the vulnerability implementers feel. One implementer described how it had already come in useful when the attendance of a missing young pupil was questioned. Another example of a pragmatic solution to safeguarding was observed in a Dominican school with Engage 360 trained physical educators. Although previously they elected not to, PE teachers are now obligated to attend sports sessions. This change was made to assist the coach with the management of the children, and to provide a witness for the coach, preventing their susceptibility to claims of malpractice or abuse.

**Evidence of impact**

The lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation procedures has meant that countries in the Caribbean have struggled to evidence the impact of their work. Consequently there is very little research with which to compare or contrast the findings of the present study. Furthermore, there is little research evidencing the impact of sport for development work in the Caribbean, not to mention work that is safeguarding specific. Nevertheless, in a bid to
contribute towards the evidence base of safeguarding work in the Caribbean, this study found some evidence of the impact of present policy and practice.

**Redefining Normal Conference**

In May 2014 the CSDA ran a regional conference called ‘Redefining Normal’ of which child safety in sport was one of the three main themes. This included presentations for researchers, and a snapshot of the safeguarding workshops that the CSDA provides. Although it was intended to be a regional conference, it was attended by a total of 62 international delegates from a total of 15 countries worldwide. This demonstrated a significant step towards increased awareness, acknowledgement and pro-activity around safeguarding children in sport in the Caribbean.

**Increased Awareness Through Workshops** - One area of impact that can be evidenced is the safeguarding workshops that CSDA are delivering. The CSDA’s safeguarding workshops provide evidence of a ground-breaking campaign to build the capacity of those involved in sport regionally and increase their awareness of safeguarding. This is open to all organisations in the region and the only criterion is that the organisation is working with children in sport directly or indirectly. The introduction to safeguarding workshop in particular has been delivered in a total of six member states with over 130 implementers, co-ordinators and ministers taking part. This also includes 5 attendees from Nevis who worked exclusively with children with special needs and received tailored workshops. When one considers that the majority of the parties that received training filter back into the PE curriculum, or the state school setting, it can be said that the impact of these workshops are genuinely widespread across the Caribbean. Dominica provides a perfect case study of this as the implementers that have received safeguarding training have been delivering on Engage 360 for four years as it is integrated into the schools programme. A senior officer from the Minister of Sport in Dominica discussed the success of the training, stating that more than ever coaches are reporting things that they would have failed to report previously. Similarly in the focus groups with implementers in Trinidad, it was said that ‘we didn’t really think about safeguarding, but now we are so much more aware and that’s important’.

**Implementation of Safeguarding Policy and SafeStamp** - Although they have not yet been formally introduced, the development of a regional policy on safeguarding and the Safestamp system are examples of the cultural change that the CSDA are inspiring. This work seems to be much appreciated by the key stakeholders as evidenced by the following direct quotes from the research:

‘They are doing such good work with child protection, it feels like they are one step ahead of some of the other organisations’

‘They have encouraged us, and help us with funding or forums like this and we get a lot of exposure through them so they have really helped us’

‘safestamp is brilliant and it will feed into how we work with coaches in the future, it’s an awesome plan’
‘they helped us to set up a child protection policy and generally helped to build our organisation, I’m not sure what we would have done without them’

Next Steps

This report has identified some of the challenges to safeguarding in the Caribbean region, discussing safeguarding through the lens of the CSDA’s Engage 360 project. Solutions to the challenges and evidence of the impact of safeguarding initiatives have been discussed and this report can also present suggestions for the next steps of safeguarding in the Caribbean and the safeguarding initiatives of the CSDA.

There seems to be a need for cultural education about safeguarding children in sport. Although the CSDA are making strides towards building the knowledge base of implementers, the present research found much evidence to suggest that the wider public would also benefit from such education. Indeed in a focus group in Trinidad, when referring to attitudes towards child protection and safeguarding in the Caribbean as a whole, one officer from the Children’s agency argued ‘we need a cultural education about the whole child protection thing’. This may take shape in the form of a public campaign and should directly discuss some of the popular beliefs regarding abuse, addressing what have been taboo subjects. This may assist parents and indeed children to become more aware of abuse, and crucially how to prevent, identify and report it.

Such a public re-education should not occur with the absence of adequate policies and systems being put in place. The present research found evidence to suggest that many are motivated to comply with safeguarding initiatives, though they are disheartened and demotivated by the significant policy and systems gaps. For example, where organisations such as the Children’s Authority are not supported by policy to investigate allegations of abuse, individuals feel confused about who to report it to and demotivated as they believe that it is likely to cause more harm than good.

With that in mind, it can be said that it is encouraging that policies are in development, and that systems such as Safestamp are being developed, although those policies must be produced to sufficient quality and be well implemented in the Caribbean. Additionally governments and organisations such as the CSDA must continue with this momentum, continuously refining these systems and updating the policies with ongoing monitoring and evaluation enterprises such as empirical research. Governors of sport should also incentivise delivering organisations by requesting a demonstration that they are a safe organisation, similar to the way governor’s demand that sporting organisations have an anti-doping policy. Rather than develop another method of doing so, this may occur by making use of the Safestamp system. The self-audit tool within the international standards project represents an important foundation upon which progress can be assessed and the development of future strategies can be based.