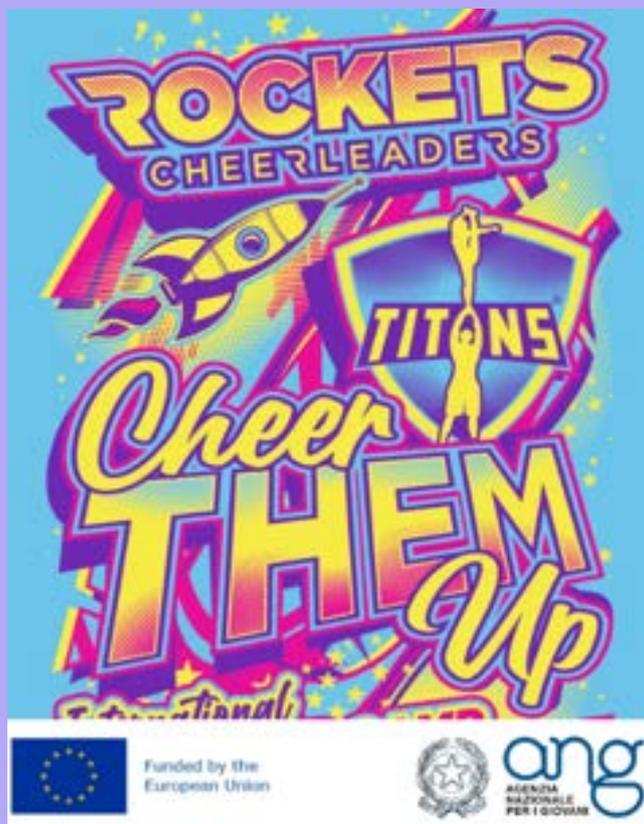


PROJECT MANUAL

CHEER THEM UP!



NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CHEERLEADING ENVIRONMENTS



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THE PROJECT

CHEER THEM UP! works on a very specific sports sector: cheerleading and cheer sports are currently on the rise in many European countries, but deeper knowledge on technical and scientific techniques is needed at the level of grassroots organizations, for their coaches and sports staff. Moreover, it must be noted that it represents quite a dangerous sport, as it registers very high numbers of catastrophic injuries: safety and risk management need to be addressed in a more comprehensive manner, embedding the newest techniques for risk reduction, thus allowing coaches to work and create a safe environment for all. The motivation of this project lies in the willingness to give high-quality training to the staff of Sprint ASD, through the implementation of a mobility and exchange with one of the biggest cheerleading clubs in Europe, Rockets Cheerleaders, based in Denmark.

The objectives of this project include the creation of a cohesive partnership with the Rockets, to build stronger and more united European communities in the various fields of sports. It also wants to increase the level of technical and scientific preparation of coaches and sport staff, as well as the level of safety of cheerleading clubs, by acquiring and mastering the newest techniques and standards applied at the international level. The aim is to promote cheerleading and cheer sports at the European level, increasing their popularity and the participation of young people in clubs across the EU, also contributing to the diversification of sports opportunities; horizontal priorities such as social inclusion, equality, active citizenship, democratic values and environmentally-friendly lifestyles through sports will also be fostered: coaches and sport staff will learn and acquire NFE teaching tools and use them for the ultimate benefit of young athletes.

The activities implemented by CHEER THEM UP! include a preparatory visit in Denmark, with the purpose of setting a smooth and effective mobility, a session of job shadowing and a session of coaching assignment both dedicated to coaches and sport staff of the sending organization. Participants will have the opportunity to learn from more experienced peers and acquire knowledge and know-how on the newest techniques at the international level. An external expert will join the project (Cheer IQ) with the purpose of testing the improvement and the learning outcomes achieved by participants. Online activities will follow the implementation of this project (internal virtual meetings for the overall good performance of both partners), paired with a communication campaign promoting the project, and dissemination activities for project results and the role of the EU for the benefit of international exchanges.

Project results are expected to include the participation of 10 people in total implementing the mobility and contributing to the newly created partnership. Learning outcomes will foster an increased knowledge and know-how acquired by participants in the field of cheerleading (+25%), an increased level of technical and scientific preparation, as well as of safety in both sports clubs (+20%). The increased knowledge on the horizontal priorities and on means of NFE will be measured and will produce a final NFE manual for cheerleading, with the purpose of using it for future activities, for the

benefit of athletes. European values will be particularly promoted, together with the opportunities for young people in terms of learning opportunities, learning tools and international exchanges promoted by the EU. A final result, perceived in the long run, will be the creation of links and networks at the European level, with other sports clubs, for the implementation of future joint activities.

THE SENDING ORGANIZATION

Sprint ASD (also known as Alba Cheer Titans) is a cheerleading sports club that rests on a few indispensable values: respect, loyalty and trust. Its mission is to work for sporting excellence and the spread of a positive and fair image of cheerleading that makes Alba one of the Italian capitals of the sport. The organization was born in 2015 and is now the main cheerleading sport center in the north-western area of Italy. It organizes cheerleading courses and classes for different age ranges of participants, at different competitive levels. The teams that the organization coaches are:

- Titans Six: Two consecutive years reigning Italian champion in the senior coed premier category. It represents the goal in which every athlete in the organization desires to arrive.
- Young Titans: It picks up the reins of the junior coed elite 5th place at the 2022 Europeans to transform into an all-girl team and compete in the lev. 4 in major international competitions.
- Youth Titans: It is the second of the three competitive junior teams, the technical and competitive steppingstone to the higher-level teams. Spectacular choreography and development of advanced acrobatic techniques await the athletes of this team that will compete in the lev. 3.
- Junior Titans: This is new for the 2022/23 season, a new team for the junior bracket with the goal of reaching the highest level of competitiveness in Level 2.
- Little Titans: It is a very competitive youth team in which to improve basic elements and develop advanced ones in pursuit of technical perfection: new stunts and a lot of tumbling work await the athletes of this team who will compete in the lev. 2.
- Happy Titans: The initial reservoir for training tomorrow's champions: it is the lev. 1 where the foundations of tumbling and stunting are laid and the first competitions are tackled, going in search of maximum technical cleanliness.
- Free Titans: The Poms Performance Cheer Freestyle Poms team after two consecutive brilliant national runner-up finishes comes into the 22-23 season with a lot of desire to grow technically. The program is enhanced by special acrobatics training.
- Starting Titans: This is the team for those who wish to start cheerleading as teenagers. Stunt techniques are learned, and tumbling skills are honed to better prepare for a quick entry into competitive teams. The team takes part in performances.
- Entry Titans: It is the pre-competitive team to begin seriously approaching cheerleading: they lay the foundations of tumbling and stunting with a technical program aimed at preparation for later entry into the more competitive teams. The team takes part in performances.
- Baby Titans: The program to begin one's cheerleading experience. Children as young as 4 years old are expected to have lots of pre-acrobatics and a gradual approach with the first stunts and pyramids. The team takes part in performances.
- Tiny Free Titans: The program to begin one's experience in Performance Cheer. Girls as young as 4 y.o. participate in lots of gymnastics and dance and acrobatic training. The team takes part in performances.

The most important event of the sports season is the National Championships for which each team will prepare to the best of its ability. Victory in some categories of the National Championships allows access to the European Championships. Titans cheerleading intends to continue participating in events of an international nature to compete against the best teams on the European scene. Its staff is made of Coaches regularly trained according to federal programs. Methodical is the work and updating of our coaches, who possess all the requirements for teaching cheerleading on the national territory. They are constantly searching for new tools and sources of inspiration and updating. During summertime, Sprint organizes the “Sport & cultural exchange” program. This is an initiative promoted by the Titans and Phoenix Elite Cheer of Chantilly (Virginia, USA) as a prize offered to 1 coach and 2 athletes from each club. Participants have the opportunity to travel and stay from Italy to the United States and vice versa, train and collaborate, sharing experiences and skills; they also have the opportunity to experience cultural moments discovering local territories, foods and lifestyles. The origins of the project date back to 2018, when Jared Rohlf, owner of Phoenix Elite Cheer, first visited Alba. Shared values and ideals with the leadership of Titans made it possible to strengthen the friendship over time and concretize the partnership in this program. Selected applicants are effective testimonials and representatives of their gym, and a special media production will allow them to chronicle a month full of experiences, highlighting the values of the project. The initiative has received the patronage of the Province of Cuneo and the Association for the Heritage of the Langhe-Roero and Monferrato Wine Landscapes, together with support from private local companies.



THE RECEIVING ORGANIZATION

Rockets Cheerleaders is an association that puts the sport of cheerleading first. We practice cheerleading as an independent sport on par with, for example, handball and gymnastics. The association was founded in January 2009. The purpose of Rockets Cheerleaders is to enable members to practice cheerleading, create a social network around the sport, and spread awareness of the sport. The purpose of the association is also to develop members' desire to get involved and take responsibility in the association. We want to be the club with the happiest and most motivated athletes. It is the most successful cheerleading club in Denmark with teams participating in DM, EC and WC. The club is based in Copenhagen (Vanløse) and Rødovre and with more than 200 active athletes, Rockets Cheerleaders is among the largest cheerleading associations in Denmark. In the association there are 10 cheerleading squads that participate in competitions and 6 cheerleading squads that do not compete. Those are Parent/Child (2-4 years old), Tiny (4-8 years old), Mini (8-12 years old), Youth (12-15 years old), Junior (15-18 years old), Senior (from 15 years old) and a parent team.

Cheerleading can perhaps best be described as something in between acrobatics, gymnastics with jumping and perhaps a bit of dance. The sport involves lifting, throwing, jumping and some choreography. Sometimes pom-poms are used, but cheerleading is not dancing with pom-poms. Rockets train in Rockets Hallen in Rødovre and in the sports hall at Kirkebjerg School in Vanløse. All of our training takes place on mats. We have cheer mats with springs (spring floor), which is used for acrobatics and when training for some foreign competitions, as well as "dead mats," used for Danish and EC competitions.

The Rockets welcome everyone, regardless of background and prerequisites. We must focus on breadth and give breadth good experiences, good training and good technique. In this way we will get a qualified elite and create good results. Rockets offers fixed trainings 1-3 times a week. We also offer camps, extra workouts in flexibility, strength and jumping. 3-6 times a year most of our athletes participate in competitions at home and abroad. In addition, the association offers social events both within and between teams. Anyone who wishes can benefit from the versatile activities of the cheerleaders. Cheerleading can help children, youth, and adults engage in physical activity and be part of social communities. Members of the Rockets Cheerleaders are co-creators of motivation, joy, mutual respect and togetherness. What can the cheerleader do?

- The cheerleader trains people
- Builds trust
- Strengthens unity
- Teaches children and youth to cooperate
- Builds self-esteem and belief that goals can be achieved
- Strengthens concentration and the ability to structure oneself
- Increases perseverance

The Rockets' values:

- Joy, motivation and commitment: athletes should experience activities as motivating and inspiring, so that going out to cheer is experienced as success.
- Accountability: all members, coaches and board members show responsibility in relation to activities and facilities.
- Development: coaches are motivated for further training. Through training, professionals are motivated to develop.
- Democracy: we must ensure that everyone has influence. Through dialogue between the board, coaches, members and the local community, our goal is to ensure
- Respect: everyone must treat each other respectfully and in a respectful manner. Any form of bullying is unacceptable.



THE CONTEXT OF CHEERLEADING

Cheer sports are a “team activity in which elements of dance and acrobatics are combined with shouted slogans in order to entertain spectators at sporting events and to encourage louder and more enthusiastic cheering.”[1] This sport was born in the USA in mid-1800s and it was originally dominated by male athletes; in its original form, it consisted mainly of dance moves and slogans chanted to support other sport teams, such as soccer players, and it was the result of students’ riots as a response to faculty abuse. In fact, collegiate teams were born as an independent extracurricular activity, as a way to escape control from teachers and professors in the university context. The National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) was established by Lawrence Herkimer with the purpose of helping people improve their cheerleading skills and spread the popularity of this sport throughout the country.[2]

During the second half of the 19th century sport college events became more and more popular, large stadiums were built and cheerleading teams started to thrive. The modern vision of this sport was then established: cheerleaders started to perform in front of huge crowds, at the sideline of sport fields, both to encourage the spectators and to serve as a form of crowd control. “By the 1920s cheerleading had become a formal extracurricular activity for boys in high schools, colleges, and communities across the country [...]. As ambassadors for their schools and communities, cheerleaders were associated with such character-building traits as discipline, cooperation, leadership, and sportsmanship.”[3] During this first historical phase, women and black people were excluded from cheerleading, as it developed in all-male private schools and universities. On the opposite side, many state-supported schools began to admit women, opening their way into sport activities. “A separate cheerleading tradition evolved within black educational institutions during the same period, with a similar emphasis on character building and leadership. Overall, however, cheerleading remained an overwhelmingly white enterprise, and evidence suggests that it became even “whiter” after desegregation, because the total number of black schools diminished and black students were rarely elected as cheerleaders in the newly integrated, predominantly white schools. It was not until the 1960s and '70s, well after scholastic athletic programs had diversified, that cheer squads began to reflect the ethnic and racial composition of schools. That shift was in part the result of protest activity on the part of black and Latino students.”[4] However, it was only with the advent of World War II that women gained full access to sport activities, as men were called to the front line. The feminization of cheerleading, as we know it today, was completed in the 1960s and 1970s, when the proportion of female cheerleaders rose to roughly 95 percent. This shift also changed the inner nature of cheerleading, leading to today’s mystification of female bodies, attractiveness and sex appeal. For this reason, cheerleading witnessed a decrease in its popularity during the 80s, when a great wave of feminism challenged gender roles and stereotypes; cheerleading was also highly criticized because of its function of auxiliary activity in men’s sporting events, and because of the introduction of cheerleading female squads for professional male sports teams, whose performances were usually highly sexualized and gender oriented. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders became one of the most popular cheer teams because of their revealing outfits and dance moves. In that historical moment, it was estimated that more than 500.000 students participated in American cheerleading from elementary school to the collegiate level; approximately 95% of American cheerleaders were female.[5]

[1]www.britannica.com

[2] <https://www.rookieroad.com/cheerleading/history/>

[3]www.britannica.com

[4]www.britannica.com

[5] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheerleading>

The popularity of cheerleading soon rose again, due to the inclusion of sport-like elements in the cheerleading routines: competitions, summer camps and rigorous practice schedules allowed for the introduction of difficult stunt sequences and gymnastics. “All-star teams, or those not affiliated with a school, popped up, and eventually led to the creation of the U.S. All Star Federation (USASF). ESPN first broadcasted the National High School Cheerleading Competition nationwide in 1983.”[1] Those changes fueled even more the participation of young girls, who had higher opportunities of participation than in the past, and also promoted again the participation of male cheerleaders. However, the “renaissance” of cheerleading and cheer sports also brought safety problems: “Studies in the first decade of the 21st century showed that cheerleading had become the leading cause of catastrophic sports injuries (meaning serious injuries to the brain or spine) to American girls and women, ahead of gymnastics and track.”[2] Cheerleading organizations such as the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors (AACCA), founded in 1987, started applying universal safety standards to decrease the number of injuries and prevent dangerous stunts, pyramids, and tumbling passes from being included in the cheerleading routines. Even with its athletic and competitive development, cheerleading at the school level remains linked to its tradition: cheerleaders act as ambassadors for their schools, and leaders among the student body. At the college level, cheerleaders are often invited to help at university fundraisers and events.

Nowadays, cheerleading remains a feminine sport: as of 2005, overall statistics show that around 97% of all modern cheerleading participants are female, although the male percentage rises at the collegiate level, with a 50-50 participation of both genders. Modern male cheerleaders' stunts focus less on flexibility and more on tumbling, flips, pikes, and handstands. [3] It is however a sport designed for women, due to the high demand and importance placed on the outfits and on the attitude: female cheerleaders are required to wear short skirts and heavy make-up, constantly smiling and expressing enthusiasm. As an opposite force reacting to this trend, many alternative movements in the context of cheerleading were born in the 90s: the American LGBTQIA+ community created a national network of teams performing at prides and events to raise awareness on inclusion and diversity, while feminist activists use cheerleading as a vehicle to condemn social injustice and promote gender equality and representativeness.

As previously mentioned, cheerleading and cheer sports register the highest rates of female injuries among all kinds of sport activities: “Over the past 25 years, there has been a dramatic increase in cheerleading-related injuries. For instance, according to research, hospital emergency visits due to cheerleading injuries increased from 4,954 in 1980 to 26,786 in 2012.”[4] According to the National Center for Catastrophic Sports Injury Research, which conducted research on this topic, the dangerousness of cheerleading increased throughout the years, with the inclusion of more difficult and articulated routines, with stunts, jumps and pyramids performed by athletes. In the United States, “almost all of the patients with injuries (98%) were treated and released, but in 2007, 221 cheerleaders were hospitalized, 217 were treated and transferred to another hospital, and 64 were held for observation.”[5] The collection of data in this field is quite difficult, as the available numbers are recent due to the short history of this discipline. The official admission of females into cheerleading, dating back to 1972 with the adoption of Title IX (federal civil rights law in the United States that was enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1972, it prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or any other state education program) saw a drastic increase in female sport participation, which leads nowadays to such high numbers of female injuries.

[1] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheerleading>

[2] www.britannica.com

[3] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheerleading>

[4] NeuLife Rehabilitation,

[5] Cheerleading Injuries and Safety, Frederick O. Mueller, PhD. J Athl Train. 2009 Nov-Dec

In 2011 there were 2.9 million female high school athletes in the United States, of whom only 3% are cheerleaders. However, cheerleading accounts for nearly 65% of all catastrophic injuries in girls' high school athletics[1]; "In data covering the 1982-83 academic year through the 2018-19 academic year in the US, the rate of serious, direct traumatic injury per 100,000 participants was 1.68 for female cheerleaders at the high school level, the highest for all high school sports surveyed".[2] "Another study found that between 1982 and 2007, there were 103 fatal, disabling, or serious injuries recorded among female high school athletes, with the vast majority (67) occurring in cheerleading".[3]

Most of the injuries suffered by cheerleaders, both light and catastrophic injuries, derive from complex stunts, mainly pyramids. These are performed on most occasions, especially at competitions, which focus on difficult and risky stunts; pyramids and similar figures include a flyer (the person on top), along with one or two bases (the people on the bottom), and one or two spotters in the front and back. The most common cheerleading-related injuries are concussions, 96% of which are stunt related. Other injuries include sprained ankles, sprained wrists, back injuries, head injuries (sometimes concussions), broken arms, elbow injuries, knee injuries, broken noses, and broken collarbones. Sometimes, however, injuries can be as serious as whiplash, broken necks, broken vertebrae, and death.[4] The Pediatrics journal reported that the number of cheerleaders suffering from broken bones, concussions, and sprains has increased by over 100% between the years of 1990 and 2002, and that in 2001 there were 25,000 hospital visits reported for cheerleading injuries dealing with the shoulder, ankle, head, and neck.[5] "Meanwhile, in the US, cheerleading accounted for 65.1% of all major physical injuries to high school females, and to 66.7% of major injuries to college students due to physical activity from 1982 to 2007, with 22,900 minors being admitted to hospital with cheerleading-related injuries in 2002." [6] In 2008, the death of Lauren Chang highlighted even more the risks and dangers of this discipline, allowing at the same time for stricter regulations and deeper supervision from the competent bodies.

Finally, it can be stated that cheerleading and cheer sports can be dangerous, as they involve the performance of risky stunts and figures, but the level of awareness and the safety regulation currently applied have helped to decrease the number of catastrophic injuries. Coaches and trainers at the global level have now the tools and capacity to better address this issue, mainly due to the mandatory nature of updating courses and of strict control exercised by each national sport authority. Up-to-date knowledge is always a priority for all clubs across the globe: for this reason, one of the most urgent needs faced by cheerleading clubs is the availability of exchanges and training options between coaches, which favor the transfer of knowledge and of best practices aiming at creating safe environments for all their athletes.

[1] Catastrophic Sport Injury Research 28th Annual Report 2011. National Center for Catastrophic Sports Injury Research.

[2] National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research At The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (September 27, 2020). "CATASTROPHIC SPORTS INJURY RESEARCH THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT FALL 1982 - SPRING 2019"

[3] Evidence Soup. 2009-06-22

[4] Boden, Barry P; Tacchetti, Robin; Mueller, Frederick O (November 1, 2003). "Catastrophic Cheerleading Injuries". The American Journal of Sports Medicine.

[5] Dangers of Cheerleading, by Dr. Ben Kim, 2006

[6] "High risks for girls who high kick". Irish Examiner, 2009 and "Girls' Most Dangerous Sport: Cheerleading". LiveScience.com, 2008

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SPORTS

Non-formal education (NFE) usually takes place outside the formal education system (schools and universities) and does not generally lead to the acquisition of a recognized level of education. Non-formal education relates to the acquisition of life skills and training for active citizenship and includes both individual and group learning. It is holistic and focuses on the learning process and on experiences and activities based on the needs of the participants. A necessary condition for non-formal education is the participation of a professional facilitator, trainer, or leader. These activities are voluntary in most cases and are led mainly by children and youth organizations or other NGOs, by leisure-based educational facilities, educational agencies, clubs, cultural facilities or other subjects.[1] Moreover, NFE is ideally accessible to everyone, it sets educational objectives, it is participatory and learner-centered, based on experience and action, and it starts from the needs of participants.[2] The soft skills acquired by participants through NFE include interpersonal skills, team skills, organizational and conflict management, intercultural awareness, leadership, planning, organizing, co-ordination and practical problem solving skills, teamwork, self-confidence, discipline and responsibility. Similarly, the United Nations states: “By its very nature sport is about participation. It is about inclusion and citizenship. Sport brings individuals and communities together, highlighting commonalities and bridging cultural or ethnic divides. Sport provides a forum to learn skills such as discipline, confidence, and leadership and teaches core principles such as tolerance, cooperation, and respect. Sport teaches the value of effort and how to manage victory as well as defeat. When these positive aspects of sport are emphasized, sport becomes a powerful vehicle [to achieve such goals].”[3]

From all these definitions of NFE and sports, it can be derived that those two fields are easily combined to produce a comprehensive educational methodology for the growth and personal improvement of young people, especially when using the method called Education Through Sport (ETS): ETS is a non-formal educational approach that works with sport and physical activities, for the development of key competences of individuals and groups in order to contribute to personal development and sustainable social transformation. To better analyze this field, it is important to first separate sports and education, to fully understand their concepts and then tie a link between them. Concerning sports, it is widely and globally known that they provide great benefits for health and for people’s general wellbeing. Sport is useful to control weight, to increase stamina, to strengthen bones and improve balance and flexibility; major diseases can be avoided, or their probability can be reduced, if engaging in regular sport activities; “Studies have shown that moderate intensity exercise can have a positive influence on depression, anxiety, self-worth, self-esteem and body image. Physical activity reduces stress, improves our mood and helps to form general wellbeing.”[4]

[1]Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Czech Republic

[2] COMPASS, A Manual on Human Rights Education for Young People, Council of Europe, 2002

[3]United Nations Inter-Agency,Hartmann, D.; Kwauk, C. (2011). Sport and Development: An Overview, Critique, and Reconstruction. Journal of Sport and Social Issues

[4] MOVE And LEARN, Manual for Non-Formal Education Through Sport and physical activities with young people. International Sport and Culture Association. 2013, Copenhagen

Furthermore, participation in sport activities could also have positive social and economic effects: sport is considered effective in combating poverty and unemployment, in preventing crime and segregation. It can also help to enhance the empowerment and social connection of young people, especially the ones living in underprivileged environments. It can serve as a vehicle to improve social and professional skills and as a tool to increase educational attainment. On the other hand, NFE focuses on the learning needs of participants (learners), allowing them to actively create and shape their educational path. This approach combines relevant activities which are adapted to the needs of the learners and are aimed at achieving practical outcomes.[1] The tie between these two fields is the implementation of the educational function of sport, meaning to pursue an educational goal through sport activities.

From a methodological perspective, “ETS consists of adapting sport and physical activity exercises to the objectives of the planned learning project. It is a matter and a process of adaptation of sport and physical activity, both in terms of their expression and their representation, which characterizes specifically the ETS approach. It does not propose any actions where sport becomes a central objective as/for a carrier solution. The important matter here is to conduct a process where sport and physical activities become tools for support to achieve the educational goals first, where the sport itself becomes secondary to the educational purpose.”[2] From a practical perspective, the trainers and mentors firstly design non-formal learning processes based on one or more issues they want to address, such as social inclusion, environmental sustainability, democracy, digitalization, etc. Subsequently, they use and adapt sport activities to the set objectives, to achieve the planned results.

Additionally, ETS can be a very useful tool both for sport coaches and trainers and for facilitators and mentors in NFE; this dual benefit is directly linked to the values promoted by this methodology: on the one hand the implicit values of sport (e.g. fair play, team work and responsibility); on the other hand the implicit values of youth work related to NFE (e.g. active participation, taking initiative and inclusion). Fair play is the first implicit value that each person will accept to be able to play or perform sports: it “creates a code of conduct which exceeds the general rules. It is not only official and legal, but more important it is a social behavior and attitude you develop and perform. Within sports fair play is normally not explicitly communicated as a social skill you need to learn, but it is implicitly expected in the development of every sportsperson.”[3] Teamwork is the second most important value, as it places the results and wellbeing of the team above the ones of individuals; it is based on solidarity and empathy, which are skills that are not usually taught, but that can be reflected on through ETS. The third sport value is represented by responsibility, for oneself and for others, and it is particularly important within a team. “Youth work aims at developing citizenship skills that are relevant for living in and with a democratic society. The above three implicit values of sport are actually the essential values of democratic and active citizenship as well.”[4] Moreover, ETS becomes effective if it includes moments of personal reflection, during which the promoted values are directly projected on participants and internalized by them: the link between sport activities and NFE is represented by the direct experience and participation, with the subsequent evolution of the group of people involved.

[1] MOVE And LEARN, Manual for Non-Formal Education Through Sport and physical activities with young people. International Sport and Culture Association. 2013, Copenhagen

[2] MOVE And LEARN, Manual for Non-Formal Education Through Sport and physical activities with young people. International Sport and Culture Association. 2013, Copenhagen

[3] MOVE And LEARN, Manual for Non-Formal Education Through Sport and physical activities with young people. International Sport and Culture Association. 2013, Copenhagen

[4] MOVE And LEARN, Manual for Non-Formal Education Through Sport and physical activities with young people. International Sport and Culture Association. 2013, Copenhagen

CHEER THEM UP! FINDINGS

Through the implementation of three activities, the organizations working on this project could find common methodologies as well as different approaches in dealing with safety in the gym and in promoting important values for the personal and athletic development of young people participating in cheer trainings. Specifically, those activities consisted of a preparatory visit, whose purpose was to set the basis for a joint work, also arranging all the logistics of this mobility. The second activity was a job shadowing one, during which Italian coaches had the chance to follow their Danish colleagues in the gym, after attending theoretical sessions addressing the topics covered by this project. The third and last activity allowed the Italian coaches to go back to Denmark and attend a coaching assignment, thus contributing to trainings in the gym with young athletes. After having completed this enriching experience, the coaches of both organizations reviewed their journey, creating this small guidebook to promote safety and European values in cheer sports. Such guidelines are meant to be useful to any organization or sport club willing to fuse NFE and sports activities for the development of their athletes, and for the creation of safer and more inclusive environments for all.

According to the findings developed during project activities, to reduce injury risk, cheerleading teams must follow strict safety protocols. These include:

- **Proper Training and Supervision:** Cheerleaders need proper conditioning, warm-ups, and cool-downs. Coaches should be certified in cheer safety, including spotting techniques and first aid.
- **Progressive Skill Development:** Athletes should master basic skills before moving to advanced stunts or tumbling. Teams should never attempt skills beyond their ability level.
- **Spotting and Padded Surfaces:** Trained spotters should always be present for difficult stunts, and practice should occur on padded surfaces like mats or spring floors to reduce the impact of falls.
- **Appropriate Footwear and Attire:** Cheerleaders should wear supportive shoes that allow for good grip and mobility and avoid clothing or accessories that could get caught or cause injury.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Teams should have an emergency plan, with access to first aid and, if possible, medical personnel during practices and competitions.

Some challenges and areas for improvement have also been identified:

- **Lack of Recognition as a Sport:** In some countries cheerleading is still not recognized as an official sport, which can affect the resources allocated to safety measures.
- **Pressure for High Performance:** Athletes may feel pressured to perform difficult stunts before they are fully prepared, leading to higher injury rates.
- **Limited Medical Oversight:** Unlike other sports, cheerleading teams may not have immediate access to athletic trainers or medical personnel during practice or events.

Improving safety in cheerleading requires a combination of proper training, appropriate equipment, and strict adherence to safety protocols. Here are practical, gym-level examples that can be applied with athletes to enhance safety:

1. Emphasize Proper Warm-Up and Conditioning

- **Structured Warm-Ups:** Ensure every practice starts with a dynamic warm-up that includes stretching, cardio, and joint mobility exercises. This helps prepare muscles, increase flexibility, and prevent strains or sprains.
- **Strength Training:** Incorporate exercises that target core, shoulders, arms, and legs to help build the strength necessary for stunting, tumbling, and jumping. Examples:
 - Planks and side planks for core stability.
 - Squats, lunges, and calf raises for leg strength.
 - Push-ups, pull-ups, and resistance band exercises for upper body and shoulder strength.
- **Flexibility Drills:** Regular stretching of the hamstrings, quadriceps, shoulders, and back improves range of motion and reduces the risk of muscle injuries.

2. Teach Safe Stunting and Spotting Techniques

- **Progressive Skill Development:** Coaches should introduce skills in a progressive manner. For example, a flyer should master basic stunts such as thigh stands before progressing to more advanced skills like extensions or basket tosses.
- **Use of Spotters:** Always have trained spotters in place, especially when practicing new stunts. The spotter should stand close to the stunt and be ready to assist or catch the flyer in case of instability.
- **Repetition of Correct Form:** Insist on perfecting basic techniques before advancing. Base and flyer positioning (e.g., correct grip for bases or body posture for flyers) can greatly reduce the risk of falls and injuries.
- **Catch and Fall Drills:** Regularly practice "what-if" scenarios, such as intentional falls with spotters, to get both bases and flyers comfortable with catching techniques and falling safely.

3. Use of Proper Equipment

- **Mats and Padding:** All tumbling, stunting, and jumping should take place on padded surfaces such as cheer mats or spring floors. Ensure that thick crash mats are available for learning new or high-risk skills like basket tosses.
- **Protective Gear:** Some teams use padded helmets during high-risk stunts or for athletes recovering from concussions. Additionally, wrist guards, ankle braces, and knee pads can protect athletes with a history of injury or during high-impact routines.
- **Rope or Harness Systems:** For teaching advanced stunts or tumbling, some gyms use suspension systems that can help flyers or tumblers practice skills while minimizing the risk of falls.

4. Implement Clear Communication and Teamwork

- **Pre-Stunt Communication:** Before each stunt, bases, back spots, and flyers should discuss the stunt, agreeing on when to initiate movements, cues for timing, and signals in case something goes wrong.
- **Trust and Team Building:** Build trust between bases and flyers by engaging in team-building exercises outside of stunting practice. This fosters better coordination and communication in high-pressure situations.

5. Focus on Tumbling Safety

- **Spot Tumbling Skills:** When learning new tumbling moves like back handsprings or layouts, athletes should be spotted by a coach or experienced teammate. This minimizes the risk of improper landings.
- **Breaking Skills into Parts:** Teach complex tumbling passes by breaking them down into smaller parts. For example, teaching a round-off back handspring by first working on the round-off and then the handspring separately before combining them.

- Tumble in Safe Areas: All tumbling should be done in designated tumbling zones with ample matting and no nearby obstacles, like walls or other athletes.

6. Monitor Athletes for Fatigue and Overuse

- Limit Practice Hours: Avoid excessively long practices or drills that push athletes to exhaustion, which increases the risk of injury. Set time limits on stunt repetitions and ensure athletes get adequate rest.
- Recovery Days: Incorporate recovery days and cross-training to allow athletes' muscles to recover. Ensure athletes avoid repetitive stress injuries by rotating roles (e.g., alternating between tumbling, stunting, and cheering tasks).

7. Use Video Review for Form Correction

- Record Practice Sessions: Coaches can use video analysis to pinpoint improper technique in tumbling, stunting, or jumps. Review videos with athletes to show where improvements in form can be made to prevent injuries.
- Slow-Motion Analysis: Slowing down footage can help identify micro-mistakes that may not be visible in real time, such as slight misalignments in a flyer's legs or the grip of a base during a stunt.

8. Enforce Safety Breaks and Water Hydration

- Scheduled Water Breaks: Ensure cheerleaders stay hydrated by enforcing regular water breaks, especially during intense practices. Dehydration can lead to fatigue, increasing the risk of injury.
- Safety Breaks: Take breaks for athletes to rest when practicing difficult routines, stunts, or tumbling passes, as overexertion can lead to improper execution and higher risk of mistakes.

9. Concussion Protocol

- Recognize Concussion Symptoms: Train coaches and athletes to recognize the signs of concussion, such as headaches, dizziness, or confusion. Any athlete showing signs of a head injury should stop participating immediately and seek medical attention.
- Return-to-Play Protocol: Establish a strict return-to-play protocol that includes clearance by a healthcare professional before an athlete resumes cheerleading after a concussion.

10. Strict Adherence to Age and Skill-Specific Rules

- Follow Age-Appropriate Guidelines: Ensure that stunts, tumbling, and pyramids are age-appropriate. For instance, younger athletes should not perform stunts or pyramids beyond their developmental level.
- Safety Rules Compliance: Follow guidelines from governing bodies like ICU. These organizations provide clear rules regarding the maximum height of pyramids, legal tumbling passes, and appropriate safety measures for different levels of cheerleading.

11. Emergency Preparedness

- Emergency Action Plan (EAP): Every gym or team should have an emergency action plan in place that covers what to do in the event of a serious injury. Coaches should review this plan regularly with the team and have access to first-aid supplies.
- CPR and First-Aid Certification: Ensure that coaches are CPR and first-aid certified, so they can act quickly in case of a medical emergency.

12. Mentorship and Leadership Development

- Senior Athlete Mentors: Encourage experienced cheerleaders to mentor younger or less experienced teammates. Senior athletes can model proper technique, emphasize safety, and help correct errors.
- Leadership Training for Coaches: Provide coaches with ongoing education on cheerleading safety, including certification programs.

By implementing these practical steps in the gym, teams can greatly reduce the risk of injury, foster a safer environment, and help athletes perform at their best while staying protected.

At the same time, participants produced some guidelines to promote safety in the gym through non-formal education. Using NFE techniques to teach safety in cheerleading is a great way to engage young athletes in a fun, interactive, and memorable way. The goal is to use exercises, games, and collaborative activities that both teach safety concepts and improve their practical skills. Below are some creative, hands-on methods used in the gym to promote safety among young athletes.

1. Safety Relay Race

- Objective: Teach athletes about safe practices in a high-energy, team-based game.
- How it Works: Set up stations around the gym, each focusing on a different safety aspect (e.g., proper stretching, spotting techniques, safe landing positions).
 - At each station, athletes must perform a quick task related to safety (e.g., demonstrate a correct stretch, spot a teammate, or show the correct body position for a landing).
 - Teams race to complete all the stations, and coaches check for proper execution.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes reinforce safe techniques in a fast-paced and engaging way, making safety concepts more memorable.

2. Spotting Challenge

- Objective: Promote trust, teamwork, and proper spotting techniques.
- How it Works: Pair athletes or form small groups with one flyer and multiple bases/spotters.
 - Set up a “Spotting Obstacle Course” where flyers must perform basic stunts or tumbling with spotters.
 - The bases and spotters are scored on their ability to maintain focus, positioning, and communication during the stunts.
 - Gradually increase the difficulty of the stunts, but always emphasize the importance of safety over completing the challenge quickly.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes learn the importance of spotting, build trust within their teams, and reinforce the idea that every stunt is a group effort with safety as a priority.

3. Concussion Awareness Role-Play

- Objective: Help athletes recognize the signs of concussion and know what to do when someone is injured.
- How it Works: Create a series of role-playing scenarios where athletes take turns acting as the injured person, coach, or teammate.
 - Give specific scenarios, such as “Your teammate fell during a stunt and hit their head. How do you recognize if they might have a concussion?”
 - The athletes must perform actions like stopping practice, assessing the person, and calling for help.
 - Use real-life examples and emphasize the importance of speaking up when they notice signs of injury, even if the injured person wants to continue.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes become more aware of the symptoms of concussions and learn the proper steps to take when an injury occurs.

4. Tumbling Form Freeze Game

- Objective: Improve athletes’ body awareness and technique during tumbling or jumps.
- How it Works: Athletes start performing a simple tumbling or jumping sequence (e.g., cartwheels, back handsprings, or toe touches), and at random times, the coach calls “Freeze!”
 - Athletes must stop in their current position and hold the form.
 - The coach then walks around and assesses each athlete’s body alignment, landing position, or hand placement.
 - Feedback is given immediately, and athletes are scored based on how well they maintain correct technique.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes develop a stronger sense of body control and awareness, reducing the chance of injuries from poor form or improper landings.

5. Safety Simon Says

- Objective: Reinforce correct form for common safety practices in a light, playful way.
- How it Works: Play a classic game of Simon Says, but adapt it to focus on cheerleading safety.
 - Commands could include “Simon says, land in the correct position for a jump,” or “Simon says, demonstrate the proper grip for a base in a stunt.”
 - Mix in a few trick commands (e.g., asking for unsafe stances) to see if athletes can differentiate between safe and unsafe positions.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes improve their ability to recognize proper form and respond quickly and correctly in practice situations.

6. Trust-Building Stunt Drills

- Objective: Build trust and teamwork among athletes while emphasizing the importance of communication and safety in stunting.
- How it Works: Start with basic stunts (like thigh stands) where the emphasis is on communication.
 - Before each stunt, athletes must communicate their plan for executing the stunt safely (e.g., the flyer explaining where they will step, the bases discussing their grips, etc.).
 - After each stunt, athletes give feedback to their teammates on what worked and what could improve in terms of safety and communication.
 - Gradually increase the complexity of the stunts as the trust and communication improve.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes learn the importance of clear communication during stunts and how trust between teammates is key to preventing injuries.

7. Spot-the-Hazard Scavenger Hunt

- Objective: Increase awareness of potential safety hazards in the gym environment.
- How it Works: Set up an interactive scavenger hunt where athletes must search the gym for safety hazards (either real or staged).
 - Hazards could include mats that are uneven, water bottles on the floor (a tripping hazard), improper spotting techniques being demonstrated, or athletes performing a stunt without proper warm-up.
 - Athletes must take note of each hazard they find and discuss as a group how to correct it.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes become more aware of their surroundings and how certain environmental factors (e.g., misplaced equipment, improper warm-ups) can increase the risk of injury.

8. Jump and Land Drill with Visual Feedback

- Objective: Teach proper landing mechanics to reduce the risk of knee, ankle, and other lower body injuries.
- How it Works: Use small group drills where athletes perform a jump and then land on a target area (like a mat).
 - Coaches and teammates observe and give feedback on landing mechanics (e.g., knees should be aligned, land softly on toes and roll through the foot).
 - Use tools like balance discs or agility dots to make landing targets and help athletes improve their precision and balance.
 - Incorporate slow-motion video feedback to help athletes see their landing form and make corrections.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes become more conscious of their landing technique, which helps prevent common injuries such as sprains and strains.

9. Safety Bingo

- Objective: Reinforce safety knowledge through a fun and interactive game.
- How it Works: Create bingo cards that include safety tips and actions (e.g., “Performed a proper warm-up,” “Used the correct grip in a stunt,” “Spoke up when someone was injured”).
 - Athletes must mark off a square each time they complete a safety-related task during practice.
 - When someone gets a bingo, they must explain each safety action they completed.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes become more actively involved in maintaining safety, while also reinforcing important concepts through repetition and accountability.

10. Emergency Simulation Game

- Objective: Teach athletes how to respond during an emergency in a calm, orderly manner.
- How it Works: Create simulated emergencies during practice (e.g., an athlete pretends to sprain an ankle, or a flyer “falls” from a stunt).
 - The athletes must respond by following the emergency protocol (e.g., stopping the stunt, getting help, ensuring the injured person is not moved if necessary).
 - After the simulation, discuss what was done well and what could be improved in the response.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes become comfortable with responding to emergencies and understand the importance of remaining calm and following the correct steps when an incident occurs.

By incorporating these interactive games and exercises, athletes will learn essential safety concepts while having fun. These methods also build stronger bonds between teammates, improving communication and trust, which are critical for reducing injuries in cheerleading.

Using cheerleading and non-formal education techniques could also be very useful to promote European values—such as democracy, active citizenship, social inclusion, equality, and environmental sustainability—in a highly effective way. Cheerleading, as a team sport, naturally encourages collaboration, leadership, and inclusion, and when paired with targeted activities, it can foster awareness and action around these values in fun and engaging ways.

Here are some ideas for exercises and activities in the gym that use both cheerleading and non-formal education techniques to promote these values.

1. Democracy: Cheer Team Decision-Making Game

- Objective: Teach athletes about democratic participation, consensus-building, and shared decision-making.
- How it Works: Organize team decisions democratically during practice, using a “Cheer Council” approach.
 - Before a practice session, present a few options for activities, stunts, or challenges, and allow the team to vote on what they would like to focus on.
 - To ensure inclusivity, each member has a voice, and they must explain why they chose a certain option.
 - Alternatively, rotate leadership roles within the team, so every athlete gets the chance to act as a “team captain” for a day, guiding the team’s activities and making decisions with input from teammates.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes learn how democratic processes work, experience voting and voicing opinions, and practice respecting the majority’s decision while considering minority views. It builds skills in negotiation and respectful debate.

2. Active Citizenship: Cheerleading Community Service Project

- Objective: Foster active citizenship by encouraging athletes to engage with their local community through cheerleading.
- How it Works: Organize a community event where the cheer team performs and engages with local citizens (e.g., a performance at a charity event, environmental clean-up, or fundraising initiative).

- After the performance, have a reflection circle where athletes discuss how their participation contributed to the community and what actions they can take as citizens to improve their environment.
- Let athletes brainstorm community projects where they can use their cheerleading skills to make a positive impact, and let the team vote on the initiative they'd like to pursue.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes develop a sense of responsibility for their community, learn how their actions can make a difference, and engage in real-world problem-solving as active citizens.

3. Social Inclusion: Buddy Cheer System

- Objective: Promote social inclusion and diversity by pairing athletes of different backgrounds and skill levels.
- How it Works: Create a "Buddy Cheer System" where athletes are paired with a teammate from a different age group, cultural background, or ability level.
 - Each pair works together on stunts or routines, helping each other improve and offering mutual support.
 - Use icebreaker games that allow athletes to share personal stories and experiences. For example, "Cultural Cheer Corner," where each athlete brings a cheer move or chant that reflects their cultural heritage, and the team learns it.
 - Rotate partners regularly to build inclusion and understanding across the whole team.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes learn to appreciate differences and foster a supportive, inclusive environment. They become more empathetic, breaking down barriers of race, culture, and ability, promoting a culture of mutual respect and inclusion.

4. Equality: Leadership Rotation and Gender Balance in Stunts

- Objective: Promote gender equality and leadership opportunities for all team members, regardless of gender, race, or ability.
- How it Works: Use leadership rotations to ensure every athlete, regardless of background, has the chance to lead the team or take a key role in stunts.
 - Create mixed-gender stunt groups to challenge traditional gender roles (e.g., girls can base, boys can fly).
 - Encourage discussions about stereotypes and expectations within cheerleading or sports, using personal reflection and team discussions to challenge these assumptions.
 - Design a practice where every athlete tries every position in a stunt (base, flyer, spotter), reinforcing that all roles are important and accessible to everyone.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes learn that everyone deserves equal opportunities to lead, perform, and succeed in every aspect of cheerleading, regardless of gender or other differences. They challenge stereotypes and develop confidence in themselves and others.

5. Environmental Sustainability: Cheerleaders Go Green Initiative

- Objective: Raise awareness about environmental sustainability through eco-friendly practices in cheerleading.
- How it Works: Launch a "Go Green" initiative within the gym. This could include activities like:
 - Eco-Friendly Cheer Uniform Day: Encourage athletes to repurpose old uniforms or create eco-friendly cheer gear from recycled materials.
 - Eco-Practice: Organize an outdoor practice in a park, followed by a litter pick-up session where athletes can see the direct impact of waste on the environment. Athletes discuss ways they can make cheer practices more sustainable (e.g., using reusable water bottles, reducing plastic waste from snacks, etc.).
 - Green Cheerleader Award: Give a small award each month to the athlete who has shown the most dedication to environmental sustainability (e.g., leading eco-friendly initiatives, reducing waste, educating teammates about green practices).
- Learning Outcome: Athletes develop eco-conscious habits and understand the importance of sustainability in both their sport and their daily lives. They become advocates for environmental responsibility.

6. Equality and Inclusion: Diversity Cheer Circle

- Objective: Promote equality, inclusion, and understanding of diversity within the team.
- How it Works: During each practice, dedicate time for a "Diversity Cheer Circle," where athletes discuss personal experiences related to diversity, equality, or inclusion.
 - Use cheer-inspired games like "Inclusion Stunt Challenge" where athletes are given specific challenges to create stunts or routines that symbolize values like inclusion or fairness. For example, they might need to include every team member in the routine in some way or make a formation that represents unity or equality.
 - Celebrate cultural diversity by incorporating chants, movements, or routines from different countries and cultures, with athletes leading sessions based on their own heritage.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes become more aware of social issues, develop empathy, and work together to ensure everyone feels valued and included on the team. It opens up discussions around discrimination, equality, and fairness in both sports and life.

7. Democratic Cheer Planning Sessions

- Objective: Teach the principles of democracy and group collaboration through planning team goals and routines.
- How it Works: Host regular "Cheer Planning Sessions" where athletes democratically decide on the elements of their next routine or performance.
 - They can vote on music, themes, and even stunt choreography. Give each athlete a role in the decision-making process to emphasize shared responsibility.
 - Use a simple parliamentary model where ideas are proposed, debated, and voted on. To add a playful twist, incorporate a "Cheer Democracy Ball," where athletes must pass a ball around, and only the person holding the ball can speak. This encourages active listening and participation from everyone.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes practice active citizenship through democratic decision-making processes, learn how to voice their opinions, listen to others, and work as a team to reach a common goal.

8. Equality Pledge: Cheerleaders for Change

- Objective: Encourage athletes to actively promote equality and stand up for fairness.
- How it Works: At the start of the season, have each athlete take a personal "Equality Pledge," where they commit to promoting fairness, respect, and inclusion both in cheerleading and outside of the gym.
 - Hold workshops where athletes role-play scenarios involving discrimination or unfair treatment, and work together to come up with solutions or actions they can take to make the gym a more inclusive space.
 - Incorporate chants or cheers that emphasize equality, such as using affirmations like "All voices matter," or creating routines that symbolize togetherness and equal opportunity.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes internalize the importance of equality, developing the skills to advocate for themselves and others. They become proactive in addressing unfairness and promoting equality in their daily lives.

9. Social Responsibility Challenge: Cheer for a Cause

- Objective: Instill social responsibility by encouraging athletes to use their cheerleading platform for good.
- How it Works: Create a "Cheer for a Cause" challenge where athletes work together to plan and execute a small charity or awareness event. They could:
 - Organize a performance to raise awareness about social issues (e.g., bullying, equality, mental health).
 - Use cheer routines to highlight important messages (e.g., creating a cheer that spells out words like "Respect" or "Unity").
 - Afterward, athletes reflect on how sports can be used to make a positive impact on society.
- Learning Outcome: Athletes learn that cheerleading is not just about performance but can also be a platform to advocate for social issues, helping them become responsible and engaged citizens.

By using cheerleading and non-formal education methods like these, European values can be promoted in a fun, interactive way while building awareness and skills that will benefit athletes both inside and outside the gym. These activities help young athletes develop into socially responsible, inclusive, and eco-conscious citizens, while fostering an understanding of democracy, equality, and active participation in their communities.



CONCLUSIONS

Integrating non-formal education techniques within cheerleading contexts presents a transformative opportunity to enhance safety protocols while simultaneously promoting vital European values such as democracy, active citizenship, social inclusion, equality, and environmental sustainability. Through engaging activities like safety relay races and buddy cheer systems, athletes can internalize essential safety practices in dynamic and interactive ways, reinforcing the collective responsibility for one another's well-being. Such hands-on approaches foster an environment where young athletes understand that safety is not solely the coach's responsibility; rather, it is a shared commitment that requires active participation from everyone on the team.

Furthermore, incorporating democratic processes into cheerleading practices—such as team decision-making and leadership rotations—empowers athletes to voice their opinions, enhancing their sense of agency and collaboration. This engagement not only helps athletes feel valued and heard but also nurtures important skills such as negotiation and compromise, which are essential for effective teamwork both in sports and in everyday life. By facilitating discussions around these democratic practices, coaches can encourage critical thinking and develop a deeper understanding of democratic values and principles among young athletes.

Community service projects and environmental sustainability initiatives provide further avenues for promoting active citizenship. By participating in local clean-up events or organizing charity performances, cheerleaders can contribute positively to their communities while cultivating a sense of belonging and responsibility. These experiences allow athletes to see the direct impact of their actions, instilling a lifelong commitment to civic engagement and social responsibility.

Additionally, embedding principles of inclusion and equality in practices such as diverse partner systems and promoting mixed-gender stunts fosters a culture that values every individual's contributions, regardless of their background or ability. These activities not only challenge stereotypes but also build empathy and respect among teammates, laying the groundwork for a supportive environment where all athletes feel encouraged to excel.

Ultimately, the integration of safety education with the promotion of European values creates a holistic training atmosphere that prepares young cheerleaders to navigate the complexities of both sport and society. By prioritizing safety and social values, coaches are not only equipping athletes with the skills needed for success in cheerleading but also nurturing their growth as responsible, engaged citizens in a diverse and interconnected world. This comprehensive approach not only enhances the cheerleading experience but also empowers young athletes to take on leadership roles, advocate for inclusivity, and contribute meaningfully to their communities, ensuring that the principles of safety and European values resonate far beyond the gym. As these essential values are cultivated within the cheerleading context, athletes are prepared not just for immediate challenges but for impactful lives characterized by leadership, responsibility, and a commitment to fostering a just and equitable society.

The Cheer Them Up! project exemplified this vision, proving to be a remarkable experience for participants and their organizations alike. Through workshops and collaborative activities, participants developed new skills in coaching techniques, safety protocols, and community engagement strategies. The project fostered an environment where athletes and coaches not only learned from one another but also formed lasting friendships and professional relationships that extended beyond the gym. By sharing insights and experiences, they created a supportive network that encouraged ongoing collaboration and mutual growth. As participants left the project, they carried with them not just improved skills and knowledge, but also a renewed sense of purpose and connection, ready to implement the values they had embraced and share them with their teams and communities. This initiative not only enriched individual participants but also strengthened their organizations, cultivating a culture of excellence, inclusivity, and social responsibility that will benefit future generations of cheerleaders.



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