



Building a Better MJKO (Part II)

Mentoring Junior Kids Organization (MJKO)

Ontario Trillium Foundation Grow Grant Evaluation (Year 2)

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A. Executive Summary

This report (Building a Better MJKO Part II) is a collection of research that indicates Mentoring Junior Kids Organization (MJKO) is an effective sport for development (SFD) organization. MJKO is an effective SFD organization because it achieves its goals (Cameron, 1984; Daft, 2004). For example, in the last year, MJKO impacted 1,157 students from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) at 134 after-school mentoring and leadership programs. MJKO is an effective SFD organization because it is concerned for its employees' happiness (Chelladurai & Haggerty, 1991) and their personal/professional development (Daft, 2004). According to Cameron (1980), "effective organizations are those with an absence of internal strain...whose internal functioning is smooth and typified by trust and benevolence towards individuals" (p. 67). At MJKO, one volunteer shared "we all have good relationships...if somebody has an idea they want to try, nobody says I don't like that or I don't think that's good. We always give each other the opportunity to try things and we support one another."

MJKO is an effective SFD organization because it meets the needs of its prime beneficiaries

(Chelladurai, 1987) – the participants in the Girls Only program. Participants from the Girls Only program indicated they were happy, supported, and part of a family at MJKO. As well, Girls Only participants described meeting new friends and strengthening existing bonds with their peers and with the MJKO volunteers. According to Putnam (2000), “the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value...social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups” (p. 19). And, according to the Girls Only participants, “I like Girls [Only] boxing because it’s a place where you can be yourself and make new friends”, and “[My friends] are all a part of MJKO [and] they are all super duper nice.”

According to Welty Peachey et al. (2018), “partnerships are the lifeblood of sport for development organizations...[and] it is through effective partnerships that organizations address societal issues, accomplish tasks, and reach goals” (p. 161). In this report, MJKO partners indicated MJKO “went above and beyond everything that was required of them as a partner...all the work Miranda and Ibrahim have done – they’re amazing people – [and] I can’t say enough about how much I admire what they do.”

B. Introduction

This report has been prepared for the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), and it is part of the annual Mentoring Junior Kids Organization (MJKO) OTF Grow Grant evaluation. As part of the OTF Grow Grant (awarded in 2016), MJKO committed to pursuing meaningful evaluations of its programs and their effectiveness. In the year one evaluation, MJKO reported 544 surveys and 625 unique participants to the OTF, as well as the Building a Better MJKO (Part I) report.

This latest evaluation (Building a Better MJKO Part II) highlights MJKO’s development

and its achievements throughout year two, as well as its commitment to improving organizational practices through research and reflection. For example, notably, 1,157 students from the TDSB and the TCDSB participated in 134 unique after-school mentoring and leadership programs with MJKO. As well, 23 champions-in-training (youth participants) became certified through the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), and 22 champions-in-training were certified in First Aid and CPR. In the last year, MJKO has also worked to develop and strengthen relationships with Ontario Works, Second Harvest, and the Coaches Association of Ontario (through the Changing the Game – Changing the Conversation initiative), to create opportunities and enhance its programs for the Parkdale community in Toronto. Overall, since 2016, MJKO has reached 1,784 new youth participants, using non-contact boxing to teach positive pro-social life-skills (Gould & Carson, 2008).

Building on sport for development (SFD) literature (Schulenkorf, 2017), and related sport for social change (SFSC) research (Sherry, Schulenkorf, & Chalip, 2015), this report is intended to provide guidance and support to MJKO and its critical stakeholders through action research (Chalip, 1997; Frisby, Reid, Millar, & Hoerber, 2005; Lewin, 1946; Rich & Misener, 2017). Specifically, this report highlights the experiences of MJKO participants from the Girls Only program. The report includes reflections from MJKO volunteers and executives regarding the psychological contract (Argyris, 1960; Harman & Doherty, 2014; Levinson et al., 1962; Schein, 1965) that exists at MJKO. It also includes insights from MJKO's critical partners (Svensson, Hancock, & Hums, 2017; Welty Peachey et al., 2018). Taken together, the findings from each of these three related inquiries reveal organizational aspects that MJKO can refine to improve its existing programs and processes, and where appropriate, dedicate time and resources to address issues raised by the MJKO participants, MJKO volunteers and executives, and their partners.

C. Purpose and Process

Building on the findings from Building a Better MJKO Part I, the purpose of this report is to build organizational capacity (Millar & Doherty, 2016) – to enhance MJKO programs (and their outcomes) through reflective action research (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017; Rosso & McGrath, 2017). In Part I, co-researchers from MJKO used an action research framework (following Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2009), that utilized focus groups and semi-structured interviews with MJKO participants, and key partners, including Toronto Police Services officers and Toronto District School Board principals who were involved in delivering and overseeing MJKO programs. In this report, co-researchers from MJKO were interested to learn from participants involved in the Girls Only program. Co-researchers were interested to learn about the experiences and expectations of volunteers and the MJKO executive, and to determine what psychological contract (Harman & Doherty, 2013; Rousseau, 1995) exists. Further, co-researchers were interested to learn from MJKO partners (Svensson et al., 2017; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016; Welty Peachey et al., 2018) – to build planning and development capacity (Hall et al., 2003) to support and enhance those critical relationships.

To learn from participants involved in the Girls Only program (n=20), co-researchers utilized an in-person focus group, following Morgan (2004). According to Morgan (2004), focus groups may enable researchers to “produce more in-depth information on the topic at hand” (p. 270), and “the real strength of focus groups is...providing insights into the sources of complex behaviours and motivations” (Morgan 1996, p. 139). Girls Only participants were asked to describe their experiences in non-contact boxing and their experiences in the MJKO Girls Only program. They were asked: “what keeps you coming back?” They were asked about barriers to participation. Co-researchers asked: “sometimes you may miss a week or two [at MJKO] – why

is that?" The focus group participants talked about making friends, strengthening relationships, and bonding social capital (Doherty & Misener, 2008; Putnam, 2000). Co-researchers and participants also discussed *The Sporting Spirit* (Orwell, 1945), and the 'power of sport'. Participants provided written responses to several questions to ensure their anonymity and to encourage participation from every voice. Creative and artistic responses to several questions were used to encourage thoughtful reflections. Written consent for participation was provided by each participant's parent(s) and/or guardian(s) prior to the focus group.

To learn from the MJKO volunteers (n=8), co-researchers utilized semi-structured interviews (following Harman, 2013; and Patton, 2015). Volunteers were asked to reflect on their history in similar volunteer roles, and their experiences at MJKO. The lead researcher (Ryan Clutterbuck) acting as a co-researcher, asked volunteers to describe what expectations they had of MJKO and how they learned about those expectations (e.g., through formalized training or informal conversations, etc.). We also asked which of those expectations they felt were most important (i.e., training, mentoring, a safe working environment, etc.). We asked what MJKO volunteers expected to provide to the organization, and whether they felt they could fulfill those expectations (i.e., leadership, reliability, technical expertise, etc.). The interviews were audio-recorded (with verbal consent) and transcribed verbatim by the lead researcher. A-priori coding following Harman & Doherty (2013), and open coding to capture new themes was undertaken.

To learn from MJKO's critical partners (n=3), co-researchers utilized semi-structured interviews (following Patton, 2015; and Welty Peachey et al., 2018). We asked a purposeful sample of MJKO partners how the partnership formed, whether and how the partnership changed over time, how MJKO could become a more effective partner, and whether the partnership could benefit from more (or less) formalization. A-priori (deductive) coding following Welty Peachey

et al. (2018), and emergent coding to capture new themes related to partnership formation and management was also undertaken by the lead researcher.

We used an action research approach for this evaluation to address relevant issues to benefit MJKO and its participants – to create new knowledge that is useful to MJKO and its critical stakeholders. We chose action research because “methodologies like [action research]...have so much potential to positively affect communities beyond the academy...[by giving] researchers the opportunity to work with people to address issues that are relevant to the public” (Hoerber & Shaw, 2017, p. 6). Further, action research “implies cycles of planning, action, observation, reflection and modification according to observations and ongoing consultation with key stakeholders (Kemmis et al., 2014)...[and it] allows for modifications during implementation of a project to address key concerns for stakeholders” (Rosso & McGrath, 2017, p. 358). Ultimately, that is what this report is intended to achieve – it should be used by MJKO and the OTF to reflect on the state of things as they are, and to develop plans to improve.

D. Summary of Results

A summary of the results from the three inquiries is provided in the following sections. Broadly, participants in the Girls Only program reported being very satisfied with the program. Participants also identified barriers to participation that MJKO may choose to address in the future. Regarding the psychological contract – a clearer understanding of the expectations and motivations of MJKO volunteers can empower the executive to enhance the experiences of this critical stakeholder group – to reduce burnout and volunteer fatigue. Regarding MJKO’s critical partners, the findings suggest ongoing communication and recognition via social media are the two most partner-valued management strategies MJKO should continue to prioritize.

E. Prime Beneficiaries & Social Capital at MJKO (Girls Only)

Participant Selection

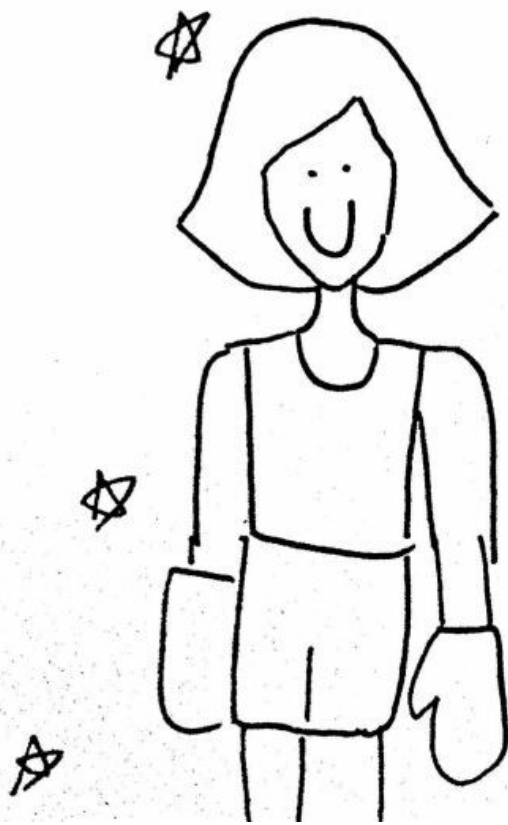
20 MJKO Girls Only program participants joined the lead research and co-researchers from MJKO on February 3, 2018 for approximately 90 minutes to discuss their experiences in the Girls Only program. Participants ranged from 9 to 15 years old, and written consent for their participation was obtained from a parent/guardian prior to the focus group. During the focus group activities, participants were asked to reflect on the Girls Only program – including what makes a girl-boxer special, what friendships they made (also strengthened) in the program, whether there is such thing as ‘the power of sport’, and their attitudes towards MJKO programs.

In this section, representative images (artwork) and quotes from the Girls Only program focus group are provided. As much as is possible, we strive to empower the participant's voices to speak for themselves throughout this report.

What makes a girl-boxer special?

What makes a girl boxer special is that

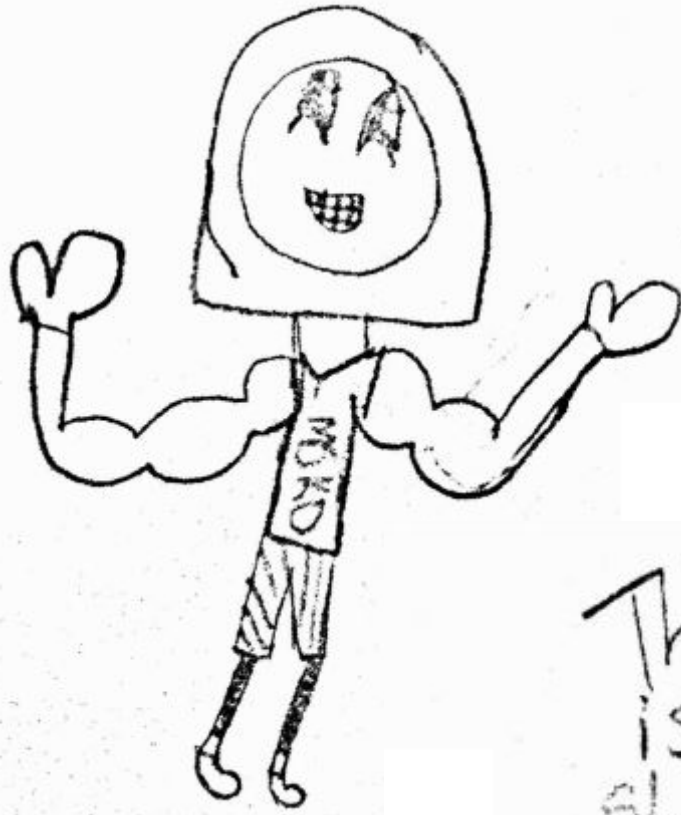
- She's powerful
- Strong
- Smart
- Independant
- Fearless
- Motivated
- Energetic



☆ She is strong
 She is brave
 She can do anything
 a man can do

She's boxing even though boxing
 is a "male dominated" sport.
 She's Fearless. Not afraid to
 make mistakes or get hurt.





This girl boxer is special because she always put's on a smile and helps everyone in need she is strong great at boxing and she's muslim a muslim boxer is very rare to me and she is and very motiva to everyone.

strong
confident
hardworking
brave



What do you like most about the Girls Only program?

Participants shared what they liked most about the program. For example, one participant shared: “all the girls are really supportive and nice! That’s what keeps me coming back” (age 10). Another Girls Only participant indicated “you get to be in a nice space where people respect you.” A 13-year-old champion in training indicated “I keep coming back because I love to box [and] it is fun to meet new people and make new friends” (age 13). Another shared: “when I face something difficult I think about what I learned at MJKO” (age 14). A 13-year-old boxer indicated: “I like girls boxing because it’s a place where you can be yourself and make

new friends. I go sometimes because it's fun and you learn" (age 13). A 12-year-old participant shared: "The Girls Only program is where there are girls who box...It helps you learn the character traits and how to be a strong girl. I think that it's good because people always say girls are not strong, so that's why I like coming to the girls only boxing program."

Barriers to Participation

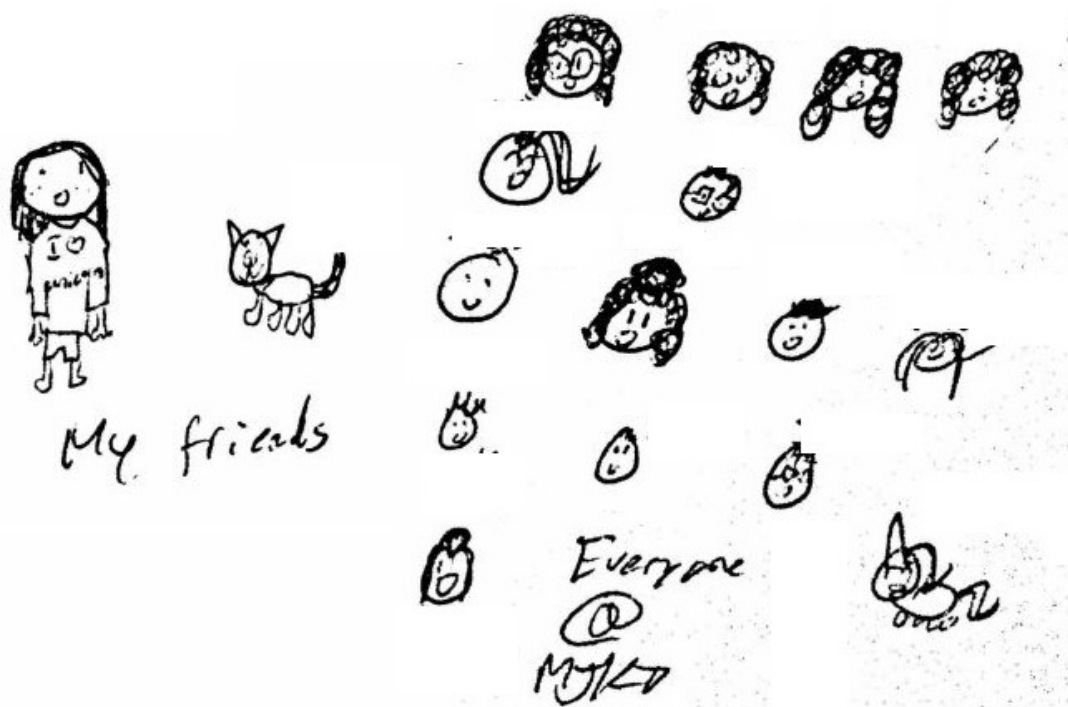
Girls Only participants were asked about barriers that they faced. Co-researchers asked: "sometimes you may miss a week or two of programs – why is that the case?" Participants shared: "sometimes I am sick, other school things, or too tired to go". Another indicated "the reason why I don't sometimes go to boxing is because sometimes the day before we do fitness and my body gets sore" (age 9). Homework and school commitments were common. For example, "I have a lot of homework and I need to start early" (age 12), and "I haven't been going [to MJKO] a lot because of homework and I've been spending a lot of time in the library" (age 13). A 10-year-old participant shared issues relating to travel to the gym: "I sometimes don't come because I either forget, or I can never find the pickup person." Another participant shared "I've just been having a better time with my other youth programs because there are less rules and I can express myself more. Overall, I'm just losing interest in boxing" (age 13). And a 12-year-old participant indicated problems with timing and travel issues. For her, "I don't go mostly because the gym is so far from my school. The program starts at 3:30 and I get there at 4:30 or later. I also don't like going in late" (age 12). However, most often, barriers faced were mostly having to do with school/homework commitments. One participant shared: "Most of the time, when I miss coming to MJKO, is because of school work...Also I live [far away] so it takes a longer time to get here so I don't get enough time" (age 15).

Social Capital at MJKO

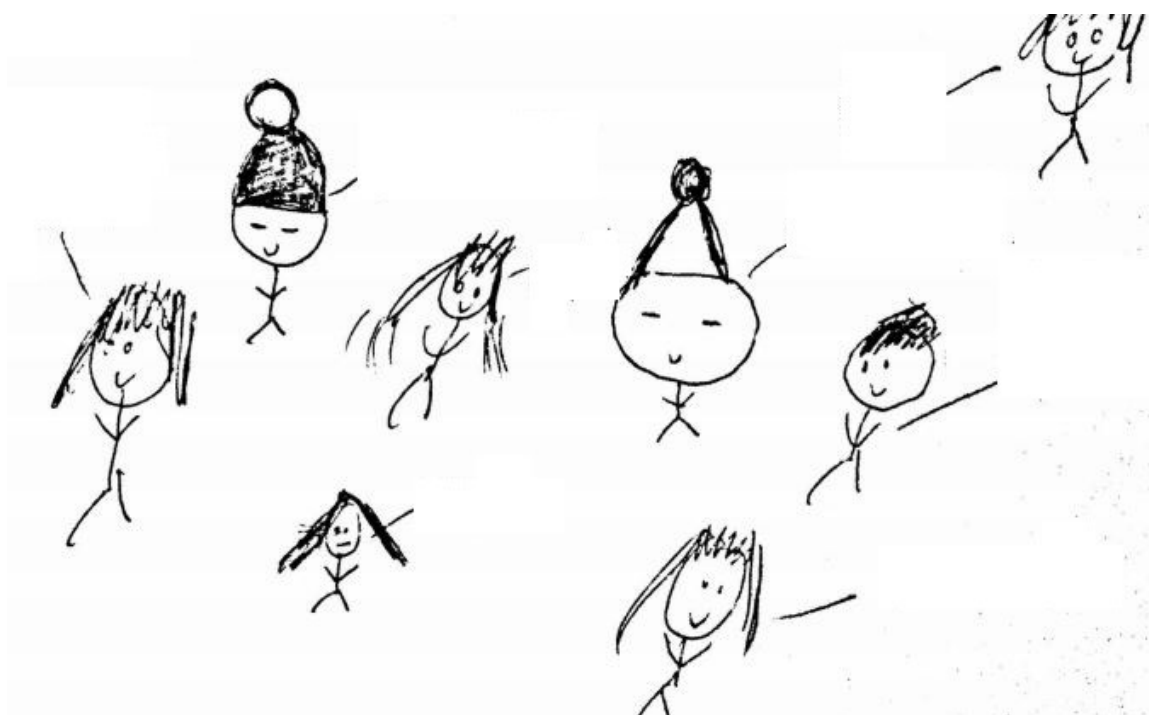
Social capital is “the building of healthy communities through collective, mutually beneficial interactions and accomplishments, particularly those demonstrated through social and civic participation” (Baum et al., 2000, p. 251). And, according to Putnam (2000), “the central idea of social capital, in my view, is that networks and the associated norms of reciprocity have value. They have value for people who are in them” (p. 1). As part of the Girls Only focus group, we endeavoured to explore the social connections between participants because we also (following Baum et al., 2000, and Putnam, 2000) believe those connections have value.

We asked Girls Only participants whether they made friends at MJKO, and they shared: “3/4 of my friends are here today. We didn’t meet at MJKO but it brought us closer.” Participants indicated bonding with their peers (also family members) at the Girls Only program. For example, one participant shared “my friend is my sister...what makes her so great is that I know she will always be there for me whenever I need her. Also me and her both like boxing.” Another participant indicated two of her best friends were with her at the focus group. She shared: “2 of them yes (they are here today). We did not meet at MJKO. They are great because, I know I can trust them, they are funny and nice, and they support me.” Participants also indicated they met new friends at the Girls Only program. One champion in training shared: “my friends and I met at MJKO and are here today.” Another participant shared: “[My friends] are all a part of MJKO...[and] they are all super duper nice”, and “[Name] and [Name] I met in MJKO. We have been best friends since...”

Participants also created and shared their artwork depicting the valuable connections and friendships they made through the MJKO Girls Only program. In several instances, the connections included MJKO volunteers as well as the participant's peers. For example:



(PARTICIPANT NAMES REMOVED FROM ORIGINAL)



(PARTICIPANT NAMES REMOVED FROM ORIGINAL)

The Power of Sport at MJKO

There has been considerable debate among SFD scholars and practitioners regarding the power of sport to achieve development outcomes (e.g., Burnett, 2015; Coalter, 2010; Levermore & Beacom, 2012; Schulenkorf, 2017). At the Girls Only focus group, we chose to pose the question to the participants themselves. Our intention was to better understand what outcomes participants believed were possible through sport and at MJKO.

Broadly, Girls Only participants indicated the power of sport was its ability to connect people. For example, one participant shared: “sports are great because I meet everyone of my friends at MJKO...without sports I wouldn’t be the person I am today.” Another participant shared: “I think sports are great because it brings people together as one. It also makes people healthier. It’s just a fun thing to do.” Another champion in training shared: “I think sport is great because it allows people to be both social and keep fit/be active.” And, “boxing is great because we get to not only learn new techniques but we also meet new people and get motivated.”

Several MJKO participants indicated learning to work in groups – teamwork skills and leadership skills – were what was most important to them. For example, one participant suggested: “sport is great because it allows you to learn leadership and team qualities. You learn new things and make new friends. It is also great because everyone is included and working together which is called Team Work.” Similarly, another Girls Only participant shared: “I think sports are good because it shows you how to co-operate with other people and you can learn how to work with other people. For sports you need to have TEAMWORK!” Another participant shared: “I think sports are good. I think it brings teams together and helps people with teamwork. You can also make friends. It could be bad though because sometimes people get too into it and get angry if they lose. Sports should be fun.”

I wish people knew this about MJKO...

During the focus group, we let participants know their responses would be shared with people outside MJKO who did not necessarily understand what happened inside MJKO. We asked participants to share something they wished those people knew about MJKO.

Overwhelmingly, participants indicated they were happy at the program. One participant shared: “that MJKO [is] awesome.” Another wrote “that being a part of MJKO allows [me] to feel a part of a family.” Others shared: “I wish other people knew the MJKO is not just a place for boys...”, and “I wish other people knew that MJKO is a place for everyone to feel happy and safe.” One participant shared that “MJKO is very supportive”. Another wrote “MJKO helps develop leadership and other skills.” While others noted MJKO is “a kind and loving place”, and that “I wish people knew that MJKO isn’t just boxing – it’s opportunities.”

F. Psychological Contract at MJKO

Participant Selection

Human resources have been identified as the most important aspect (dimension) of non-profit organizational capacity (Hall et al., 2003). Volunteers and paid staff enable non-profit SFD organizations to achieve their goals by raising funds, writing grants, seeking out and developing partnerships, finding and renting space, delivering programs, and planning/research. Yet, volunteer burnout and challenges associated with volunteer fatigue can mean the difference between a successful organization and an organization that cannot function. Thus, we chose to explore the psychological contract between MJKO volunteers (n=7) and their executive (n=1). We endeavoured to uncover what expectations volunteers had for themselves and to the

organization, and what the MJKO executive expected to provide to volunteers (and receive in return). The findings from this section can enhance MJKO's ability to serve and manage their human resources – understanding what they need and expect from the organization, and what they expect to provide in return. Regarding the research questions:

1. What are the expectations of MJKO volunteers?

Volunteer A indicated

I guess just like a meaningful experience. I was curious about the way the organization was run, and I love working with kids. So that to me was just expecting it to be a very gratifying experience which it was...it was really just for more the meaning of it.

According to Volunteer C

What's really struck me is how organized MJKO is, and it's probably one of the most organized organizations I've ever been involved with. Everything from our code of conduct to our scheduling and the communication and the coaches' meetings and how we communicate as a group is very organized and that's the kind of clarity and support that is really helpful.

Volunteer D shared

It's the chance to try and make a difference, and that can be challenging at times. I've never been a fan of the term give-back. I understand what it means, but to me it's just almost do the right thing...I just want to help young people.

Volunteer E indicated they expected

Mentorship and training in regards to my position. Opportunities like workshop opportunities that would help me advance in my coaching. Things like for example – a mental health course that could help me [to grow]...and I've done that through MJKO...I've done that through MJKO as well as advancing my coaching.

Volunteer F shared they

Expect MJKO to give me a safe – comfortable – caring environment to be in. A space that's built on respect and an opportunity to learn...[and] training and support are one of those things that we are given a lot of opportunities for that.

Volunteer G indicated they expected

The ability to use the skillset that I've gained over the years to apply it at MJKO...as well as to feel heard, and that's the way I'm going to put it. By heard, it's I put in a thought process, others put in a thought process, and at the end of the day we come up with a solution or game plan to move forward. That's what I like, and that's what I want from any organization. I want to feel useful. I don't want some Mickey Mouse task...and in my case, it has to help people in some way shape or form...I [want to] deal with people. I want to talk to people. I want to see their lives get better.

2. What do the volunteers expect to provide to MJKO?

According to Volunteer A

I would say the point is really to give. I mean obviously you do receive, but I think it's more like it's very personal to the individual what they're hoping to get out of it. I didn't go into it thinking what are they going to give me? It was kind of my own personal set of

values I was hoping to satisfy...like having fun. I guess that was one of the things I was hoping to get out of it – the kids are super fun!...[and] I took the role seriously. I see it as the expectation for me to be a responsible consistent person.

Volunteer B indicated they expected to

Help identify additional or new sources of funding and new avenues of funding to help secure the future of MJKO...I expect to provide my expertise.

According to Volunteer C

I think one of the main things that the youngsters need is stability and somebody to be there on a consistent basis. So I think that's one of the things that I bring to the table...I like to think that I'm very solid and I don't really ever miss a day or call in sick or anything like that. So that's some of the stuff that's expected of us, and in return we get a lot of support with education, and just the network of support. Miranda and MJKO they support the coaches in their development as well and that's a big thing. We all get something out of this. Even if we're just doing it for passion, we're also learning and growing as a coach, and as a coach you probably want nothing more than having the athletes to work with. And being a part of a well-organized reputable organization.

Further, Volunteer C shared

I expect to be dependable and reliable and consistent. I pledge to uphold my highest standards of just the code of conduct, and this' an opportunity for me to really just show what my vision of being a good coach is. MJKO does definitely encourage us to just be passionate and just demonstrate. Just participate, you know. That's what I expect.

According to Volunteer D

This' something that I've struggled with especially recently because I want to be there for the athletes. I really do feel and the youth, I really do feel, obviously my passion and energy towards sport and the power that sport can provide to the community. But with logistics of time and travel, and work, and life – [do I] give enough? So, I've sort of had to try to make peace with being able to give one night a week at the gym...and it's really been something that I've struggled with. I'm not, I feel that I'm often not there enough to really make a difference. And, if I could be there more, I could make a better and more significant more valuable difference.

Volunteer E indicated they

Expect to provide more ideas and different ways to engage the kids in the community, and more kind of fun ways for the kids to enjoy themselves while they're at MJKO.

According to Volunteer F, the critical attributes are

Reliability. Consistency as much as possible...[and] leadership obviously.

And Volunteer G shared

In my case, I hope they think I provide some type of a leadership role.

3. Are MJKO volunteers able to fulfill these expectations?

According to Volunteer A

Just looking back on my own experience, I think about the metrics that they use to screen people. I probably passed with flying colours in many ways, and as a result it was a really good fit, and a really wonderful experience for me...but ultimately it didn't work out in the

long term. And maybe one of the items that they're missing in their screening is looking for a person who has a lot of stability in their life...I think ideally, unless this screens out basically all people – [it's] people who are in stable careers, stable relationships, stable environments, [that] didn't just move to Toronto, who aren't in transition. That's why I think like students are great because they're so available, but they're also, they're not likely to stick around because they're inherently unstable at that stage of life. They're going to be going to school or they're changing their priorities or whatever.

Further, Volunteer A suggested

I think also looking for people who – it sounds paradoxical but really who are looking for almost like a selfish way, like they're looking to get joy out of it. I think volunteering for a lot of people sounds like a really nice idea, and you can get people who are kind of like a little bit like martyrs who think that it's just the right thing to do. Which is fine, but I think ultimately that kind of person isn't as likely to continue volunteering because they're more likely to get burnt out compared to the person who really just wants to do it because they think it's fun and joyful and it gives back to them.

Volunteer C shared

I do actually. Because I feel we have a great team. We have all the support that we need. Yeah, I fully feel that we are just blessed to have this group. I don't know what else to say, just quite simply yes, we have all the parts and I think it's because we're well organized, and we have a great staff and we have great athletes and the energy is great. We have a great culture.

Volunteer D indicated they

Feel like I don't meet my expectations, because I would love to do it multiple days per week. Deep down, me wanting to do more, I'm not meeting that. But for right now, the best I can do for right now, is once [per week], and so if that's the expectation then yes I meet it. But truthfully my heart says that's not enough, and that I should be doing more. If I take that approach, then no, I'm not able to match that expectation unfortunately.

Further, Volunteer D shared

It is something that I at times become quite emotional about because I wish I could do more, and I feel like I'm not doing enough. It's one of these things that in the moment when you're there it's great. I'm really enjoying it, I'm trying my best to make the best decisions, actions wise and words wise to try and make a difference in that moment, in that couple of hours. But you walk away, and now I have a whole week to wait to get back to that, so it's kind of bittersweet. You have such good days, but the good days are too far and too few in-between to really be completely sold on the difference that I'm making. And because that's my want is to make a difference more would be better I would love to give more, but it is what it is, and I have to go with that, and sometimes it doesn't sit well with me.

Volunteer E suggested they were achieving their expectations because

Everybody is very supportive and we all have good relationships and a good understanding of each other. So, if somebody has an idea, or something they want to try, nobody says I don't like that, or I don't think that's good. We always give each other the opportunity to try things and we support one another.

Emergent themes

i. Volunteers passion for boxing and helping youth

According to Volunteer C

It's interesting because it becomes less and less about boxing. I noticed that it might sound weird over the last year and half, it becomes about showing up and being there, and just ready to take on whatever is needed at that time. Sometimes it might not be coaching. Sometimes there's plenty of coaches and you'll be working with the group on other capacities, be it honestly cleaning up the space or helping organize the space. There's a lot that goes beyond just running around with the kids. Like Miranda says, that's probably the easiest part of the job, and it's not the only thing she needs. She doesn't need somebody to just play with the kids and run around with them. She needs somebody that's consistent and willing to take on anything that's required so a lot of times I just show up and you know, you never know what you're going to take on. But the most important thing is to be there on a consistent basis.

ii. Satisfaction from seeing volunteers develop over time

According to Volunteer F

Having other people happy and satisfied, not just the participants – the other volunteers – I get a drive from that. That's satisfying to me, to know that people are getting something out of it. I mean yes we're there for the kids, but we're also there for each other. And if somebody is struggling with something, for me, it's like how do we as a unit make their experience a lot better. It's trying to make it a welcoming environment, and if people aren't comfortable with something, it's teaching them how to fish...

iii. Building capacity through action research

According to Volunteer G

Because [the lead researcher] makes us look at things from a different perspective sometimes we get a far better result...you ask sometimes very innocent questions, that I'm sure everyone says I never thought of that before. But, I'm sure it goes to their head, and we go away and see if we can make it better. Where we have improved since you started is we're getting more and more staff to take some of the routine burden away from Miranda, so we can think about more planning for the future. and our planning for the future right now, is to get a more stable.

What does MJKO expect to provide and receive from its volunteers and staff?

i. Communication

According to the MJKO executive,

We have a coaches meeting once per month led by myself. It's a meeting with minutes that we use with our communication as well as volunteer coach development. At the beginning of the year we do goal setting with our coaches so I can figure out what it is they want to get back from MJKO and how I can personally support them. They do a self-evaluation and they do SMART goal-setting. That let's me know if they're a Level 1 and they want to get to Level 2 – they kind of let me know what their personal goals are, so when I'm doing budgeting I can try to gauge who's interested in doing what.

What do you expect the volunteers and staff to provide to the organization?

At the end of the day, their job is to create a safe environment for all the kids to come to

MJKO. I expect them to lead by example - following MJKO's code of conduct. We recently talked about our policies at the MJKO board meeting in March. So, when it comes to the volunteers, all of the policies that have been created have been created because of the students we serve in the community. They weren't written because we can say we have this certain policy. They were written with our students and our communities at the forefront. So, they need to follow those - but we also want them to have a voice. Everyone that's a part of our organization has a voice to share. I don't want people to just come and agree with me because I'm the boss. I need the volunteers to be able to share information and if they see a need or a challenge or something that we could be doing better I need them to share that information...[and] everything we do is about making a safe space for children. Most of the children that come here are the victims of trauma, food insecurity, or housing issues, and regardless of the issues of whatever volunteer is facing in their own personal life, they need to park that at the door in order to create a safe space for the kids.

Do the expectations for volunteers and staff change based on their title/experience?

No. The expectations of every single volunteer that comes here is the same. They have to get setup quickly. Before they start they have to go through multiple training courses online or in person. They have to take Commit to Kids training which is for the protection of children and identifying possible sexual predators. They have to have taken Access Training – so how to make people in Ontario in general have more accessibility, and they all have to take concussion training – Making Headway. And they all have to read and sign off on the policies and code of conduct and the youth training manual. That's for every person that comes one on one with the kids, and have an up to date police record check, and then also usually throughout the year they do an MJKO action card – the start stop and

continue for the year.

How does MJKO communicate its expectations to the volunteers and staff?

Every month we have a coaches meeting for all staff and all coaches – anyone in contact with the kids. So that's the time when we address day to day things...sometimes a coach will come to me personally with feedback, and that's something that we bring up at the coaches meeting, and there's other times where there's an immediate thing. We had an issue where some of our younger coaches felt overwhelmed with the students with special needs, and left it to another coach and that was addressed the same day.

What is the most important expectation for MJKO volunteers and staff?

The safety of the athlete and creating an inclusive environment. 95% of the people that come to MJKO come for a sense of belonging, and boxing is a tool to create change. But, without safety and inclusion, nothing else that we do could be possible.

Are the MJKO volunteers and staff able to fulfill these expectations?

I would say that it's a work in progress. I would say every person that comes and is a part of the MJKO family is a work in progress, and they understand what we're trying to achieve – but we're all human. Day to day I'm beyond proud of the staff I have here...I'm thankful for the coaches who come to me, and if they say they need training in certain areas, that shows me they have the willingness to try. I don't expect anyone to come in off the street and work with kids from priority neighbourhoods and expect them to be perfect. All I can expect them to do is to try. And I'm 100% confident that everyone on my team is trying to be a better human and is trying to use sport to create change. For me, as a leader, they don't have to be perfect, they just have to try to get better every day and that's

something I think every person on our team is doing.

What does MJKO expect to provide to the volunteers and staff?

I think at the end of the day, it's respect and inclusion, and safety, that we give to our athletes. I also expect that same courtesy to the coaches and volunteers that work here. We are committed to the personal development of all of our coaches. I'm proud to say every person on our team has their Level 1 boxing certification, everyone has CPR and First Aid training...[because] the more PD and coaching conferences, and courses, the more up to date with the current knowledge and science of sport my team is, the better we are able to serve our people. So, for me, I want the people that come here to create a legacy. I want them to feel like each individual person has had a part to play in making MJKO a success...I want the volunteers and the coaches and the staff to realize that that's something they're doing. That has nothing to do with me. They personally have the ability to make someone's life better or worse every single day they come here. And I hope every day they come here they make a personal connection with an athlete, with a coach, with a youth, that leaves them feeling like they're doing their part to make the world a better place. I don't want them to give 'til they have nothing left to give. The best way to have our coaches lead is to create balance and healthy boundaries and for them to find happiness and health in their own lives, and then to share that. And I think volunteerism and making the community better provides intrinsic value to the people that are part of MJKO.

Does MJKO meet its expectations?

I believe MJKO as an organization does an excellent job at providing the tools our team needs to be successful - training courses, personal time with more experienced coaches,

mentorship. I think we're doing an excellent job at sharing the value that each individual brings to our organization, and I think that the people who are involved at MJKO – they do fulfill that...but there are volunteers that don't understand the needs of the community are different from their personal needs...all of our volunteers have to commit to 6 months at a time, and we've had people that after that 6 months decide it's not the right fit, and for me there's no shame, or I don't take that personally.

Further

The demands of a MJKO volunteer are more of an entrepreneur than of a position at a company. An MJKO volunteer needs to do whatever it takes to serve the community – whether that's emptying a garbage can, shaking hands with politicians, or walking a kid home in an unsafe community. That's what MJKO volunteers need.

And

One thing our organization could possibly do better is explaining right from the beginning the priorities of the neighbourhoods that we serve. That's 98,000 people waiting for housing, disproportional people of colour facing discrimination in the workplace, and in their day to day life – very low reading rates, and food insecurity. The Vital Signs report has noted Toronto has become the child poverty capital of Canada, and as an organization, we need to find ways to better serve the community.

G. Critical Partnerships at MJKO

Participant Selection

A purposeful sample (n=3) of critical partners were selected to contribute to this project because their ongoing support and sustained engagement is important to the success of MJKO. The representatives from each partner organization shared their experiences with MJKO, and their perspectives regarding what makes a successful partnership.

Research Questions

The lead researcher followed a semi-structured interview guide that was developed specifically for this project to address the following research questions:

- a. What are the necessary conditions for successful partnerships for SFD?
- b. What strategies contribute to successful partnerships for SFD?

The semi-structured interview guide allowed for follow-up questions regarding new ideas and insights on partnership formation, tensions (where they existed), and the benefits of partners.

Regarding the research questions:

1. What are the necessary conditions for successful partnerships for SFD?

Partner A indicated they had

Identified [MJKO] as a sport and activity organization [that is] high impact...they were asked if they wanted to join the collaborative at that point...and the successful ones continued on with us and received funding every year to keep running the program.

Partner A also shared

When I think of partnership I guess I tend to think of relationships where there's less of a power dynamic. Because no matter how much we try to mitigate and minimize that power dynamic...there's a certain level where you can't get rid of it entirely...there's always going to be a mini power dynamic no matter how much you don't want it to be there.

Partner B indicated they required

A lot of volunteer recruitment and there's a lot of [things] required to become a regular partner...[MJKO] auditioned through [one of our programs, and] they were amazing. They continue to be on that front – they've been really great...I would say [they are] the most engaged of our partners for sure.

They also shared their organization has a

Similar mandate to change the lives of children and youth through sport. So, you know, [the two organizations] are definitely in line with each other on that one.

The representative from Partner C indicated they

Didn't want to do the monetary donation thing...[we] wanted to work with kids in the sports area [and] not just from a monetary standpoint.

2. What strategies contribute to successful partnerships for SFD?

Partner A indicated MJKO had

Always been one of the better organizations at recognition in terms of branding, and kind of throwing it by tagging us in social media or having our logos on their promotional materials, and kind of never forgetting. They've been really good at that with all of their partners and funders from day one.

And regarding what MJKO could do to improve its relationship to Partner A

It's not that they can do anything better or worse. It's applying to our grants and things all the time, or even being in contact with us and letting us know what's new and what's happening...if they can let us know if there are galas or events...if they send us thank you letters...if they send us invites...keeping us in the loop about engagement opportunities.

Partner C shared that MJKO

Worked with us to get our staff involved in their programs...they've come into our offices to do stuff [and] it's not just like here's a cheque do your thing.

And according to Partner B

[MJKO] went above and beyond everything that was required of them as a partner over the years...I'd just like to say that I really appreciated their organization. It's unique...all the work that Miranda and Ibrahim have done – they're amazing people. I can't say, I couldn't say enough about how much I kind of admire what they do.

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