

# URBAN STARS

Sport, crime prevention  
and community action





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## FOREWORD

### A MESSAGE FROM ACTIVE COMMUNITIES NETWORK

The research in this report provides clear evidence that sport is effective in engaging vulnerable and marginalised young people, that it tackles youth crime and reduces re-offending rates.

Urban Stars commenced with three pilot projects in London, the West Midlands and South Gloucestershire and has expanded with projects in Manchester, Belfast, Bristol and Glasgow with the assistance of the St. James' Place Foundation.

Professor Andrew Parker and his team from the University of Gloucestershire conducted an 18 month research study into the pilot projects and their findings reinforce my view that the key to engaging these targeted individuals is through a focussed network of experienced individual role models and mentors combined with respected organisations 'on the ground' delivering who understand the area and young people engaged.

Active Communities Network has a commitment to research and evaluation, sharing best practice and working with strategic, funding and like-minded delivery agencies. This report highlights how we engage the wider field of sport and community development through strategic and delivery partnerships with organisations to promote the wider network and sport for social change and urban development agenda.

Our delivery and management offices are based in Northern Ireland (Belfast), South Africa (Cape Town) and our headquarters in the United Kingdom (London), alongside satellite offices in Manchester and the Midlands. Our delivery of grassroots activities continue to use the mediums of sport, physical activity, arts and cultural activity to deliver and promote direct personal, social and community development to support young people and communities across the UK and overseas.

This report adds to the conversation surrounding the 'Sport for Urban Development' movement which has the long-term aim of influencing decision makers and those at the very top of Government in effecting policy change.

Sporting legend Edwin Moses, who is also the Chairman of the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation – a partner in Urban Stars, describes the programme in his foreword as "an innovative, excellent project", and I agree wholeheartedly.

Read the report and recommendations, then join in and continue the conversation with us.

**GARY STANNETT MBE**  
CEO ACTIVE COMMUNITIES NETWORK





## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Sport is an amazing draw and inspiration for so many people around the world. The recent Olympics and Paralympics in London were a reminder of just how powerful sport can be. But all too often sport is seen as being about winning at all costs. An issue that, as newly appointed Chair to the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, I and the world sporting community must now deal with in a very real way as we try to come to terms with the doping crisis gripping the world of cycling.

And it is for that very reason that we need to remind ourselves of the broader value of sport beyond the endless drive to be the best in the world – the going to any length to succeed. Sure winning is important. I wouldn't be the man I am today if I hadn't won the many races in which I ran.

But all too often we get blinded by the fact that sport is only about winning. In reality sport is about far more than just winning.

I firmly believe that sport's impact reaches far beyond the elation of standing on the podium. Sport has the potential to address some of the most pressing global challenges and social issues we face. Whether it is poverty and violent crime or drug abuse and discrimination, sport can make a real and lasting difference.

This is what drives me to continue to be involved in sport beyond my professional career. Through my work with Laureus over the last 13 years I have seen first-hand how sport can, and continues to, change lives.

And Urban Stars, on which this report focuses, is just one example of the excellent projects that Laureus supports around the world. Delivered in partnership with our strategic partners at Active Communities Network, this innovative sports based crime prevention project is one that we, at Laureus, are not only proud to have supported since its inception in 2009, but are delighted to see demonstrating its value and growing impact.

This report is further evidence to my conviction that sport is an excellent tool to deliver real and lasting social change for young people. It shows how it can be used to target young people that are vulnerable and at risk. It not only helps these young people as individuals by giving them key life skills such as resilience, confidence and empathy. It also benefits us all by developing individuals that will become a value to society and not a burden.

What the Urban Stars projects in this report shows is clear evidence that sport can be effective not only in engaging marginalised young people, but in tackling youth crime and reducing re-offending.

The evidence for the impact of sport may be clear and growing in awareness, but we still have a job to do in bringing key opinion formers and policy makers on board helping them see the multi-dimensional value of sport.

Laureus has ambitions to make sport for development an approach that every policy maker and government sees as a vital tool in addressing the most pressing issues we face. And this is why the work and impact of Urban Stars is so important. Over and above the real and measured change for young people and communities across the UK it is delivering, the project has led to the creation of the first accredited qualification in the use of sport as a crime prevention tool enabling us to share innovation and learning more broadly with grassroots sports organisations in the UK and beyond.

However, growing the impact and reach of sport as a development tool can only be done with others. This is why we are proud of our partnerships with Active Communities Network, and so thankful to the critical role St James's Place Foundation has played in the subsequent extension of the Urban Stars Programme. Its support and funds are vital to the project and has allowed it to now grow to seven locations across the UK.

As we continue to shine a light on exactly how sport is changing the lives of young people and communities worldwide, we hope more governments and other funders will invest in sport as a multi-dimensional tool for social change – helping make sport about winning in life and not just getting onto the podium.

We hope you enjoy reading the report and would love to hear your comments on how we can continue to move this agenda forward. You can contact us on [foundation@laureus.com](mailto:foundation@laureus.com)

### EDWIN MOSES

CHAIRMAN OF THE LAUREUS SPORT FOR GOOD FOUNDATION



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 THE PROJECT

The aim of the Urban Stars initiative is to use sport to engage young people who are identified as marginalised from mainstream society, as well as those deemed to be 'vulnerable' because of their exclusion, or categorised as being 'at risk' of further exclusion.

This report is the result of an 18-month research project exploring how the Urban Stars initiative seeks to achieve this aim with young people who are: (i) living in areas of high social deprivation and crime; (ii) on the periphery of crime; or (iii) already in custody.

Throughout the report, the term 'vulnerable' is used to depict young people living in some of England's most deprived regions. Although the vast majority of these 'vulnerable' young people were not affiliated with gangs, had not been in trouble with the police, and were not identified as being at risk of falling into a life of crime and/or gang-related activity, their vulnerability and marginalisation stemmed, at least in part, from them living amidst disadvantaged circumstances. The term 'at risk' refers to young people who were (or believed themselves to be) excluded from and/or stigmatised by mainstream society because of their previous actions, attitudes and/or life choices. They included 'vulnerable' young people within the youth justice system, those on community rehabilitation programmes, as well as those on the verge of being criminalised or excluded from mainstream society because of their antisocial behaviour.

#### URBAN STARS

Urban Stars is a flagship programme for the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and is delivered by Active Communities Network – a strategic partner of Laureus Sport For Good Foundation. The partnership between these two organisations operates around the common goal of delivering sport to marginalised communities and to working with the most 'at risk' and 'vulnerable' young people within those communities. Recognised across the sport development and youth work sectors as a key funder of such initiatives, in recent years Laureus Sport For Good Foundation has worked closely with Active Communities Network to set up a series of Urban Stars pilot programmes in the UK, in London, the West Midlands and South Gloucestershire. In 2011 this partnership expanded to include the St James Place Foundation, a move which has enabled the expansion of the Urban Stars programme into new sites in Manchester, Belfast, Bristol and Glasgow. This research focuses on the initial pilot programme

Active Communities Network is a registered charity that works in the UK and internationally to use sport and cultural activities as a conduit for individual and community development. Active Communities Network portfolio of services includes implementing local projects, managing national programmes on behalf of strategic partners, delivering accreditation and training packages to both project participants and to the broader workforce, and supporting evaluation and research in the wider sport, community development and education fields. As the name suggests, Active Communities Network facilitates a network of like-minded member organisations with a range of specialist skills which act as regional leads for programming and development. In the context of Urban Stars, two of these network partners have been heavily involved in the delivery of the programme: (i) Fight for Change, a boxing-based charity that operates in the West Midlands and London and which counts former World Champion boxer and television commentator, Richie Woodhall, as its active Patron, and (ii) The 2nd Chance Project, an organisation

with expertise in working with young people in the criminal justice system and with ex-offenders on their release into the community. These network partners are integral to the Urban Stars programme in the West Midlands and in South Gloucestershire.

At the grass roots level, Urban Stars seeks to target 13 – 19 year old 'vulnerable' and 'at-risk' young people by using sport as a vehicle to foster social change, facilitate social inclusion and nurture positive youth development. The focus on providing early interventions and diversionary activities, such as football, boxing, weightlifting, basketball and dance is high on its development and outreach agenda with a view to tackling crime and antisocial behaviour across areas of social deprivation, criminal activity and unemployment in a variety of regions and localities. The initiative seeks to utilise the potential of 'sport for good' to address some of the most pressing global challenges and social issues such as: poverty, homelessness, war, violence, drug abuse, disease and discrimination.

Since its inception in 2009, the pan-London approach to Urban Stars has coupled the sporting element of projects with mentoring and group work sessions. It also offers educational packages as well as bespoke employment, youth leadership and training pathways aimed at addressing behavioural issues and nurturing positive life chances. Although the project is delivered in a variety of UK localities, this research examined the impact of the delivery of the Urban Stars initiative and its engagement with vulnerable young people across specific hub sites in London (Lambeth, Southwark and Croydon), the West Midlands (Birmingham and Coventry), and South Gloucestershire (Ashfield HMP and YOI).

## 1.2 URBAN STARS LONDON

In Lambeth the Urban Stars project primarily works on the Moorlands housing estate where a newly formed partnership between Urban Stars and a local housing association has recently created an opportunity for programme delivery. On the Moorlands estate, and in surrounding areas, youth crime and gang-related affiliations are major issues resulting in a large proportion of young people feeling socially excluded from their communities and neighbourhoods. The Urban Stars project, in partnership with the local housing association, has been utilising facilities to provide a variety of sporting activities to engage with 'at-risk' young people in order to effectively tackle these issues.

In Southwark, Urban Stars delivery predominantly focuses on the Aylesbury housing estate and works in conjunction with a variety of local community partners. These partnerships have sought to enhance a well-established 'sport for social inclusion' infrastructure that is embedded in the cultural fabric of the estate through the work of Active Communities Network and its programme leaders, mentors and youth workers. Rapport between project workers and local residents, neighbours and community leaders has allowed leaders to deliver all aspects of the Urban Stars programme ranging from youth work courses to football tournaments.

Urban Stars delivery in Croydon has focused on the communities in South Norwood, Selhurst and Thornton Heath. Within these communities youth crime, exclusion and gang membership is a major concern with the area covering the intersection of three London boroughs and being seen as a focal point for conflict. Current delivery continues to utilise the universality of football within London and embeds a curriculum (highly influenced by funding) that engages a diverse array of participants, primarily focusing on increasing community and intergenerational relations.

## 1.3 URBAN STARS WEST MIDLANDS

Urban Stars facilitates boxing activities and competitions in crime and disorder hotspots in the West Midlands with a view to positively engaging vulnerable and at risk young people who experience a level of stigma or marginalisation from mainstream society. Since its inception the programme has targeted approximately 500 13-19-year-olds across the Aston, Lozells and Handsworth areas of Birmingham - regions notorious for gun and knife crime, gang and drug related activity, and the urban riots of 2005. In Coventry, Urban Stars has targeted the areas of Hillfields, Canley and Tile Hill areas where exclusion and disadvantage are a central part of many young people's lives amidst communities which, in more recent years, have experienced an influx of new, unskilled migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Due to more recent collaborative partnerships with local organisations, Urban Stars not only offers personal development opportunities, issue based workshops and training and development pathways for young people in Coventry but increasingly an emphasis is being placed on volunteering, peer mentoring and accredited training courses to nurture positive youth development by building individual aspirations and attainment levels. The latter approach stems from programme leaders, youth workers and partner agencies seeking to aid career and community leadership pathways for young people who might not otherwise consider investing in their own development.

## 1.4 URBAN STARS SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE

At Ashfield HMP and YOI, South Gloucestershire, Urban Stars has facilitated the engagement of male young offenders in sporting activities to improve their behaviours and attitudes and to raise their achievement and skill levels. Through the creation of a series of community partnerships, a number of sporting activities, pathways and experiences have been devised offering offenders a variety of opportunities on release from custody linked to education, training and employment. Within this context Urban Stars has established links with a wide network of local and national sporting organisations and receives funding from a range of agencies including the Football Foundation. The continuing relationship between Urban Stars and Ashfield has spawned the Ashfield College Sports Academy which presents offenders with opportunities to participate in activities such as sports coaching awards, community placements and mentoring roles. The South West region Active Communities Network member, the 2nd Chance Project, have successfully managed and implemented similar provision at Portland HMP and YOI (see Meek, 2012).

Ashfield HMP & YOI is located in the village of Pucklechurch near Bristol. It is currently operated by SERCO and opened on 1st November 1999 as the first privately managed YOI in the UK. The prison caters for up to 400 male juveniles aged 15-18yrs emanating from over 120 sentencing courts across the South West, Wales, the Midlands and London. The site on which Ashfield is built was formerly that of Pucklechurch Prison, an adult remand centre. As well as operational prison staff, personnel include: teachers, caseworkers, psychologists and healthcare workers. The prison seeks to provide an excellent learning environment within the structure of a formal custodial setting. All residents receive at least 27 hours of education per week undergoing initial assessment to establish their levels of literacy and numeracy and then placed accordingly into classes for mathematics, English, life skills, IT, music and art. The prison also hosts various resettlement and employability programmes.

## 2.0 THE RESEARCH

### 2.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Monitoring and evaluation has become an integral part of the delivery of sport development projects in recent years. This is a commissioned research project that focuses on the extent to which the Urban Stars initiative uses sport as an effective tool of engagement (and intervention) for young people involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. It seeks to:

(i) assess how, if at all, sport operates as a vehicle to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour; (ii) evaluate the various impacts that engagement in and through sport has on personal and social development and on processes of rehabilitation; and (iii) investigate the merits of project partnership in facilitating access to wider notions of education and training.

Given Active Communities Network's continued commitment to improving the delivery, reach and impact of its projects, a key feature of this report is the classification of (and recommendations towards) a 'best practice' model that can bolster the impact of new delivery programmes across other regions and localities.

### 2.2 THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The research adopted a mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach to data collection, ensuring a comprehensive overview of the Urban Stars programme. The quantitative aspect of the study investigated the perceptions of programme participants (via large scale survey) whilst considering local, regional and national statistical data on young people's engagement with this, and similar, initiatives. The qualitative aspects of the research involved focus group interviews with the young people taking part in the Urban Stars initiative, as well as with programme leaders, and members of related community groups. The report is, thus, grounded in first-person opinions, perspectives, perceptions and subjective experiences, offering evidence of trends and patterns of engagement as well as an overall sense of the 'impact' of the Urban Stars programme.

The research was managed and coordinated by Prof Andrew Parker and Dr Andy Pitchford; Dr Samaya Farooq and Benjamin Moreland were appointed researchers for the project. They, alongside Andrew Parker, handled data collection and the analysis and write-up of the report. At the time of the research, all were members of staff in the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire (UoG). To evaluate whether or not sport can be used effectively to combat crime and anti-social behaviour amongst young people, whilst also assessing how, where and when this might best take place, the research team aligned their investigations with Active Communities Network objectives and focussed their attentions on young people: (i) in areas with a high incidence of crime; (ii) on the periphery of crime; and (iii) already in custody.

As we have seen, the research plan comprised data collection at the following project sites:

- London (Croydon, Lambeth, Southwark), and;
- West Midlands (Birmingham and Coventry); and
- South Gloucestershire (Ashfield HMP and YOI).

Primary data was collected via the following methods:

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY OF 200 PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED ACROSS THE URBAN STARS INITIATIVE**

The questionnaire was designed to assess young people's perceptions of the impact of the initiative on various aspects of their development (personal, social) and their ability to include themselves in a range of social and community activities. In order to assess the social impact of the initiative, young people were also asked to indicate the extent to which their participation had impacted a range of personal, social and civic skills deemed necessary for active participation in society.

#### **SIX FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH 50 PROJECT PARTICIPANTS**

Focus groups were conducted with project participants in order to explore young people's personalised experiences of engaging with the Urban Stars initiative and its associated projects. Discussion topics varied with participants talking about their entry route into the various projects, their awareness of overarching project aims and objectives, and positive and negative 'critical' moments. The research team explored testimonies where the initiative had successfully and effectively removed young people from damaging social circumstances associated with crime and antisocial behaviour, and facilitated their re/integration within localised communities. Two focus groups were conducted at each project location.

#### **FIVE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH PROGRAMME LEADERS ACROSS ALL PROJECTS**

Focus groups were conducted with project leaders and workers across all three London boroughs and in Birmingham and Coventry. A one-to-one interview was conducted with the programme leader at Ashfield HMP and YOI in South Gloucestershire. Questions focused on uncovering information about the kinds of young people and communities engaged, the benefits accrued by young people, and the extent to which delivery staff felt that wider project aims and objectives (around sport for social inclusion, positive youth development and social change) were being met.

#### **NINE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH STATUTORY AND VOLUNTARY REPRESENTATIVES FROM ASSOCIATED (COMMUNITY) GROUPS AND AGENCIES IN ONE LONDON BOROUGH, AS WELL AS IN BIRMINGHAM AND COVENTRY AND SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

Focus group discussions were held with partner agency representatives (i.e. local authorities, teachers and workers from mainstream schools, employability centres, youth development workers and sports coaches etc.) and local community residents. The aim was to expose agency representative and local resident views about the Urban Stars initiative, and more importantly, sport's potential to operate as a vehicle for social change, social inclusion and social development.

#### **DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS OF EXISTING STATISTICAL DATA (LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL) AND PUBLISHED REPORTS ON THIS AND SIMILAR INITIATIVES**

Relevant literature and documentation was reviewed and assessed in order to contextualise and underpin both the rationale for the research and the investigations into the work of the initiative. The analysis included consultation of academic literature and published reports on issues such as sport and inclusion/exclusion, criminology and community sports development theory, whilst also considering past and present government policy.

## 2.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative (descriptive) statistical analysis was performed whereby trends and patterns were identified across key data categories. Quantifiable measurements were expressed and illustrated in the form of graphs. All qualitative interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Thematic and axial coding was used in relation to the analysis of qualitative data and the research team adopted a cyclical process of examination and interpretation to draw out themes and meanings from all of the data in response to the primary aims of the research. In turn, data was summarised, patterns, clusters and relationships between experiences and perceptions were developed and explanations formulated. From this process, a series of key themes emerged, and it is in line with these that the resultant findings are based. At a broader level, the report aims to develop an understanding of: (i) how, why and to what extent sport operates as an effective tool for engagement (and what are the challenges and limitations associated with this); (ii) the impact of sporting activity on the overall development of young people and their capacity for self-change and social inclusion; and (iii) the importance of partnerships and the centralisation of 'youth voice' in effective practice. Ethical approval for this research was gained from the University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics Committee and from the National Institute for Social Care and Health Research Ethics Service (REC for Wales).

We pre-empt an exploration of the empirical findings with two further sections. The first provides background and context on the overall scope and remit of the Urban Stars initiative and its associated projects (Project Reach), whilst the second provides an overview of the related literature.



## 3.0 PROJECT REACH

### 3.1 URBAN STARS LONDON

In London, Urban Stars operates against a backdrop of antisocial behaviour, active gangs and high profile gun and knife crime. Programme participants were targeted because they were identified as being vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged both as a consequence of the social circumstances in which they lived and because of the educational and employability barriers which they were likely to experience growing up in areas of high unemployment and social deprivation. Such circumstances were highlighted in participants' questionnaire responses with more than half claiming that they were not registered in formal education (56%) or in training (89%). These figures are further reinforced by the low number of educational qualifications possessed by nearly half of London based participants (43%) and similarly those receiving state benefits (44%). Figure 1 (below) presents the different social characteristics of males and females engaged with Urban Stars in the London area who were deemed vulnerable.



**FIGURE 1.** Characteristics of male and female 'vulnerable' participants (actual numbers) engaged with Urban Stars in London.

As can be seen from these data, when compared to females, males had lower educational attainment scores, with almost twice as many achieving less than 5 GCSEs or having no qualifications at all. The percentages of males and females who were unemployed and seeking apprenticeship opportunities were, however, similar. Young people from a range of different BME communities were engaged with the initiative; these were largely from 'black British' communities (63%). The high volume of black male participants (74%) attending Urban Stars projects uncovers the extent to which young black males were 'at risk' from wider stigmatisations.

Individuals who were deemed to be 'at risk' were largely considered to be those on the periphery of crime, due to the potential for criminal and illegal activity that spans the London boroughs. For some it was conversations with programme leaders that finalised their decision to attend Urban Stars

activities, for others it was the recommendations of peers and local people placing a sense of cultural value and worth on their personal experiences of the programme. For others still, attendance was seen as something of a lifeline (and progression pathway) after having completed custodial sentences. Some saw the initiative primarily as a sporting intervention. These individuals were acutely aware of the wider employment sphere and recognised the ability of Urban Stars to up-skill and accredit participants. Motivations for attendance commonly surrounded personal desire however wider reasons for taking part were grounded in Urban Stars' diverse network of contacts, ranging from recommendations by external partners, such as wider delivery organisations and educational establishments, to word-of-mouth testimony by current participants acting as ambassadors for the programme. Those attending Urban Stars through these external channels were diverse in their interests ranging from 'dancers' to 'footballers'; the common denominator being that all were identified as vulnerable young people.

### 3.2 URBAN STARS WEST MIDLANDS

In the West Midlands young people were primarily engaged in boxing-based activities. They represented a much larger proportion of young people growing up in a climate of increasing fiscal austerity and mass youth unemployment and were living in neighbourhoods with higher than average crime rates. Their vulnerability and exclusion from mainstream society stemmed from the fact that many were not enrolled in, or benefiting from, formal education (72%) or training opportunities (63%); they had little or no formal qualifications (67%) and/or work-related experiences to use to their advantage (58%). A number were unemployed at the time of the research (72%), claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) (46%) or looking for apprenticeship opportunities (34%). Figure 2 (below) illustrates more clearly the 'exclusionary' characteristics of 'vulnerable' participants and their entry routes into Urban Stars.

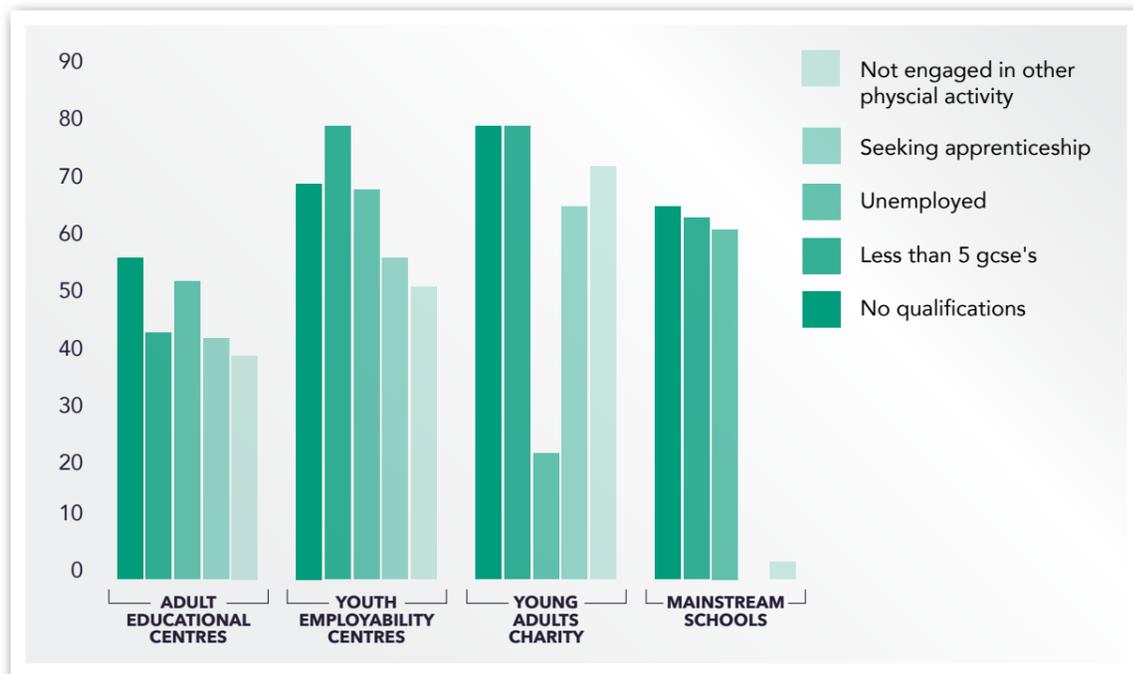


FIGURE 2. Characteristics of targeted 'vulnerable' participants (actual numbers) engaged with Urban Stars in the West Midlands

Whilst some young people were actively recruited onto boxing placements by programme leaders and sports coaches committed to detached or outreach youth work schemes, others were sign-posted to 'live' delivery sessions through partnership work with local statutory agencies, such as mainstream schools or voluntary organisations (i.e. employability centres, educational community centres and other such charitable organisations working with children and young people). Those young people who were referred to boxing from charitable organisations were mainly refugees and/or asylum seekers and therefore experienced a greater sense of exclusion from their local communities.

Meanwhile, 'at risk' participants had either served custodial sentences or were participating in community rehabilitation programmes through the local Youth Offending Service (9%). Others had been referred to Urban Stars via partnerships established with the local Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) responsible for helping young people who had been excluded from mainstream schools for presenting challenging behaviour (17%). A proportion of some 'at risk' participants had been encouraged to engage in boxing sessions for displaying anti-social behaviour (14%), presenting anger management concerns (24%) and/or were deemed to be 'on the periphery' of participating in gang-related (34%) or criminal activity (29%). The majority of these participants were referred from PRUs, local mainstream schools or had been sign-posted to sessions by the local Police for being 'troublesome'. Figure 3 (below) illustrates more clearly the characteristics of 'at risk' participants in the West Midlands and their entry routes into Urban Stars.

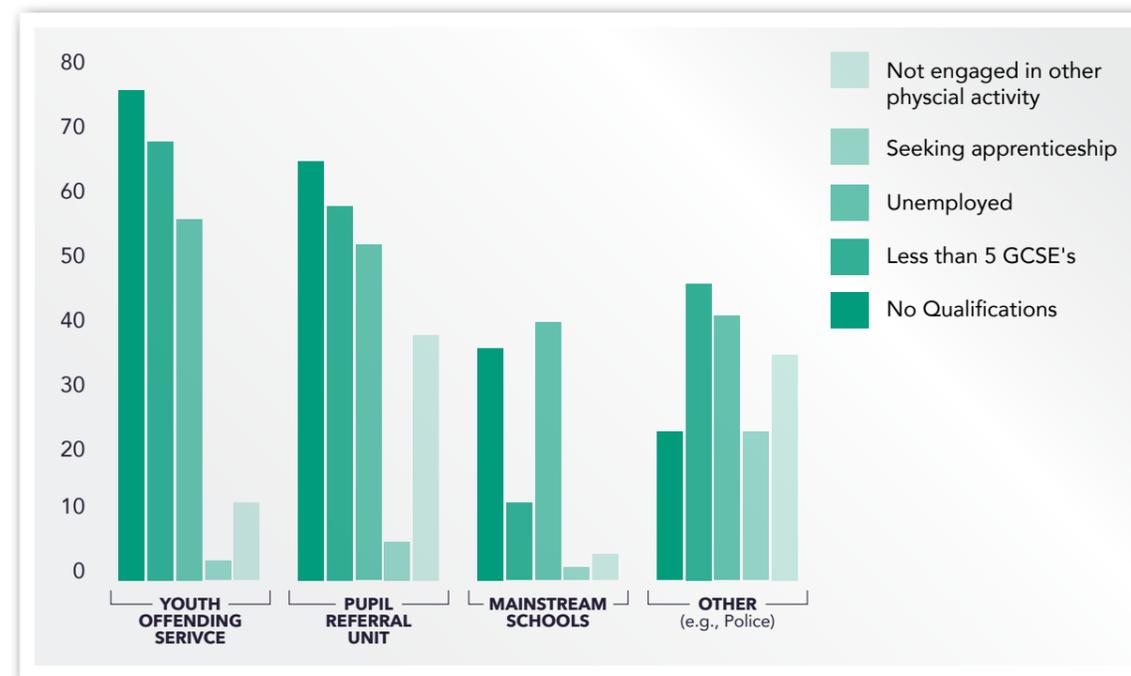


FIGURE 3. Characteristics of 'at risk' young people (actual numbers) engaged in Urban Stars in the West Midlands.

For those outside of mainstream schooling, participation in boxing sessions normally constituted the only form of physical activity that they engaged in during the week. In some cases, boxing was offered to young people as an extrinsic incentive or positive reinforcement mechanism for sustained 'good behaviour'.

### 3.3 URBAN STARS SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE

All those engaged with Urban Stars in South Gloucestershire were either currently serving prisoners (at Ashfield HMP and YOI) or had recently been released from the prison on licence. The predictability of access to those engaged on the programme proved problematic throughout the duration of the research. The original cohort comprised 12 young men for whom a prison-based 'Enrichment Programme' was initially designed in line with the aims and objectives of the in-house Urban Stars sports academy structure. However, rising tensions within the prison during the summer of 2011 (largely as a consequence of wider social unrest) meant that seven members of this initial group were transferred away from Ashfield during that time with a further four being released early. Hence, an alternative cohort had to be assembled. The resulting group comprised 10 young men aged between 15-17 years all of whom completed questionnaire responses. A further two young men were interviewed, both of whom had been released from custody on licence during 2011. A variety of sporting interests were represented among this group including weight training, rugby, boxing and football and, hence, the Urban Stars delivery programme designed for this group was categorised as a 'multi-sports' academy.

Urban Stars provision at Ashfield is clearly distinctive from that within London and the West Midlands on account of the fact that: (i) it caters primarily for young men in (and immediately post) custody, and (ii) it provides opportunities not only through sports participation and sports-based qualifications, i.e. Community Sports Leaders Award (CSLA), but through a range of wider activities, i.e. outdoor pursuits and music, and via broader mentoring, employability and educational accreditation programmes.<sup>1</sup> Since its inception the programme has engaged 165 Ashfield residents, 40 of whom have received support during the post-custody resettlement transition whereby referrals to wider agencies are a key focus. At the time of this research staff from the 2nd Chance Project were working with 20 young men within Ashfield, and a further 15 at transferred prison locations, whilst also providing post-custody mentoring to 29 individuals, communicating with them regularly (bi/monthly) either in person (depending on geographical location), by telephone/text, or via social media portals. Of these 165 young men, 92 (56%) claimed not to have reoffended one year after their release.<sup>2</sup> This equates to a 44% one year reconviction rate (compared to a prison average of 67% who reoffended in the 12 months ending September 2010<sup>3</sup> and a national average of 74% for those serving sentences of one year and under<sup>4</sup>).

Inside Ashfield, Urban Stars is delivered in accordance with the highly structured educational regimen in place. Each 12-week sports academy is (normally) designed to focus upon a specific sport (football, boxing, rugby or cricket) and is open only to those with a consistently positive behavioural profile.<sup>5</sup> Within this framework academies are advertised and promoted in the prison and residents are able to express an interest in taking part via initial referral forms. These expressions of interest/applications are processed by the Ashfield Physical Education (PE) Department and subsequently screened by the prison's Education Department and Security staff in order to ascertain the suitability of applicants for academy involvement. Once enrolled, academy candidates attend six classroom sessions per week (each 1.5 hours in duration) where they study the 'theoretical' aspects of sport; and six practical sessions per week (1.5 hours) where they participate in their chosen sporting activity. One of these practical sessions takes place during a weekday evening and

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the 2nd Chance Project see: <http://www.2ndchanceproject.co.uk/view/1/home>

<sup>2</sup> This data relies on self-reported re-offending. The sample discussed here were not necessarily representative of the juvenile population in their pre-existing risk levels, nor did the research involve statistical control for the effects of other interventions. A further eight Urban Stars participants committed minor offences within their first year of release.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Justice (2012), *Proven re-offending tables Oct 2009-Sept 2010. Table 23: Juvenile proven re-offending data, by individual prison, based on first discharge from each prison, 2007 to September 2010.*

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Justice (2012), *Compendium of reoffending statistics and analysis tables: Number of young offenders, proven re-offending rates and number of previous offences by sentence type, 2009.*

<sup>5</sup> Changes to this profile can lead to residents being denied further access to the programme and/or to the forfeiture of privileges with regards to practical (sports) sessions.

the other at the weekend. All academy programmes operate in line with a partnership model which sees Third Sector and statutory organisations come together to provide a comprehensive package of multi-agency support for the young people concerned. To this end, academies include: coach and sports education qualifications, life coaching, community industry talks, and pre-release resettlement support. The latter is provided via one-to-one mentoring (one hour per week) and facilitates assistance with a wide range of resident/agency negotiations, i.e. case workers, YOTs, Parole/Review Boards, family re-engagement, whilst challenging negative attitudes and promoting positive working relationships with others. Depending on length of sentence and behavioural track-record, residents may complete as many sports academy programmes (and embedded qualifications) as they wish.

The Ashfield residents with whom Urban Stars staff members work bring with them a wide variety of offence and sentence histories ranging from assault to manslaughter and from Detention and Training Orders (DTO) to significant periods of imprisonment (6-11 years). In terms of the overall profile of the academy group featured in this report a number were considered 'at risk' either as a consequence of a lack of parental support or because of their previous offences. Five of the research group emanated from the Greater London area and were affiliated with gangs. In terms of the length of sentences in play these included: a 10-month remand period (with the prospect of a three year sentence if found guilty), a number of 18-month – two-year DTOs, and one sentence of four years and six months. Offences ranged from burglary, aggravated burglary, robbery, aggravated robbery, wounding with intent, possession with intent to supply Class A and Class B drugs, and money laundering.

All Ashfield participants identified as being male and were targeted due to their current life circumstances. Within this context participants were exposed to a multitude of barriers ranging from the necessary constraints placed upon their everyday movements to those imposed as sanctions for any part which they had played in instances of institutional unrest. Academics and government officials alike recognise the potential risk factors that can increase the likelihood of certain individuals (re)entering the custodial system and these were reflected in participant questionnaire responses which suggested that 66% were either in single parent or other households, that none were receiving any form of benefits, and that 65% had few or no formal educational qualifications. Figure 4 (below) presents an overview of the questionnaire responses from Ashfield participants highlighting aspects of their vulnerability.



**FIGURE 4.** Characteristics of Urban Stars participants (percentages) at Ashfield HMP and YOI.

These data present an insightful picture of the demographic of Urban Stars participants within Ashfield. Even though 65% had no formal educational qualifications, 33% had 5 GCSEs or above, with 11% possessing A-levels. These figures counter the general assumptions made of youth in custody and shed further light on the lives of vulnerable young people. Whilst all Urban Stars participants within Ashfield were seen to be at risk because of the fact that they were currently serving a custodial sentence, these circumstances acted as a platform for their engagement with Urban Stars.

Having provided some background and context on the lifestyle circumstances of the young people involved in the research, we turn now to an overview of the academic and policy literature in this area.



## 4.0 SPORT, YOUTH AND SOCIAL CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW

### 4.1 SPORT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Sport has long been viewed as a tool for the 'crisis management' of social ills (see Houlihan, 1991) and as a vehicle through which governments have sought to ease a variety of wider political concerns. During the late 1950s and early 60s, the Albermarle (1959) and Wolfenden (1960) reports began to explicitly promote such a view, alluding to sport's potential to control and pacify anti-social behaviour. During the 1980s, sporting provision was framed as an 'essential social service' in the battle to reduce urban unrest; such values being poignantly reflected in the Sports Council's earliest 'Sport for all' campaign. In the 1975 White paper on 'Sport and Recreation', the Department of Education viewed "participation in active recreation" as a necessary measure in "reducing delinquency among young people" (1975: 3), and further endorsed the Sports Council's response to the 1981 inner-city riots with the introduction of campaigns such as "Action Sport".

Academic debate has tended to criticise these more traditional approaches to social intervention as being weak on social inclusion (Giddens, 2009) or for using sport to reinforce 'policing tactics' (Houlihan, 1991; Henry, 2001). This is evident in the way in which some early interventions (aimed at providing additional sporting and recreational opportunities in the inner-cities) failed to recognise the economic and racial tensions that often fuelled rioting and social disorder (Scarman Report, 1981; Coghlan and Web, 1990). Against this broader backdrop (and amidst rising youth unemployment rates) there is evidence to suggest that those aged between 16-19 are currently failing to engage in key sports such as football, tennis and swimming (Sport England, 2012). It is widely accepted that sport has the potential to operate as a vehicle for social change, and it is with this premise in mind that Urban Stars looks to positively transform both individuals and communities through grassroots sport.

The rhetoric of 'sport for good' commonly underpins community development programmes where grassroots outreach has capitalised on sport's capacity to bring people together. Sports based community development is informed, (indeed, driven), by a social justice and equalities agenda and, therefore, encompasses a flexible, adaptable, informal, consultative, people-centred approach aimed at addressing deficiencies in mainstream provision (Hylton and Totten, 2006). According to Collins (1995), such provision often enables and encourages people to access sporting opportunities.

In recent times, sports development has shifted to encompass a more holistic outlook whereby wider social inclusion objectives have been emphasised and where principles of ownership and empowerment, traditionally rooted in community development work, have been embraced. The emphasis is thus upon developing individuals rather than on facilitating sports performance, competition or talent identification (Collins and Pitchford, 2010). To this end, multi-agency use of sport as part of development programmes often juggles the various facets, roles, and responsibilities of community development with those of sports development, that is to: (i) engage vulnerable groups through a variety of mediums of which sport comprises but one core element; and (ii) ensure that the overall experience of engagement instils a greater sense of empowerment, positive development, and access to some form of training, educational pathway or exit route that ultimately increases quality of life (Hylton and Totten, 2006; Houlihan and Green, 2009). The potential for sport to be used in this way has been recognised and exemplified in and through the work of various agencies (see Sport England, 2005; Active Communities

Network, 2010). More importantly, this holistic and multifaceted approach to community sports development has enabled sport to be used as a vehicle for social inclusion.

As we have seen, in recent years sport has gained an increasingly high profile as a 'social good' (Coalter, 2004, 2008; Kay and Bradbury, 2009). It is viewed as a participatory tool that has the capacity to nurture and mobilize marginalized and disenfranchised groups (Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group, 2008; United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, 2003). It has been embraced as a vehicle for social inclusion in a range of different policy initiatives.<sup>6</sup> The benefits of inclusion in sport are multifaceted and far-reaching especially for those who are vulnerable and at-risk (Spaaij, 2011). Sport has also come to be associated with a series of positive impacts on a range of personal conditions and characteristics: increased self-confidence, self-esteem, elevated levels of motivation; reduced fatigue and depression (Coalter, 2004). It is similarly

embraced as a tool which has the capacity to nurture a sense of active citizenship and other such social attributes (Theeboom et al., 2010; Muncie, 2009; Waring and Mason, 2010). These findings highlight the extent to which the social aspect of sport can impact positively on an individual or community. Such qualities and benefits have been recognised and acclaimed in key government policies and strategies such as: Every Child Matters, Youth Matters, New Deal for Young People, Positive Activities for Young People, and Youth Inclusion Programmes.

## 4.2 SPORT AND YOUTH CRIME

Available evidence strongly suggests that sport alone is not sufficient in and of itself to combat youth crime (Coalter, 2004), but that it can work effectively if intervention occurs before delinquent behaviour sets in (Carmichael, 2008; Farrington and Welsh, 2007), and/or when it is provided alongside a range of other support structures to minimise the socialisation of criminal behaviours (Muncie, 2009). Collins (2010) and Carmichael (2008) suggest that partnerships aimed at reducing youth crime should adopt non-traditional formats by working collaboratively with the police, social services and housing agencies to ensure that appropriate individuals and communities are being identified and targeted. According to Hylton and Totten (2006) and Collins (2010), partnership working is essential to the success of any such initiative due to the range of benefits a multi-agency or collaborative approach can offer at a grassroots level, i.e. an increase in resources, knowledge, information and influence, all of which have the potential to aid successful programme delivery. Robson (2006) suggests that effective partnership working is itself reliant on an ethos of mutual benefit reiterating the importance of agreed aims, objectives and/or priorities to ensure that provision meets the needs of all partners. Robson (2008) and Collins (2010) also suggest that whilst the benefits of partnership working are often fruitful and effective in achieving specific goals, they necessitate the adoption of a youth-centred approach to delivery.

It is not unusual for community sports development projects aimed at tackling youth crime to engage with a range of young people such as those at risk of engaging in criminal activity, those who are currently offending, those who have served (or are serving) custodial sentences, and those enrolled on community rehabilitation programmes. It is essential that projects engender a holistic ethos, enabling the accommodation of the differing (and specific) needs and requirements of individuals. According to some research findings,

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Audit Commission (2009); Cabinet Office (2006); Central Council of Physical Recreation (2002); Crime Concern (2006); European Commission (2007); HM Treasury (2007); Home Office (2003); Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2004).

a focus on educational attainment is an effective way of deterring criminal behaviour and empowering and up-skilling those from such backgrounds (see, for example, Farrington and Welsh, 2007).

Walpole and Collins (2010) allude to the positive effects of sport-based education within this context, highlighting how one 'East Midlands Sport Action Zone' initiative used a sporting curriculum to enable participants to gain accredited courses in their chosen career paths. Such programmes are clearly beneficial, enabling vulnerable young people to find exit routes and pathways out of criminal activity and into meaningful (and lawful) employment. More importantly, integrating within this model discussions about the negative consequences of criminal behaviour further enables participants to see the implications and consequences of their actions with regards to the wider community.

Several successful sporting projects have been aimed at tackling youth crime and/or its associated factors. Bowtell's (2006) work highlights the potential of community sports coaches to act as effective agents who have the capacity to deter youth from crime. Community sports coaches often work with local authorities, sports governing bodies, schools, sports clubs and leisure centres to deliver sports to young people in communities. Both deploy outreach and detached youth work principles by focusing on local delivery, emphasising teamwork and communication, nurturing ownership and listening to the 'voices' of young people when seeking to increase personal development.<sup>7</sup>

According to Nichols (2007), sport has the potential to reduce youth crime in three ways: (i) as a distraction or as a surveillance mechanism, (ii) as cognitive behavioural therapy; and (iii) as 'hook' or a relationship strategy. What Nichols advocates is a rooting of sports projects within community sport development principles so as to ensure that the vehicle of sport is sufficiently and appropriately mobilised to achieve the wider social objectives of the community and the partners, as opposed to simply being promoted as an intervention tool in and of itself. The notion of sport providing a form of cognitive behavioural therapy is dependent upon project workers and leaders ensuring that a hybrid, risk-protective, value orientated approach is adopted thereby presenting appropriate values such as trust and recognition that seek to minimise criminal predispositions.

In line with the assertions of academics and policy makers, the social exclusion experiences of many Urban Stars participants are multifarious and far-reaching. Understandings of these experiences cannot be interpreted in relation to a single social factor but rather how a number of factors collude to marginalise individuals and groups from society and the communities within which they live. With all of these issues in mind, it is to the practicalities of Urban Stars programme delivery that we now turn.

<sup>7</sup> For more on how the 'voices' of young people have been more recently heard through research see: Greco et al. (2009), Hayden (2009), Johnson (2009), Pamment (2009), and Swartz (2011).

## 5.0 PROJECT FINDINGS

As we have seen, sport has long since been associated with the promotion of positive qualities, attributes and characteristics. Its ability to increase self-confidence, self-esteem and levels of motivation, as well as to induce a range of social, personal and psychological benefits, has been well documented. Over the years, these benefits have been highlighted by a range of political campaigns not only with the aim of promoting initial participation in sport, but also in an attempt to sustain long-term engagement. In more recent times, the “power of sport to do good” has contributed to its recognition as an interventionist tool to initiate and facilitate positive processes of personal and social change (Crabbe, 2007: 27).

Community development enthusiasts, for instance, have often adopted sport as a vehicle to promote and foster a range of ‘social goods’ including the targeted re/engagement of disadvantaged and marginalized social groups such as young girls and women, minority communities, and those with special needs (Green, 2006; Green, 2008). Politicians too have recognised the potential of sport to cut across social divisions, to bring people together, and to nurture a sense of collective spirit and belonging. Such claims have been central to government agendas aimed at promoting ‘social and community cohesion’ at the grassroots level (Active Communities Network, 2010). In contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to critiquing how and why it is that certain sports are able to nurture such positive effects. What the following findings present is an analysis of the way in which the Urban Stars initiative uses particular sports in specific geographical locations to stimulate and promote ‘positive social change’.

## 5.1 URBAN STARS LONDON

Across the inner city London boroughs football is the flagship vehicle for Urban Stars to engage vulnerable young people, especially on the Aylesbury and Moorlands housing estates. The Aylesbury estate is situated within Southwark, an identified area of multiple deprivation, consequently receiving substantial government funding through the New Deals for Communities initiative. The Moorlands estate, within Lambeth Borough, is also categorised as an area of deprivation, experiencing issues of gang-related crime and youth disturbance. Much of the Urban Stars outreach delivery in these areas is led and managed by two specific youth/project workers: Oli and Shinead. Both are popular amongst programme participants and respected role models for their sustained commitment to helping local people and the community. Aiming to tackle widespread exclusion in numerous guises, sport, and in particular, football has long been used as a vehicle by which to communicate with specific demographics with the intention of bringing about social change. The past decade has witnessed a widespread incorporation of the game within an extensive social inclusion agenda. The value of football as an outreach tool across the Aylesbury and Moorlands estates stems from the extent to which, over time, it has become embedded as a way that local youth can re-engage with others in their community amidst a safe and positive atmosphere. One project partner claimed that without football, the Urban Stars initiative: “... would not possess the credibility to engage specific groups [to bring about] social change”. Football was effective because of its popularity to draw in participants and its capacity to facilitate peoples’ collective abilities and desires to come together and reach out to others.

### 5.1.1 FOOTBALL: A HOOK FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT?

Football is undoubtedly one of the most popular sports in the world. Across the inner-city boroughs of London alone over 300,000 individuals participate in the game at least once per week, with the largest demographic being 16-19 year-old males (Sport England, 2011). Football is also uniquely characterised as a sport that has the potential to transcend cultures and societies alike and to engage vulnerable and excluded young people. Football was delivered at many Urban Stars hub sites, (i.e. Southwark, Croydon and Lambeth) because it was “exactly what participants wanted”. Certainly, it was not unusual for the underlying motivations to engage in Urban Stars across the Aylesbury estate to stem from “a pure love of the game”. As one young person put it “... football was the hook ... because it’s the main sport in London ... it’s what we grew up playing”. Another declared auspiciously that his “life (depended) on football”.

Comments like these illustrate the centrality of football in the everyday existence of Urban Stars participants and justify the logical inclusion of the sport as an outreach vehicle. Football was clearly more accessible to these young people than any other sport due to the vast number of London-based professional football clubs. Most notable in the areas of outreach delivery is the Crystal Palace FC Foundation which has a long-standing relationship with people in the locality and continually delivers in partnership with Active Communities Network. Football’s ability to provide access for numerous individuals on a regular basis was highlighted by one project leader who stated that: “it’s all about football ... even when we put other sessions on its football that gets the most people here. Why waste time on other things?”

Football was also an ideal choice of activity given the range of sporting heroes used to champion the initiative for young people; for example, the current Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand grew up in the London Borough of Southwark. The importance of using footballing role models was recognised both by partners and local participants alike. One partner from the Aylesbury estate stated that football stars were easily identifiable and accessible heroes for young boys growing up in “rough neighbourhoods”. In part this was because, as a sporting domain, football had enabled ordinary local people to become global stars:

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*You have to look at who are the role models for these young people when choosing a sport [to deliver]. They don't have bankers and lawyers in their environment. Rio Ferdinand is a Peckham boy and he's one of the first people they look at ... and he got out.*

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Global sporting figures like Rio Ferdinand are glorified as role models who had once lived in the vicinity but had managed to make a different life for themselves in and through their sporting involvement - without forgetting their roots. Likewise, it was not unusual for local boys to be head-hunted by professional clubs. One project worker spoke of a young man who had grown up on the Aylesbury estate and was talented enough to be scouted to play for Arsenal's junior teams. For others of his age this young man became a local hero with some claiming that by making the professional grade he would “get off the estate once and for all”. One participant spoke of the effectiveness of engagement strategies that utilised local footballing heroes, claiming that if “positive role models” are used to market the initiative, young people can easily become “hooked” because “they want to hear from a footballer”. Football was a medium through which young people could find a gateway out of their socially deprived circumstances. This issue was, of course, acknowledged by Urban Stars project workers who recognised that simply creating opportunities for participation was not enough to sustain widespread interest and involvement.

To this end, excursions to football matches, such as those at Fulham FC, participation in prestigious football tournaments at Crystal Palace FC, and access to a range of accredited sports and football courses were all adopted to sustain engagement. Such access to wider services has not only become central to Urban Stars delivery across the London hub sites, but in so doing allows participants to continue their sporting development beyond the parameters of the initiative itself. Speaking with delight about the opportunity to attend a football match and walk on the pitch at Crystal Palace FC, one participant outlined how Urban Stars had presented opportunities that would rarely be available for someone in his position:

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*We went to watch Fulham and played in a couple of tournaments through the summer ... that was the best, the highlight of all of it ... We also went on Palace's pitch and if we never did this [Urban Stars] we probably would never get these opportunities.*

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Participants recognised the value of the wider opportunities that Urban Stars offered suggesting that these experiences had been integral to their continued engagement with the programme. One participant from the

Aylesbury estate recalled how his own aspirations had changed over time due to his involvement in football:

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*... when we was (sic) younger we obviously just focussed on football, but now you see the bigger picture ... you now know Urban Stars can give you a lot more than football and we are willing to take all of it ...*

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As a result of sustained engagement in the initiative, this young boy was able to make a connection between sport being a vehicle for development/social engagement and his own interest in becoming a youth worker – whose desire it was to use sport to similarly engage other young people. The latter point cannot be underestimated given that the majority of vulnerable young people engaged in such activities rarely come across project workers (or access services) who they feel are genuinely concerned with (or passionate about) their overall personal development. Urban Stars appeared uniquely attractive in this respect.

### 5.1.2 FOOTBALL AND ‘COLLECTIVE SPIRIT’: BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER?

A prominent feature of discussion by Urban Stars participants was that of the universality of football and its ability to bring together individuals from different boroughs and postcodes. This was essential in light of recent media coverage regarding the increase in postcode rivalries amongst young people in inner city London. Crime and antisocial behaviour too are widely reported to be on the rise and are often identified as exacerbating factors in the growing sense of social unrest around the city. Speaking about this issue, one project leader highlighted the extent to which the ‘postcode war’ has not only presented the Urban Stars initiative with significant challenges regarding recruitment and engagement, but has been firmly rooted within its agenda to tackle social exclusion on the streets:

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*... the postcode issue has been a huge problem for us ... some people won't move to one area because something happened there or because of something over there ... But we need to break that barrier down, and football can bring people together under one roof.*

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The significance of providing opportunities for young people to engage with others cannot be underestimated for it not only creates potential for friendships to be built between and beyond rival groups but further enables young people to recognise and put aside their differences. The effectiveness of football to achieve this latter end was certainly echoed by one male participant who claimed that when playing football, he was able to “work with other people” whom he would not normally associate with and, through this, “get to know them and become friends”. Of course, the ability to make friends was, to an extent, reliant on the capacity of the young people concerned to communicate and engage with others. For some it clearly presented an opportunity to “chat about interests”, thereby breaking down initial preconceptions. Another boy talked about the initial worries which he had about accessing such events. However, he went on to say that once exposed to such environments young people were able to see and experience the benefits for themselves. In interview the same participant stated:

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*Here on the Moorlands [estate] ... football allows you to feel more comfortable ... You might feel intimidated at first ... but if you keep going there it gives you the confidence to play around with them, so it becomes easy to become friends and you don't fight with each other anymore.*

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The acquisition of social skills (such as teamwork) through football stands in stark contrast to the work of critical commentators who suggest that sport (and especially football) may provide a platform for the reinforcement of territorial and community boundaries. Urban Stars participants did recognise the possibility of confrontation in and through competitive games but it was generally accepted that this was simply the “nature of football”. Moreover, there was an acceptance that participants would “learn how to control the[ir] anger through Urban Stars”. Not only was the ability to communicate important, so too was relationship building, and project leaders and young people spoke passionately about the extent to which football nurtured a range of skills that were more conducive to “knowing how to ... and wanting to” engage with others.

### 5.1.3 FOOTBALL AND LIFE SKILLS

Football is said to possess the ability to change the lives of individuals through a variety of inclusionary practices (Sport England, 2011). Within academic and political discourse football is valued as a vehicle that has the potential to increase essential transferable social skills such as teamwork, leadership, decision making and problem solving in democratic ways. Football's ethos, as with other competitive team sports, rests on ideals of fair play and good sports-person-ship; characteristics that have the capacity to foster individual empathy and responsibility. When talking about the ‘transferable skills’ they had learned in and through active participation in football, a number of participants from the Aylesbury estate claimed that they had valued the opportunity to develop their team-building, confidence, empathy and punctuality. More importantly, participants realised the potential of these skills to benefit their lives:

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*I think it's best to have as many skills as you can for when life throws challenges at you; you can have that base.*

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*Confidence is so important ... it's another way to show, like, who you are ... you look different to other people, because some people are really shy but on the football pitch they are really different and more comfortable.*

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The latter testimony alludes to the impact which self-confidence can have in helping young people express themselves and, perhaps more importantly, to feel secure with the notion of ‘difference’; something which was frequently used as a point of demarcation. Project leaders reiterated these sentiments stipulating that the delivery of the Urban Stars initiative placed an emphasis on football for the “social good” rather than “football, for football's sake”; meaning that the initiative was not simply concerned with mass participation but with the wider social benefits on offer:

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*... We just use sport as a hook ... to enhance their employability skills and their ability to stay away from crime ... Sport has an ability to reach out to these kids and through that we can work to improve other aspects of their life, like leadership, respect and trust*

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These comments closely align with those of the participants above, illustrating the effectiveness of football in engaging otherwise socially excluded individuals and enhancing their skill-sets in ways that young people can themselves recognise.

Notwithstanding widespread claims that football, at the grass roots level, had significant potential to engage with diverse groups of people, like many sports, it remains a largely male preserve. Indeed, across the Urban Stars projects, football was a bastion for male involvement. The relatively low levels of female recruitment and active engagement were certainly something that concerned project leaders and coaches. Encouragingly, this was echoed by a large proportion of young male participants who felt that girls' inclusion in football was not only important but also essential in helping to break down gendered stereotypes. Some, for instance, identified that football may not be a girl's immediate choice in terms of sporting past-time, and that consultation between Urban Stars staff and young women about what they may prefer to participate in was a progressive move towards more balanced social engagement.

In acknowledging the potential of football to nurture positive (individual and social) change, young people themselves identified a number of significant impacts accrued from their own participation in these activities and it is to a closer analysis of these that we now turn.

### 5.1.4 ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

As we have seen, a significant impact of Urban Stars London on notions of community engagement was the way in which young people began to recognise and admire specific role models and to identify with mentors who had the skills and expertise to help nurture positive life changes. Although the terms ‘role model’ and ‘mentor’ are often used synonymously, the latter operate in a distinctly different way. Role models are identified as individuals who are held in high regard for a variety of reasons, such as their performances as professional sportspeople or their work with individuals through a sporting intervention. Hence, when questioned around this topic participants were quick to identify role models outside of their environment such as professional footballers. Points of identification for young people here were that they identified with the practical and physical skills that role models possessed and the teams for which they played, rather than any specific attribute that the individual demonstrated or, indeed, the impact that they had on the lives of young people. In this way, role models were respected for their talent, and for “making it big” – which, of course, highlights a young person's desire to be successful. Mentors, on the other hand, seek to actively develop positive features and attributes in (young) people, primarily through face-to-face, ‘live’ contact. The result of this contact may be knowledge transfer, building relationships, networks and friends, creating opportunities outside of the individual's immediate orbits, boosting morale, broadening horizons. When asked to talk about mentoring, many young people identified project workers – “real people” – as their mentors. They spoke of Oli and Shinead, and Earl, for instance, and valued the impact that these individuals had had on

their lives. Talking about their role as a mentor, one Urban Stars project leader stated:

*You're not just there to do your job, you actually care for them and want the best for them ... that is your job, to care! And if the young people see that then they will show an interest. They respect you for it, they bond with you and through that bond, that friendship, you can begin to work in a way that make a difference in that person's life because you know what the problems are and able to help them find solutions or develop their skills to tackle the problem independently.*

In many ways these comments highlight the raison d'être for much of the work of Urban Stars. It is focused on 'helping young people', on reaching out to them and better enabling them to change their lives and the lives of others. Importantly, for the young people concerned, project workers (such as Oli who had worked on the Aylesbury estate) were revered for the things they had done for and with local children. Indeed, it was this ability to care, to empathise, to create a sense of difference for young people that was most valued. According to one participant, this was how Oli had "made it big":

*He does a lot for us ... helping us and that ... Telling us stuff ... he takes time out of his everyday life. He'll stay an hour longer with us, when others leave, so he's cool and we get on with him.*

The personal qualities and level of commitment spoken of here provide a sense of reassurance for programme participants which, in turn, sustains their involvement in Urban Stars and maximises the potential of programme delivery for positive social change. Oli was seen as a "guardian" by some thus highlighting that key aspects of mentoring are taking place amidst day-to-day interactions with young people. When asked about their own involvement in Urban Stars, some participants claimed that they were role models for others and many aspired to be mentors. Similar issues were evident where a number of successful Urban Stars partnerships had been established.

### 5.1.5 FOOTBALL AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Fostering positive change in young people is a central part of the Urban Stars initiative and is framed around the ethos of better enabling participants to engage with society, and in many cases, to better enable them to acquire skills and training that will aid their search for employment. One Urban Stars project worker confirmed this, suggesting that helping young people to make positive life-transitions was a central feature of the initiative, particularly in a climate of increasing economic austerity:

*Our aim is to provide training and development for participants and leaders because the world is changing day by day ... this is a big role of Urban Stars, to help support young peoples' development in an ever-changing world*

In terms of quantifying the social impact of football on the lives of programme participants, Figure 5 (below) presents the findings of questionnaire data obtained from the inner London Boroughs demonstrating the impact of football on young people's confidence and self-esteem (78%), the ability to appreciate the importance of hard-work (61%), a willingness to invest in their future (70%), take decisions regarding their life (67%), organise their time (61%), try new things (69%), feel able to work independently (74%) and as part of a team (75%), and generally be more motivated and goal-orientated (72%). These data highlight the power of sport to change the lives of young people engaged in the initiative.

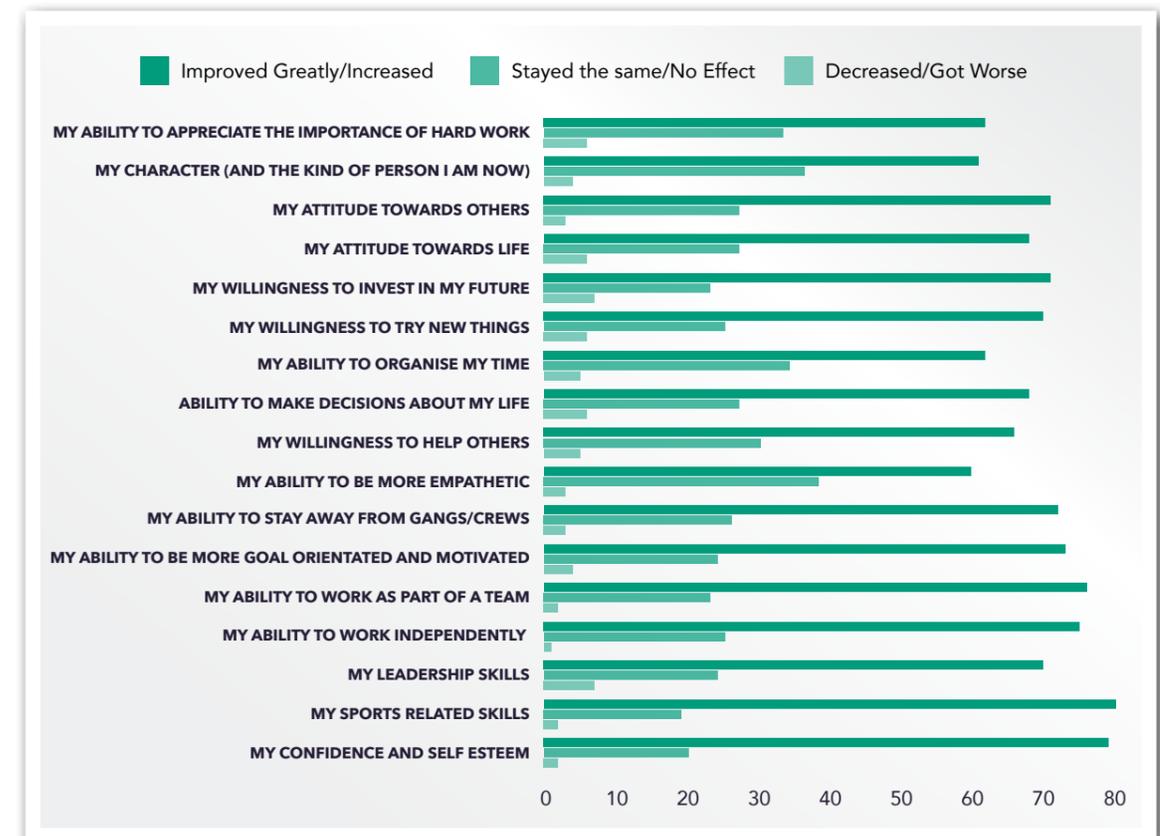


FIGURE 5. Impact of Urban Stars football delivery on personal characteristics.

There was ample evidence to suggest that established Urban Stars projects were working to induce the kinds of positive changes that were required to help young people deal with local problems. In turn, Urban Stars was working effectively in helping young people to develop personal characteristics that would be conducive to them dealing more appropriately with 'postcode' rivalries: 70% of participants confirmed that they were willing to stay away from (more reluctant to get involved with) gangs and 'crews'. Participants' ability to empathise with others, to show tolerance and have the capacity to control confrontation was also recognised. On the Aylesbury estate, for instance, an area that has historically been acknowledged as one of high socio-economic deprivation, Urban Stars had firmly embedded itself with local young people and community residents. Recognising local rivalries and gang activity, Oli talked at length about providing a sporting infrastructure that would better suit the needs of local young people. With Urban Stars devised an 'anger management' resource, encouraging participants to 'red

flag' themselves in moments of stress, allowing time out to calm down and think about possible consequences of negative action. Speaking about his experiences of participating on the course, one local boy claimed that he had not only learned to curb his anger ("an essential life skill on and of the pitch", as he identified), but that his engagement had contributed significantly to the development of his communication skills and levels of confidence whilst also providing experience of problem-solving, rationalising and managing difficult situations: all key issues which would be vital in relation to his coaching aspirations.

Likewise, on the Moorlands estate (an area renowned for gang-related activity and antisocial behaviour), in order to facilitate opportunities for young people to build connections and make friends across 'turf territories', an 'All-In MUGA (multi-use games area) Night Football League' was set up with the aim of drawing in young people of varying ages from different ethnic groups and postcodes. This was also a time when young people could build their inter-generational contacts with older and younger participants being invited to engage. This was challenging for some as it required people to step outside of their 'comfort zones' and to express an interest in reaching out to others to make new friends. For those suffering from low self-esteem this can be an extremely difficult task. One participant spoke of how he had learned to overcome his initial fears of engaging with others through participating in 'MUGA Night Football'. In time he also came to understand that the development of communication skills was essential for success not only in the MUGA but, more importantly, in the 'real world'.

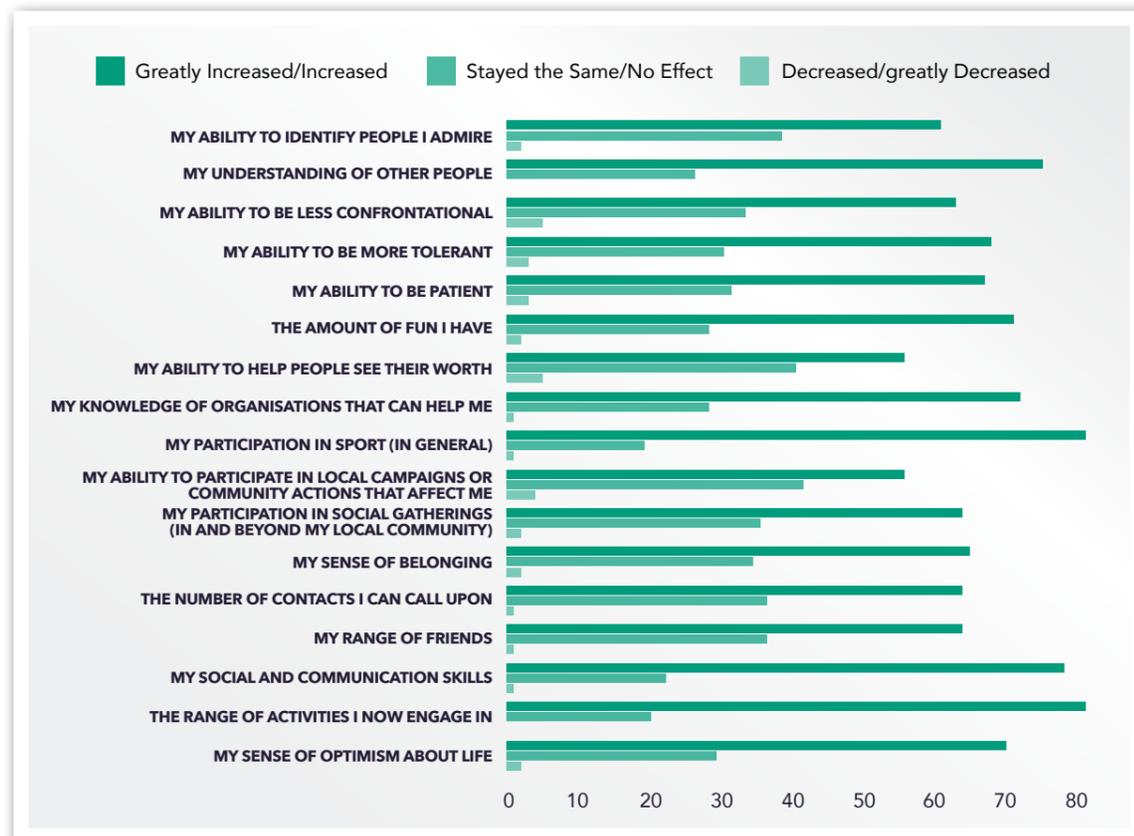


FIGURE 6. Impact of Urban Stars football delivery on social engagement.

Figure 6 illustrates the impact of Urban Stars delivery on a range of social characteristics amongst committed London participants. For example, within a physical benefits domain, participants experienced a distinct increase in their sport participation (80%) alongside a variation in the activities which they participated in (80%). Importantly, participants engaged in football provision experienced increases in all of the recorded social characteristics such as their communication skills (77%), their social capital (63%) and their participation in social activities (63%) and campaigns (55%). Participants also realised an increase in their belonging (64%), patience (66%) and tolerance (67%), which, in light of the inferences above, demonstrates the instrumental role that sport played in the increase of participants social attributes.

Such data provide a snapshot of the increase in social engagement experienced by Urban Stars participants. One young man from the Aylesbury estate spoke of his experiences of an off-site residential trip: 'The Aylesbury Exchange'. The event was jointly organised by Active Communities Network and their counterparts at another sports-based initiative in Dublin and facilitated a two-week exchange visit between programme participants from both locations. The overarching objective was to provide young people with opportunities to enhance social competencies such as widening their friendship networks, enhancing their communication skills, and increasing their levels of confidence. Participants also spoke of another event where young people were given the opportunity to enhance their problem-solving, entrepreneurial and leadership skills. The 'Now we are the Teachers' event was devised via links with a partner agency and provided constructive opportunities for young people to work with local primary schools and nurseries to deliver a sports-based curriculum of football, basketball and cricket. Young people spoke passionately about this event identifying a multitude of benefits that it had spawned:

*We got a whole new experience working with little kids, because we have never done anything like it before ... some of us decided that we would do well in a career as a PE teacher but others realised that they were good with working with the kids, but hated the school environment so they thought more about working as sports coaches and youth workers. It was a great experience, we never really have chances to think about our future, people don't give us that chance*

The most significant impact that such events had on young people was signposting them to potential career outlets. They were also able to develop their leadership skills (69%), an essential benefit for Urban Stars participants due to the demands of the programme itself but also important within the wider world where leadership qualities are often seen as a vital ingredient for success not only on the sports field but also within a multitude of other social settings such as employment. Speaking of the aims and objectives of Urban Stars, one project worker echoed how essential the initiative was in nurturing sociability skills, and providing opportunities for such skills to be applied and demonstrated to others:

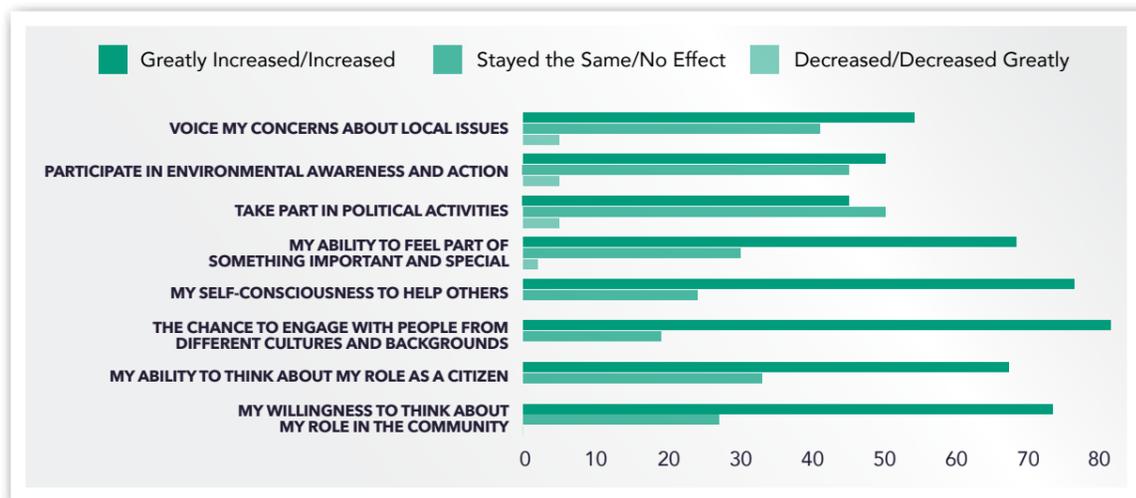
*We're all about how we can give more young people opportunities through sport ... how they can become Ambassadors through the program, more importantly, about targeting young people that are really hard to reach...*

*to improve their quality of life ... and witnessing whether it does have an impact on them, measuring this impact or being able to see it for ourselves and for the kids too, is so important.*

Engagement and participation in community or civic life is said to be an essential marker of being or feeling 'socially included'. However, the community impact of sporting interventions is a minefield of contestation and ambiguity. Practical problems involve communication with local residents, providing appropriate offers of engagement and actually attracting attendees. Project workers at Urban Stars recognised that some of their delivery sites carried a sense of social stigma which further impeded progress at a grassroots level; that is, certain places had 'reputations' that prevented people from wanting to establish development programmes to help the locals:

*On the estate, if you're not from round here you are going to be scared because all the estate looks the same ... and for someone coming into the area they might be frightened and think that they are going to get robbed ... It really can put a spanner in the works, and we try to recognise this but work to overcome it too*

In addition to these practical 'delivery' problems also evident are wide ranging views regarding the effects of programmes on host communities. Some believe that such interventions bring communities together and enhance a sense of affinity amongst participants. Others believe that such interventions serve only to exacerbate divisions between groups and to provide sites where territorial advantage can be reinforced. Figure 7 (below) illustrates the impact of football on young peoples' ability and capacity to engage with their community and to 'give something back'. A noticeable increase is evident in participants' engagement with individuals from different cultures and backgrounds (81%), a self-consciousness to help others (76%), a willingness to think about their role in the community (73%) and their ability to be part of something important and special (68%). These results illustrate the role that Urban Stars plays in re-engaging potentially fragmented communities and in targeting vulnerable groups.



**FIGURE 7.** Impact of Urban Stars football delivery on community engagement.

Increments in these aspects of social development certainly reflect the capacity of Urban Stars to minimise feelings of exclusion and to encourage young people to think about others and the role that they can play in a local context to foster positive social change. Participants alluded to a number of activities that had helped them in this respect. For instance, a 'fundraising' event was organised in Southwark to encourage young people from the Aylesbury estate to think not only about themselves but the extent to which they were in a more privileged position than those around them. Participants spoke positively about the event with one recalling that it enabled him to: "understand his community, and other people's communities more". In this way he came to understand the importance of individuals in a community working towards enhancing the quality of life in that local demographic:

*I learned a lot about our community and how to get along with our community. We take this stuff for granted but if these people weren't around for us, we'd be worse off. Having them here and doing our little bit is about giving them back something that they give to us all the time.*

Others stated that the event helped "isolated people get out of their house", and "put a smile on peoples' faces". These comments certainly reinforce participants' understandings of the importance of community engagement and the central role that initiatives like Urban Stars can play in changing the mind-set of young people who may otherwise be disinterested in their local communities. In essence, community engagement was a means by which young people's negative perceptions of social engagement were being challenged.

### 5.1.6 FOOTBALL AND PARTNERSHIP

Working in a recognised area of multiple deprivation a number of agencies and organisations have attempted to utilise the power of social inclusion interventions to overcome social exclusion barriers on the Aylesbury estate. In light of this dedication the creation of partnerships sharing similar objectives is inevitable and is characterised by the relationship between Urban Stars and 2Inspire. 2Inspire is a youth focussed social inclusion intervention tackling exclusion through engagement in the arts and learning within communities. The partnership has been in place for many years and builds upon the previous success of partnerships between individuals in previous roles. Working in partnership in this locality has been fruitful for both organisations with continuous overlap evident between their activities. At the centre of effective partnership has been the identification of the strengths of partner organisations and strategic thinking about how resources might be pooled, this within the context of the varying aims and interests of the respective parties, as one of the project leaders indicated:

*I am more arts orientated whereas they [Urban Stars] are more sports orientated. We have a joint partnership with them. We do a lot of joint work. We have joint publicity and we work together to bring a lot winter and summer programs ... for anyone in the SE17 area to access.*

This snapshot highlights the overlap in delivery between the two organisations. Whilst the aims and objectives of the parties are distinct, common goals exist and these have been identified and built upon.

Of course, like any working relationship of this nature, partnership around social inclusion brought with it a specific set of problems. Marketing and participant engagement had, at times, proved difficult. One partner recollected how her initial attempts to engage with potential participants had been futile on account of the fact that her design of marketing materials failed to impact recruitment. As an alternative she adopted a more consultative approach and recruited some “quite keen volunteers ... we trained them on Photoshop and got them to make the flyers”. The partner recalled how she initially thought that the flyer designed by the volunteers was “tacky” and unlikely to engage participants. However, contrary to this she noted that it ‘sold’ to her target age group.

The time given over to engaging the skills of the volunteers illustrates the facilitation of a consultative process that allowed the partner to access knowledge that was otherwise unavailable to her and provided a marketing tool that met the needs (and tastes) of potential participants. The utilisation of the skills of these young people highlights the importance (and effectiveness) of a grassroots approach. In turn, it seeks to reinforce the need for the involvement of young people in the design and delivery of youth-based projects to ensure a sense of ownership and suitability.

A partnership in only its second year, Urban Stars and its relationship with a local housing trust on the Moorlands estate was a logical step for both organisations on account of the lack of social inclusion provision in the locality and the construction of a new community centre. Those at Urban Stars did not underestimate the challenge ahead highlighting that they “... had to introduce a whole new programme... trying to get people to understand” what they did. The partner illustrated a sound understanding of the role of Urban Stars: “Urban Stars provides the main youth engagement programme on the Moorlands ... providing a non- contact boxing session, a dance session and a generic youth club session a week”. In this particular partnership, the partner agency provided the facilities and Urban Stars provided the delivery. These comments stand in stark contrast to the desired nature of partnership from an Urban Stars perspective. From their point of view the partner:

*... very much has its own aims and objectives ... around youth development ... it would have been better in the past if we had sat down jointly because I'm sure there are some similar objectives across both organisations ... but we are probably just not aware of them such as getting young people into accreditation and engaging with residents.*

The initial lack of communication between the two agencies illustrates some of the perils of partnership working when new relationships are formed. Despite the apparent absence of shared aims, objectives and understandings the success of Urban Stars delivery seemingly remained unaffected, as one representative from the partner agency suggested: “Urban Stars has been really, really valuable to Moorlands”. In turn, there is a real desire on behalf of the partner to progress the partnership “... and to really develop it ... because it has been a really cohesive programme”. However, these positive comments were accompanied by a sense that things might have been better thought out in terms of ownership and joint-working: “... there has always been the feeling that we are providing the space, but Urban Stars is providing its own programme”. This illustrates the need for agencies to formalise partnership agreements from the outset if possible, to clarify roles and responsibilities, and to maintain open communication thereby maximising synergy and impact through delivery.

## 5.2 URBAN STARS WEST MIDLANDS

Boxing was the sport which was most appealing to a number of local statutory and voluntary agency partners involved with Urban Stars in the West Midlands. Emphasis was placed upon providing weekly training programmes with targeted small groups from a range of different organisations in and through specific referral programmes. The benefit of this approach was that bespoke packages could be crafted and delivered with both individual young people and the agencies concerned in mind. In many cases, boxing was incorporated as an adjunct to other sustained forms of support that young people received. To this end, it came to be viewed as one of many avenues via which ‘vulnerable’ and disadvantaged individuals could improve their social position in a society that frequently stigmatised and/or criminalised them.

### 5.2.1 BOXING AS A CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

Boxing was valued both by unemployed young people and those not presently in education or training as something constructive which positively impacted their free time. For many this was because sessions were not merely about the acquisition of physical skill and technique but were underpinned by an educational focus enabling committed and talented young people to gain accredited sports qualifications. In addition, Urban Stars delivery provided routes into amateur boxing. A number of coaches identified that for young people who were struggling to “find (their) way into the world of work” the educational and developmental opportunities provided through the initiative were especially important. For participants like 17-year old Hamza, training sessions not only created a legitimate entry point into the boxing world but also enabled him to embark on a pathway that was more conducive to his self-development as an individual with a ‘purpose’ and a more ‘focused’ approach to daily life:<sup>8</sup>

*It [boxing] opened doors for me I didn't know I could go through ... I couldn't be bothered before, but when I found out I was good at it, I wanted to try harder... I jus' realised that I was naturally good at boxing ... I felt like I had something to focus on ...*

What Hamza’s testimony also highlights is the extent to which boxing helped to enthuse him. This was certainly an important factor that appealed to a number of other young people, especially those who were struggling to motivate themselves, to find their ‘calling in life’, or to identify something that engaged their interests and passions. For those who discovered that they were ‘good’ at boxing, training sessions emerged as key places where hidden talents could be unearthed. They were also places which young people often entered believing themselves to be decidedly ‘unskilled’ yet departed “feeling great”, especially those who claimed that they had struggled to find “anything they were good at”. Developing competencies and skills (no matter how significant), knowing how to effectively apply these in training sessions, and receiving rewards were all central to inducing positive behaviours and thoughts, even where apathy, resentment and boredom had previously reigned. In part, such a positively charged experience stemmed from knowing that praise was rarely given in boxing circles unless rightfully earned. Hence, those who received a “pat on the back” felt exhilarated about themselves, their performance and, more importantly, their ‘self-progress’ (and self-change).

<sup>8</sup> In the interests of anonymity, where the testimonies of programme participants feature, pseudonyms have been used throughout. Pseudonyms have also been adopted for a selection of Urban Stars project staff.

For targeted young people deemed to be 'at-risk' of (further) isolation and exclusion, boxing sessions were also valued as 'safe spaces' that were strategically accessible at times when individuals could potentially gravitate towards "trouble spots in the rough neighbourhoods" (e.g., street corners, parks, derelict landscapes). Boxing was also a much sought-after engagement tool and small-group placements were often embedded as an obligatory part of already-existing youth development structures targeting those who felt excluded, isolated, vulnerable and/or 'at risk'; i.e. those who had experienced disadvantage in their daily lives, as well as those currently living in a recurring cycle of personal danger and fear. Those on community rehabilitation programmes with the Youth Offending Service, for instance, were expected to complete at least four hours of boxing per week as part of their 25 hour Supervision Orders. In many cases, the practical boxing sessions complimented the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) that many received as part of their rehabilitation. Hence, CBT enabled supervisors to "focus on how young offenders were thinking", to "assess and evaluate how their thinking was changing" and to identify "new ways of inducing positive cognitive behavioural changes that would promote a better quality of life for that young person" (YOS, Birmingham). At the same time, boxing sessions provided a physical space where the focus on tackling behavioural factors that contribute to a young person's offending were made visible and put into context to induce positive change. This dual support process meant that 'at risk' young people were taught how to change their thinking as well as their behaviours, attitudes and approaches to better facilitate their ability to re/integrate (back) into their respective communities.

### 5.2.2 BOXING AND MASCULINE MYTHS

Discussions with stakeholders, community partners and grassroots development workers revealed that boxing had enormous 'transformative' and 'empowering' potential to foster positive youth development and, in turn, to facilitate social change in the lives of committed young people. What was especially appealing about boxing was that it challenged the particular ideas that many offenders and 'at-risk' young people held about body size, power and masculinity; ideas that would generally encourage problematic behaviour on the street where it was important for them to bolster their kudos. Speaking at length about this, Dave, a Supervisor from the Youth Offending Service in Birmingham, stated:

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*A lot of our lads might walk in here and see the weights and just gravitate towards them ... there's a whole subculture around why they want to use weights ... they assume size equals power and status ... There's issues with masculinity and how these guys feel they need to prove their masculinity ... but boxing exposes all these myths ... they see the pro-boxers, the really skinny lads who are super fit and powerful and can actually do a lot of damage, but they don't ... they're really calm and disciplined, and they realise that size doesn't always equal strength or power ...*

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More importantly, Dave claimed that boxing helped some young people understand that having the skills to fight did not necessarily mean that they had to utilise them on the streets to prove themselves. Richie Woodhall, ex-professional boxer and a key advocate for Urban Stars, reiterated this point alluding to a case where boxing (and the ethos of professional boxers) had transformed a number of 'bad-boys' into respectable young men:

We had some of our professional boxing lads do a spar for the guys in Aston and these lads ... thought they were something else, they were really rough and tough and boisterous but as soon as they saw the sessions, and saw the pro's going at it hard, you could see them thinking "Oh my god – these guys are proper!" and actually from that moment they were just different - ready and alert and they wanted to give it their all. They gave these guys a lot of respect and didn't mess about.

### 5.2.3 BOXING AND DISCIPLINE

Disciplined training schedules, coupled with the calm and controlled demeanour of professional boxers outside of the ring, appealed greatly to a number of targeted agencies already working with 'at-risk' groups. Young people arriving from Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), mainstream schools and the local Police for displaying various forms of social, emotional and behavioural unrest were encouraged (and, indeed, expected) to commit to weekly boxing sessions because of the cathartic effects that these often had. Circuit training and 'pad work' were central features of these sessions and sought not only to reduce levels of aggression, but also to draw young people's attention to the negative consequences of harbouring anger, resentment and confrontational attitudes for sustained periods of time:

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*The discipline side of boxing is important and they wouldn't get it with usual gym routine ... At the gym they might get caught up with the who-size-power mentality, but the boxing gives them team-building skills. They learn how to respect individuals, how to keep time, how to live a nutritious life, how to control their own behaviour, how to control their own anger and the negative impact all that anger and aggression can have on your performance, your learning of skills and your own emotional levels ... We do a lot of theoretical sessions on anger management etcetera as part of their Intensive Supervision Surveillance Programmes but the patterns of behaviour they see and experience here in boxing are a good way of making the young people see these theoretical skills for themselves ...*

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**SIMON, YOS MENTOR, COVENTRY**

### 5.2.4 ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

There was widespread belief amongst project delivery teams that boxing sessions not only promoted a sense of identity via the creation of friendships between young people, but also via the creation of strong personal and social bonds between young people and the professional sports coaches involved. A number of statutory and voluntary agency partners agreed that this was, in fact, one of the most valuable contributions that boxing made to the lives of 'at-risk' youth. Richie Woodhall talked about how, for some, the coach was almost a 'substitute' or 'surrogate' father-figure providing the right kind of support, nurturing the right kind of attitude and listening to the young person in a way that they were unaccustomed:

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*There's a lot of respect between the boxer and the coach; more than any other sport really. For kids who are from deprived backgrounds and probably don't have many good role models, especially at home, the*

*respect they have for their coach is just incredible. We know kids who are hard as nails, but they will not talk back to their boxing coach ... there's just something there, it's inbred with the whole atmosphere of boxing really. Boxing coaches don't give out praise a lot so, when they do, it's really meaningful and the relationship becomes special and is often cherished for a long time.*

Certainly, the transformative potential of boxing appeared to be heavily rooted in the coaching techniques used. Just as the one-to-one training relationship between coach and young person was seen as 'special', so too was the continued and targeted mentoring which often followed which focused on personal/life skills and individual journeys of self-development. This meant that young talent could not only be spotted but also supported longer term thereby enabling individual young people to reach their own goals. Transformative potential lay also in the fact that as an individual sport, boxing enabled programme participants to "move at their own pace". Hence, their success and progress was dependant on them listening to and acting upon guidance from their coach. Jez, one of the Birmingham-based coaches, spoke about this:

*Whereas in football you might only be as good as your team, boxing is much more about the individual ... you can take one step forward or a massive leap forward and everyone moves at different levels ... And it's up to you really. You set your own goals in our sessions, even if you're being coached together.*

This style of coaching and mentoring meant that young people came to realise that their progress was dependent upon their own efforts, and not on those of others. This being the case, young people were able to learn about the importance of setting (and taking responsibility for achieving) their own goals. For some, this meant mastering the next skill, for others it was simply about improving their fitness levels or realising the damage that their unhealthy lifestyles (excessive drinking, smoking cannabis, hanging around with the 'wrong crowd') could have on their physical and mental state. Fundamentally, it was the mentoring techniques used in boxing that encouraged many young people to adopt an attitude that was conducive to their self-reparation. In some, it evoked a new-found sense of enthusiasm and motivation to help themselves. This was essential given that, as one boxing coach (Steve) from Coventry highlighted, apathy was often the biggest barrier to young people from bettering themselves:

*... the lack of motivation is a big barrier for most of them so once they start coming here and see the positive changes, it changes their mentality. They start reaching out for things. They start setting goals, they want to push themselves ...*

Self-motivation (either to seek personal help or to improve their social situation) was identified as a pivotal factor for young people in both evoking a rehabilitative state of mind and facilitating a greater level of community engagement, and was clearly something that boxing had the potential to unleash. In part this was because participation instilled a mentality that

better enabled young people to challenge, if not counteract, negative public narratives about who they were. Perhaps unsurprisingly, youth workers, learning mentors, and sports coaches all recognised the empowering potential in the social aspects of boxing, stating that sessions enabled similarly marginalised young people to congregate, to make friends, and to meet groups of professionals working to foster positive social change in their lives. Mike, a project co-ordinator from Coventry, felt that boxing often exposed young people to a range of role models and mentors who were genuinely committed to helping them and which, in turn, not only increased the range of people they might call upon for help, but also encouraged them to pro-actively seek available opportunities and services. Amidst a range of different support networks, alongside which boxing offered complimentary functions such as positive youth development and a range of more desirable social, behavioural and emotional changes, for Mike, grassroots Urban Stars projects helped to "bring otherwise excluded young people back into the fold of the community". Endorsing this point, the Regional Development Manager for the Urban Stars initiative in the West Midlands stated that:

*Urban Stars in the West Midlands uses boxing to have a social change on the young people we work with, from the smallest of things like preventing anti-social behaviour, keeping out of trouble, to reducing their involvement in crime, and increasing self-confidence, to promote better behaviour at schools ... whatever that change might be, but creating that smallest change to facilitate the biggest change in the young person's life.*



### 5.2.5 BOXING AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Coalter (2007) suggests that sport(s) have the ability to engage a myriad of diverse demographics due to their allure and perceived benefits. These range from the physical to the psychological; a space permitting individuals to release stress but more importantly providing social situations where skills such as leadership, confidence and communication can be discovered and enhanced exponentially. Sport has also been identified as a vehicle through which young people's sense of self (image/worth) can improve. In the West Midlands, boxing was strategically used to enhance aspects of participants' personal and character development, as well as their social and community engagement potential.

Figure 8 highlights a series of personal characteristics that participants identified as 'increasing or improving', 'decreasing or getting worse' or 'staying the same' as a result of their boxing engagement. These data illustrate that certain aspects of individual participant's personal character had increased and/or improved greatly, especially those skills conducive to attaining a 'positive outlook and attitude towards life': e.g. confidence and self-esteem (75%), the ability to appreciate the importance of hard-work (86%), a willingness to invest in their future (95%), take decisions regarding their life (91%), organise their time (87%), try new things (97%), feel able to work independently (84%) and as part of a team (87%), and generally be more motivated and goal-orientated (94%). These findings reinforce the notion that boxing provided something constructive for young people to do to, and particularly benefited their ability to transform their own way of thinking to embody an altogether more positive ("can do") spirit.

Young people's positive and committed approach to overcoming social exclusion, to finding work, and to generally seeking to change their outlook on life was something that project workers and partners in the West Midlands valued. One Urban Stars sports coach in Birmingham spoke of a young boy who had changed his demeanour and entered a committed, stable relationship, "as opposed to hanging around with bad lads" as a consequence of attending boxing:

*One of our lads was sent here 'cos he was always getting into fights, causing trouble, getting into trouble, and I hadn't seen him for ages and then Richie saw him after ages and the guy had gotten married. When you first saw him, you thought to yourself, this guy won't be able to get a girlfriend let alone get married ... he said the training side of things just made him grow up a little bit, it made him think differently about life*

Boxing across the West Midlands was also identified as enabling young people to stay away from the 'wrong crowds' (94%). This was reinforced by a boxing coach from Coventry who talked about the significant transformation he had witnessed in the life of one young man who had been on the verge of being in trouble with the police but through boxing had changed his outlook on life and found work - much of which stemmed from a sustained period of mentoring by his dedicated coach:

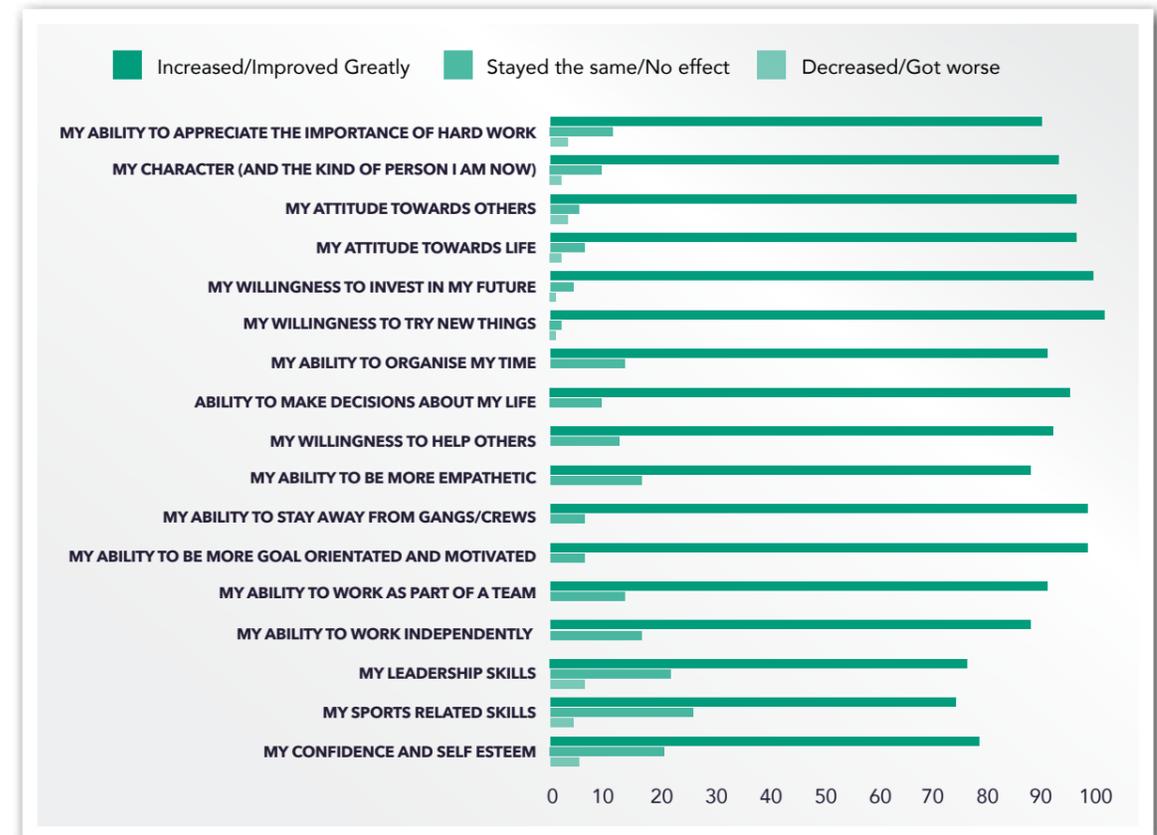


FIGURE 8. Impact of Urban Stars boxing delivery on personal characteristics

*One lad came to us; he hadn't been in any trouble with the police but there were worries that if he continued on the path he was on, he would end up in prison serving a custodial sentence. He came to our gym for about three months and he's now a taxi driver ... you'd never have thought he'd get his licence, but he pushed himself and focused because of the boxing. He said it made him think differently, it taught him how to set a goal for himself and how to work hard to get that goal. He put his training to good use and found himself a job, he was earning his own money and he was happy because he felt worthwhile.*

Social skills are often identified as being central to the ability of young people to integrate with their respective communities. Urban Stars participants in the West Midlands were asked about the potential for boxing to facilitate their social engagement with others. Figure 9 highlights the range of social skills participants claimed 'increased', 'decreased' or 'stayed the same' as a result of boxing engagement. On the whole it is evident that boxing helped young people to be more physically active (88%). It also improved their 'sociability status' increasing their 'social and communication skills' (62%) and their sense of optimism about life (71%). Ritchie Woodhall talked about the significant social changes in one young boy who often isolated himself from social settings:

*I always remember this one lad because the change in him was incredible. He used to walk with his head down; he wouldn't interact with anyone, he just didn't socialise with anyone, wouldn't speak to anyone ... But the boxing sessions completely changed him. He would never miss a session. He was there early. He was the first to start the training, keen to get started, you know, gave 100% of himself to the session, and completely changed his personality. You could see the changes. Because he had changed, he was walking upright; he was confident; he was proud of himself. He was a young man.*

For others, boxing curbed undesirable attitudinal and behavioural characteristics that often contributed to their social exclusion. For instance, boxing was identified as helping young people feel less confrontational (92%), more tolerant (91%) and patient (88%). It was also crucial in helping young people identify role-models and people they admired (88%), and made them more aware of people and organisations they could turn to for help (88%). For some it instilled a greater sense of belonging (57%) and enabled them to have fun (65%). These benefits were certainly echoed by a number of programme leaders and sports coaches working to deliver Urban Stars programmes:

*... letting them [participants] meet new people, not just young people, but professional adults who are there to help kids like them is a great thing in itself ... if they can build their networks of people they can call on for help, they're more likely to ask you for help and therefore empower themselves to change their lives.*

**PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR COVENTRY**

*Providing something for young people to do ... it's definitely a more positive use of their time instead of them just sitting at home doing nothing. Plus, it keeps them busy for a few hours and this prevents them from doing things that would otherwise get them into trouble.*

**PROGRAMME LEADER, BIRMINGHAM**

Even though Figure 9 illustrates that young people's understanding of others did not necessarily improve as a result of attending boxing sessions, testimonies from focus group interviews revealed otherwise. Resulting evidence suggested that the social contact element of boxing was essential in breaking down initial barriers between racially segregated communities in Coventry, an issue which one young boy alluded to during focus group discussion:

*Lots of Romanian kids used to come here, [but] ... the Asian kids wouldn't really know 'um. Plus, the Slovakian kids were horrible to the Afghani kids and you hear this stuff and you wouldn't talk to 'um and that. But when they come here and you chat to 'um, it's good because you find out that they're exactly like you. They're just*

*kids too. They like the same things we do and that, and once you start talking, you become friends so the next time you're walking somewhere and you see 'um, you stop and say hello ... like you don't cause trouble between them and us anymore because you know 'um.*

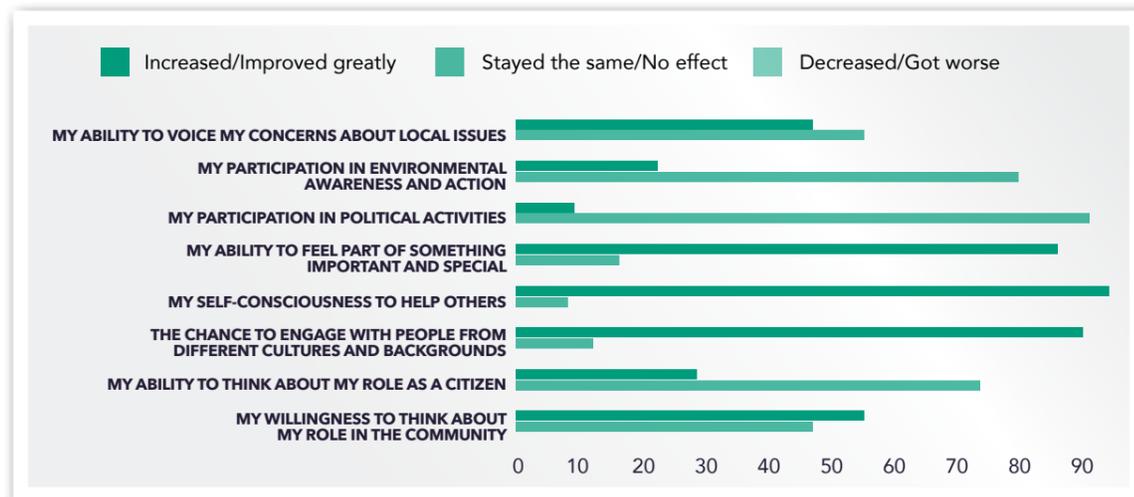


**FIGURE 9.** Impact of Urban Stars boxing delivery on social engagement

The project co-ordinator also alluded to the existence of these rivalries and identified the extent to which boxing provided an environment for young people to put aside their assumed differences:

*I think, before, the problem was there were never really any intermediaries or spaces where these kids could come together without conflict but here they were able to make peace between themselves and it was good... the issue was between the Afghani and the Slovakian kids ... but they managed to put aside their differences. The biggest challenge we had was trying to re-label and re-position this Centre because for a short period it was actually labelled as a Slovakian Romanian centre and we did a lot of outreach work to make sure that we mixed up the ethnic make-up of who comes to use this space, so now what you'll find is a lot more kids from BME and Eastern European communities using this centre and not having issues with each other.*

Questionnaire data illustrated that, in some cases, young people's range of friends decreased as a consequence of programme involvement. However, participant focus groups revealed that for some young people this was a positive outcome. One boy stated that attending boxing helped him to realise that the friends he was keeping were "not really friends", but people who were holding him back from reaching his potential. He began disassociating from them, and was less eager to participate in the "trouble-making antics" that this "crew encouraged". Likewise, Figure 10 (below) indicates that young people's willingness to participate in local campaigns (community actions and social gatherings in and beyond their local neighbourhood) did not vastly increase or improve as a consequence of attending boxing. During focus groups, however, young people were adamant that if the boxing sessions were no longer offered to them because of public funding cuts, they would "take to the streets" and protest their disappointment. This response indicated that participants were keen to assert themselves at a social level but needed more guidance and direction on how and when to do this.



**FIGURE 10.** Impact of Urban Stars boxing delivery on community engagement.

These data highlight the positive contribution of boxing on: the ability of programme participants to be part of something special (84%), their self-consciousness to help others (92%), and their engagement with people from other cultures and backgrounds (88%). However, little impact was made on changing young peoples' abilities to: voice their own concerns (54%), participate in environmental awareness and action (78%), take part in political activities (89%), think about their role as citizens (72%), or what it meant to them to be a member of a community (46%).

### 5.2.6 BOXING AND PARTNERSHIP

Government policy and recommendations for the delivery of developmental and interventionist projects are dynamic and always in a state of flux. A key feature of this shifting model of delivery has been the use of strategic partnerships and collaboration with a range of agency representatives. In fact, in light of the fragmented nature of government and wider agency links that have become increasingly evident in more recent years, the use of partnerships has emerged as a central feature of 'best practice' procedures. This was evident in the delivery and outreach of Urban Stars in the West Midlands

The effective delivery of Urban Stars projects was highly dependent upon consultations with a range of local statutory and voluntary agencies who were already working with and for vulnerable and 'at-risk' young people. According to the regional manager of Urban Stars West Midlands, establishing partnerships with the "right kind of organisations and agencies" was a necessary initial step in helping project staff to act upon and meet the aims and objectives of the initiative. A project worker for Urban Stars echoed this point, stating that the programme could not work in isolation but needed the support of other relevant organisations and agencies to provide "an appropriate offer" of engagement. To this end, both ventures could be strategically marketed as grassroots urban development and outreach initiatives working to further promote a range of positive 'sought-after' changes that existing agencies were already pursuing, as opposed to being viewed as sporting initiatives that were seeking to promote mass participation. The developmental and outreach aspect of both projects appealed greatly to local agencies already working to nurture positive change in young peoples' behaviours as the focus was not solely on taking part in sport, but rather, as one learning mentor explained it was: "steeped in ideas about sport for positive development in young people". Speaking about his initial meeting with the Regional Development Manager of Urban Stars in Birmingham, one project coordinator from the Youth Offending Service stated:

*She ... came to one of our meetings and told us about Urban Stars. What she said about the project working to help young people appealed to us because, from an organisational perspective, one of the things we push for in terms of rehabilitating our lads back into the community is to give them some sense of normality. The boxing sessions would allow the kids to access a local space that was accessible to all members of the public and would therefore put them into contact with the 'real world'. In addition to that though, the Intensive Supervision Surveillance Programme works to satisfy criteria relating to the 'Every Child Matters' campaign, one of which includes healthy outcomes.*

To this end, Urban Stars was seen not as a local rival or competitor to existing agencies but as an organisation seeking to work in conjunction with current service providers to further improve the delivery and outcome of their aims and objectives. Project leaders at Urban Stars raised similar issues stating that with so much local competition partnerships were an essential way of maximising effectiveness and preventing overlap in delivery. As a result Urban Stars was better aligned as a 'supplier of local demand' which existing service providers were expected to meet. Certainly, the Youth Offending Service's project coordinator alluded to this highlighting the extent to which the establishment of a partnership between the two organisations was reliant on the Urban Stars initiative being 'sold' as a service that would complement the ethos and support structures of his own agency. The initial meeting was therefore a crucial opportunity for Urban Stars staff to 'pitch' boxing as an initiative to be incorporated into existing developmental, reparative and rehabilitative support/care structures offered by the local Youth Offending Service. In the West Midlands, such an approach ensured that boxing was aligned as a key 'adjunct service' through which young people would be able to physically alter their way of thinking, and their responses to different events

(e.g., staying calm in a fight, being less confrontational or aggressive etc.). In fact, meetings with local agencies were important not only in making Urban Stars staff aware of existing vulnerable and at-risk groups within their localities but also by better exposing them to the services already on offer. Moreover, such links enabled Urban Stars staff to gauge how flexible, innovative and creative they needed to be in terms of service delivery. One Urban Stars project leader talked of the greater confidence that partnerships evoked amongst local residents and participants engaged in the project:

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*When you have youth workers and they get to know the police, it builds that confidence, you have more expertise, and things get done more efficiently.*

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Similarly, in Coventry, where Urban Stars has been working within schools to deliver boxing as part of the Physical Education (PE) curriculum, one Assistant Principal spoke of how the partnership had enabled the school to act upon their strong commitment to the “pastoral development” of students:

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*The sub-text to Urban Stars coming in [to the school] was that we wanted skilled workers who knew how to work with young people to deliver boxing for our kids. We liaised with programme staff and added boxing to the curriculum as an extension to what we now offer our PE students. It's really appealed to those students who couldn't engage with some of our more conventional PE sports: football, hockey, basketball. Now I'd say many significant barriers have actually been removed for us ... Firstly, because we have access to expertise we didn't before ... Secondly, because we were able to hand over a degree of responsibility to these guys ... we can trust the ethos that they are coming from ... Thirdly, the flexibility of times have meant we've been able to arrange courses that suit the kids whether that's in formal taught school hours, or outside of these schooling hours ... It's allowed us to work with an organisation that really does add in a big way to the things we're able to give to our students, whether it's with something to do with boxing or mentoring or a range of skills that are coming from the right people who know how to deliver to and cater for the variable needs of young people*

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Speaking about some of the difficulties faced by Urban Stars, Richie Woodhall stated:

I think some people will look at boxing in the wrong way... it's all black and white to them ... They see a young offender who's just been arrested for mugging someone and they automatically think: “No. No. No. No. No! We're not having any of that thank you very much”. But that's not what boxing trains you to do; that's not what we do. We don't teach sparring to kids ... We're not encouraging fighting. We're opening up doors for kids who haven't found an exit route in life ... If they're good at boxing, they can go for it if they put the effort in and the effort and the drive will transform them into better people. The only way to change this is to churn out lots of results about young offenders who've turned over new leaves and who are not offending and not engaging in any difficult problematic behaviours. That's your proof and we haven't been good at collecting this proof before.

## 5.3 URBAN STARS SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE (ASHFIELD HMP AND YOI)

As we have seen, since the 1960s sport has been increasingly viewed as a suitable intervention in youth delinquency both in the UK and elsewhere. The overwhelming consensus from research findings in this area is that: (i) physical activity and sport can be an effective means by which to engage young people in activities that they dislike and/or fail in at school; (ii) most sporting activity is beneficial to young people's health; in physical terms (improving fitness, diet and reducing smoking and drug taking), and in psychological terms (improving mood and self-esteem and reducing self-destructive behaviour, i.e. self-harming/suicidal tendencies); and (iii) in social terms sport can improve interpersonal skills (both amongst peer groups and adults) and coping skills, and increase self-confidence.

In terms of the specific role (and provision) of sport and physical education/activity inside young offender institutions (YOIs) this has traditionally been monitored by government agencies as part of broader inspection and accountability measures. Findings from the joint report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and the Youth Justice Board in 2009 suggest that, overall, physical activity levels in male YOIs are relatively low (see Lewis and Meek, 2012; Parke, 2009). For example, in six out of the 18 institutions (and of the 1,159 young people) surveyed by Parke (2009), less than one in 10 young men said that they were allowed to take daily exercise, and in three of those institutions, fewer than a quarter said that they had ‘association’ with other residents more than five times per week.<sup>9</sup> Certain kinds of physical activity remain high in such settings with 77% reporting that they visit ‘the gym’ at least once per week. Surveys of juveniles coordinated by the Inspectorate of Prisons have revealed that the number of young people attending gym sessions at least five times per week and exercising outside everyday has increased consistently in recent years (Cripps, 2010; Tye, 2009). However, scant attention is paid to the specific deployment of sport and its role in the incarceration/rehabilitation process across the youth estate.

<sup>9</sup> For further insight in to the role of sport in custodial settings see Meek, Champion and Klier (2012).

As Holt and Pamment (2012: 125) note, young offenders “... constitute two of the most marginalised and maligned groups in popular discourse: ‘young people’ and ‘offenders’”.

Like London and the West Midlands, Urban Stars at Ashfield HMP and YOI in South Gloucestershire was all about engaging marginalised, vulnerable and disenfranchised youth in sporting activity. As we have seen, this was undertaken by way of an in-house ‘sports academy’ system which provided a 12-week package of intensive education and training in a range of sports-related fields. As noted previously, the academy framework discussed below featured a ‘multi-sports’ programme of events.

### 5.3.1 PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR SPORT

As is the case in wider social spheres, sport does not appeal to everyone in prison, neither are all prisons in a position to facilitate the kind of work that Urban Stars undertakes. However, by encouraging residents to pursue some form of sporting interest the project has found a significant measure of success. To this end, one of the particularly interesting features of the work of Urban Stars in Ashfield is that as well as attracting young men who have an existing interest in (and passion for) sport, many academy participants

have little, if any, previous sporting exposure, as Majid pointed out during interview:

- AP** *Tell me about how you got involved with Urban Stars.*
- MAJID** *Well, basically I chose the Academy to do some sport and educational qualifications ...*
- AP** *So, when you came here [to Ashfield] were you a sports person anyway ... like at school?*
- MAJID** *Definitely not. When I was in school an' that I was quite lazy. But ever since I come in here I've been doing lots of sport an' stuff. It gives me a real buzz, running about an' that. An', y' know, sports really push you to the limit an' I really enjoy that ... Boxing is the main thing that made me do it ... instead of just doin' weights ... 'cos they all wanna do weights and just get big but it's about stayin' fit on the inside; your lungs an' everything. That's what I really wanna do as well. All that running and training, it's just pushin' me to the limit.*

Neither had the post-school experience been particularly productive for Majid. During his time at Ashfield, however, sport had come to provide a means by which he could focus his thoughts and start to think about life in an altogether more positive way:

- MAJID** *It [sport] takes my mind of other things an' that, y'know, stress an' stuff, family problems, stuff that goes on in the world, it just takes my mind of it. 'Cos it's like a motivation for me, y'know. Before I couldn't think about anything; fuck school, fuck education, I can't be arsed with any of it, y'know ... people are teaching me stuff that I'm not gonna need in the future. But ever since I've come in here I've been doing my O Levels, been doing my boxing as well, and doing boxing makes me, like, instead of smoking drugs I do boxing and that makes me think more about my future to be honest.*
- AP** *So, do you think that you get the buzz out of boxing that you used to get out of smoking?*
- MAJID** *Yeah. Y'see, when you smoke weed you get the buzz at the time ... but in the morning you wake up an' it's just like the headache an' like ... if you don't smoke a spliff then you're just gonna constantly keep having this headache. But when I'm doing boxing it helps to release endorphins which keeps me happy all the time but then afterwards I feel healthy about myself, y'know. So, in the mornings I jump out of bed and I get on with the day. But before I'd get up and I was like: 'Fuck it, I'll just go back to sleep'.*

For others too sport was something which had passed them by during their days in school (and out in the community) and only on entering prison had it become an activity with which they had chosen to engage. Granted, there were various reasons and motives in play here. Some chose to do sport simply because they saw it as 'better than other lessons' but who 'looked forward to

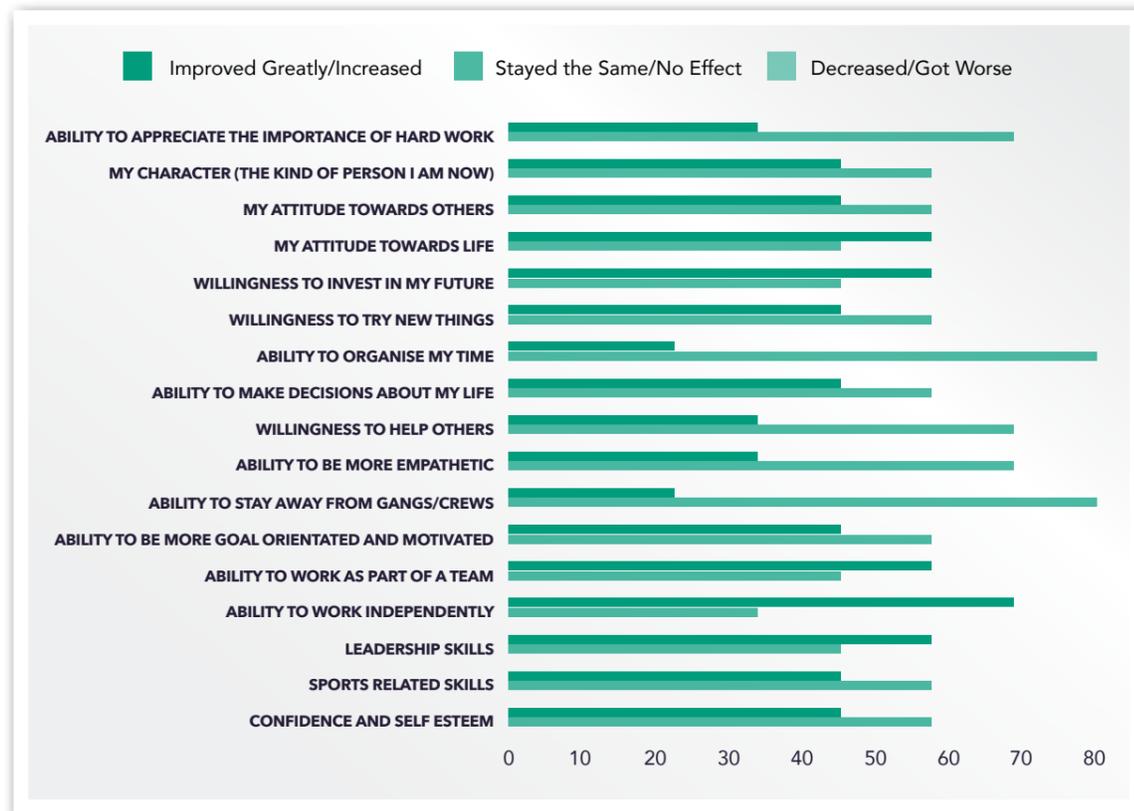
it anyway'. For Dean (like Majid) sport provided an avenue of emotional

release, '... if you're angry and you go to the gym, hit the weights, do a bit of boxing ... takes your mind off certain things. In turn, Dean was mindful of the broader spin-offs of doing 'every qualification that you can ... while you're in prison'. Either way, and for whatever reason, through the presence of Urban Stars sport was presented as a possible point of engagement for these young men and one via which a whole host of life skills and learning opportunities had been opened up to them.

In terms of quantifying the personal impact of sport on the lives of Academy members at Ashfield, Figure 11 presents the findings of questionnaire data which demonstrate, in particular, the positive impact of sporting involvement on the ability of participants to: organise their time (78%), stay away from 'trouble' (i.e. gangs/crews) (78%), appreciate the importance of hard work (67%), and work both independently (67%) and as part of a team (56%). Sport also had an impact in terms of the willingness of participants to help others (67%) and their ability to be more empathetic (67%).

For some young men sport provided a way of re-directing their thoughts and energies and acted as something which facilitated a sense of achievement. In Gavin's case his relationship with the Urban Stars programme had played out far beyond his initial intentions or expectations. Gavin had been introduced to sport prior to entering the prison system (albeit as a consequence of previous exposure to the Courts) but, once in Ashfield, Urban Stars had served as an opportunity for re-engagement:

- AP** *So, what made you get interested in sport in here [Ashfield]?*
- GAVIN** *... I'd been here a couple of weeks and the Gym lads (PE Department employees) said 'Do you wanna play football', and I said I'd give it a go... And then they said 'Do you wanna have a go on the [football] team', and so they got me on the team. And then every other sport they said 'Do you wanna have a go at this, do you wanna have a go at that ...' and so I had a go ...*
- AP** *And you're keen on the boxing. How did that happen?*
- GAVIN** *Well, when I was out [prior to prison] I got arrested for ABH [Actual Bodily Harm] and they put me on a Community Order. And part of that was that I went boxing at a gym round my area and I went there for about four months and I got into it. And then I came here and found out that they do a boxing club here, so I joined in ...*



**FIGURE 11.** Impact of Urban Stars multi-sports delivery on personal characteristics

So successful had this process of re-engagement been for Gavin that he had progressed through the various levels, ranks and stages of the Urban Stars sports academy to earn himself a position as a Gym Orderly, working alongside full time staff in the prison's Physical Education Department. Like most other services in prison, Urban Stars operated in line with a clear punishment/reward ethos: if young men were deemed suitable (by the relevant internal authorities) to take part in a sports academy, then they were eligible for recruitment. If their behaviour (both on the academy and within the prison) remained positive during the designated 12 week academy period then they could stay on the programme. If, as a consequence of their engagement, they demonstrated significant behavioural improvement, then further opportunities opened up for them within the context of the academy structure. Such opportunities might include progression to Gym Orderly, Gym Assistant or Mentor and, ultimately, work placements in the community.<sup>10</sup> Gavin was one such individual who had responded very positively to his sporting experiences and had pursued all of the opportunities presented to him. In turn, everyday life inside prison had become much more focused and purposeful:<sup>11</sup>

**GAVIN** *When I first come here I was on the [prison] wing an' I used to mouth off at staff and have fights an' all that. But on social time, if I'm off the wing doing sport, I'm not getting into trouble ... You've got to behave to keep coming [to academy sessions]. And so I kept coming and started to enjoy it. ... So, it taught me how to behave really; just started behaving an' that ...*

<sup>10</sup> Work placement opportunities are only available to those residents eligible for Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL).

<sup>11</sup> For similar findings (within the context of Portland YO) see Meek (2012).

**AP** *So, can you now train each day?*

**GAVIN** *There's two [Gym] Orderlies ... and we take it in turns; one lesson one person refs' the football while the other's training. So, we just take it in turns really and help each other out ... After the lessons, people go back to the wings and are banged up in their cells for half an hour but because I'm here [in the Gym] I've got the option to stay over here and do a bit of cleaning an' that, or do a quick training session.*

Just as Gavin's involvement in sport had resulted in increased benefits for him in terms of everyday lifestyle, so too had it offered him a sense of individual progress and development:

**GAVIN** *Yeah ... before I came in I used to smoke weed an' that and I never used to talk to no one really. But I started to do sport an' you get to know people an' you get more confident talking to them an' that ... I talk to the family, I talk to the missus [girlfriend] an' that. Sport's definitely kept me out of trouble while I've been in prison ...*

**AP** *And do you feel better about yourself?*

**GAVIN** *Yeah, definitely. You can see a difference as well. Like, I'm much fitter ... more confident with people, more confident when I play the sport. 'Cos when I first come in I'd get the ball and just pass it to someone else but now I get the ball and take people on an' that ...*

For Gavin, a further benefit of his position as Gym Orderly was that he was able to come into contact with (and get to know) a range of other residents who, under normal circumstances, he would not have had the opportunity to interact with. In this sense, sport was a means by which he was able to develop socially as well as individually, a scenario common to a range of other academy members. Yet, whilst academy activities as a form of engagement brought any number of benefits to participants, the reality was that in and of itself sport was unable to provide the wider skills and support mechanisms needed to enable successful transition during the post-custody period. Indeed, none of these changes occurred in isolation from the further coaching and mentoring input which was provided by the Urban Stars team and it is the benefits of these broader support mechanisms that we now explore.

### 5.3.2 ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

As is the case for Urban Stars provision both in London and the West Midlands, a key facet of programme delivery at Ashfield is the provision of mentoring alongside practical sports coaching and qualifications. This takes place at various levels. The first is through project case worker, Justin Coleman, whose objective it is to establish trusting relationships with each academy member. The underlying philosophy here differs from that of traditional mentoring where a structured programme of regular meetings takes place between mentor and mentee over a predetermined period of time. Instead, the mentoring relationship within Ashfield is mentee centred (and driven) with the mentor responding (within certain parameters) to the specific needs (individual and social) of the mentee. Justin also provides on-going, one-to-one support during the post-custody transition and, in many cases, far beyond; this as a consequence of the level of trust that he is able

to establish with the young people whilst they are in residence at Ashfield. The second level of mentoring support provided within the context of the academy structure occurs via individual sports coaches who are affiliated with the Urban Stars programme and who enter the prison on a weekly basis to lead coaching sessions. In one sense, these individuals act essentially as role models to the academy participants; that is, they are often (or have been) talented sports practitioners (players and/or coaches) in their own right and because of this carry a certain amount of personal kudos. The third level of mentoring within the context of the programme is provided by peers; those who are, or have been, part of an Urban Stars sports academy during their time at Ashfield and who have graduated to positions whereby they are trusted to take responsibility for the needs of others who find themselves in similar circumstances. Again, the philosophy here differs to that of traditional mentoring where the mentor (whilst commonly acting in an inspirational capacity) is often someone who is far removed from the experiences of the mentee. The peer-mentoring model encouraged within Ashfield facilitates the establishment of trust on the basis of the similar experiences which mentor and mentee share with inspiration being derived from the fact that the mentor has chosen to exchange those experiences for an altogether more positive and productive lifestyle.

How, then, and to what extent, we might ask, did all of this impact the lives of academy members? Certainly, there is evidence to suggest that even within a relatively short space of time residents found mentoring provision to be both supportive and stimulating in terms of potential life changes, as Majid explained:

**AP** *And you also do some one-to-one sessions with Justin. Tell me about that ...*

**MAJID** *Yeah, that's about asking for other things like boxing and college ... They're [2nd Chance] mainly trying to help young people so that when they go out [of prison] they stop committing crime again ... Instead, they help us getting into sport. Y'know, instead of goin' out with my friends and committing crime ... I can go out playing sport ...*

Informal mentoring sometimes occurred as a consequence of academy members building close working relationships with their role models. Here, Gavin describes how his work with boxing coach Barry had had a particularly important impact on him and on his behaviour:

When I first come in [to Ashfield] when I had an argument with someone I'd be like 'Come on then ...' but now I just laugh at 'em ... Barry says to me every time I go in sparring that it's not a fight it's a boxin' match. So, you don't box like you're fightin'. Fightin' and boxin' are two different things ... Fightin' it's all aggression an tryin' to hit someone. Boxin' is more controlled. So, instead of hittin' someone really hard you can just give 'em a tap as controlled sparring.

Perhaps most telling amongst these accounts were the experiences of those who had graduated up through the Urban Stars academy system and who, having been released from prison, could now reflect on the way in which one-to-one support had allowed them to see life in a completely different way. A case in point is that of Brett who had originally engaged with Urban Stars in Ashfield and who was now learning to cope with life back in the community:

**BRETT** *Well, y'know, I didn't really trust anyone ... I mean I've always had a close knit family but your mates, well, they're not really mates if they're off doin' stuff [crime] and they want you to do stuff as well ... So, really you don't have no trust in anyone or belief in anyone, that's the thing. Trust comes in time when you get to know someone. But I didn't have that in anyone ... 'cos that's what I was like myself. I didn't have any belief in myself either and if you don't believe in yourself you can't have belief in others ... I believe that anyone can do anything and that's through Justin an' that all mentoring me ... It's the people that are [work] on Urban Stars ... you don't meet people like this all the time who are committed to what they do ... And when you meet people like this it gives you so much inspiration ... To meet decent people who are 100% behind what they do, it's like 'gold dust' ...*

**AP** *So, with Urban Stars there's sport going on and then there's one-one support as well. But what else did you get?*

**BRETT** *Opportunity. Not just through sport. There might be courses going on but just working with Urban Stars, it opens up the doors for opportunities 'cos they're linked into people. Y'know, we'd be havin a chat and I'd say, 'Oh, I wouldn't mind doing this one day', and they'd say, 'Oh, hang on, I know someone who's involved in that'. An' like, the opportunity that 2nd Chance gives you and that safety thing as well. Y'know, when you work as a mentor with people you've got to feel comfortable with them an' like when you're inside [in prison] as well, a lot of people make a lot of promises that never come through. But when Justin's said, like, 'We'll do this, do that', it all happens, y'know what I'm sayin ... And when you've got that confidence in people like that it just makes a difference ... I mean, I didn't know that I had this motivation in me or the want to do stuff an' that but once it come out like ... it's like weird. It's like I've got a whole different mentality on stuff, a whole different way of reasoning with stuff ...*

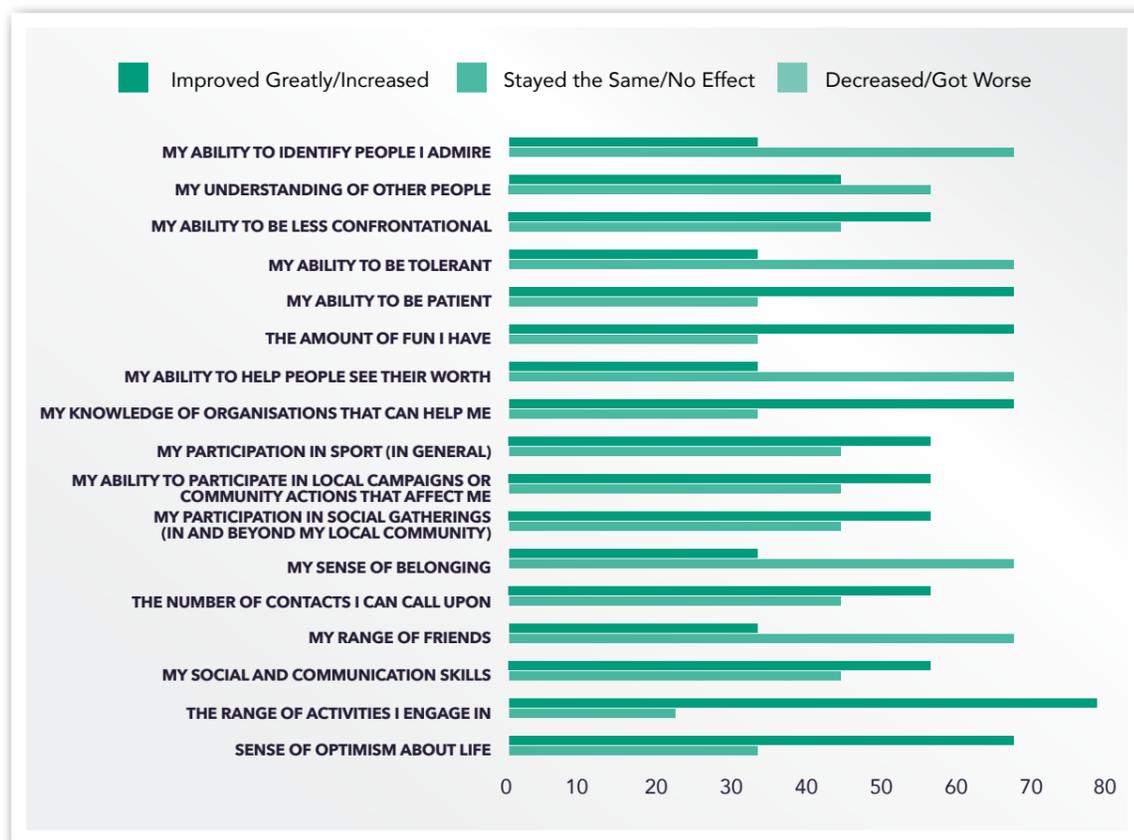
As both a beneficiary and provider of mentoring support within the context of Urban Stars, Brett had a clear view of the way in which such connections could enable a young person to not only be able to negotiate the vagaries of custody, but to make the transition into an alternative lifestyle outside of its bounds.

### 5.3.3 SPORT AND SOCIAL IMPACT

For some years politicians, social commentators and academics alike have proclaimed the social benefits of sport; leadership, teamwork, self-sacrifice, are words and concepts which are commonly used in association with sporting endeavour. What then of sport in custody? In a world where social interaction is often a risky and sensitive business, how might sport oil the wheels of relationship building?

Figure 12 illustrates the impact that Urban Stars delivery had on a range of social characteristics amongst Ashfield academy members. For example,

within a physical benefits domain, individuals clearly experienced a distinct increase in the range of activities which they engaged in (78%). Importantly, participants also experienced increases in a number of recorded social characteristics such as: their communication skills (56%), the number of friends they could call upon (56%), the amount of fun/enjoyment that they experienced (67%), their sense of optimism about life (67%), and their participation in social gatherings (56%) and community actions/campaigns (i.e. in-house sporting events organised collectively by academy members) (56%). Participants also realised an increase in their sense of belonging (67%), patience (67%), and their ability to be less confrontational (56%) the latter of which, in light of their personal and social circumstances, was a key benefit both to the individuals concerned and to those around them.



**FIGURE 12.** Impact of Urban Stars multi-sports delivery on social engagement

It would be fair to say that for many Urban Stars academy members prison had been an isolating experience and a place where 'keeping your head down' and 'staying out of trouble' was the name of the game. Inferences towards postcode rivalries and community tensions were evident during a number of interviews but no one talked openly about 'gangs', 'crews' or their affiliations to them. Indeed, such discussion is uncommon between prisoners and authority figures and/or outsiders. Despite all of this, sport had come to be seen by academy participants as a way in which social interaction might be promoted<sup>12</sup> and, in turn, as a way in which their own social skills might develop, as both Dean and Majid described:

<sup>12</sup> See also Meek (2012).

**AP** *Do you think sport helps your relationships with other people?*

**DEAN** *Yeah, it's just like, in prison you meet different people in the gym sessions an' that. You're in there doin' a bit of shoulders [shoulder exercises/weights] an' they're given you hints on how to get bigger an' that. An' while you're workin' out you're talkin' with them ...*

**AP** *And these are people that you don't know?*

**DEAN** *Yeah, you see them round the prison but you don't really talk to them. But when you see them in the gym an' stuff and they're doin' the same work-out as you're doin', then you get to talk to them. You just start communicating with them, y'know what I'm sayin' ...*

**MAJID** *Yeah, yeah. It helps you gain friends as well. You get to meet new people from other areas [of the prison] an' everything. You think that everyone's from London and are just gangsters an' everything, but it's not like that ... When you get to know them they're not actually people that are like that, they're totally different.*

Gavin talked of similar experiences with regards to the way in which, as a consequence of his Gym Orderly role, he had begun to build relationships with people whom he came into contact with: 'you get people from different [accommodation] blocks mixing together so when they come in [to the Gym] ... I do their assessments, so you meet people every day really'. Having attended a number of sports academies during his time at Ashfield, Brett (now on licence and living in the community) reflected how rugby, in particular, had brought home to him the ways in which sport can develop social skills and how important this kind of developmental process is:

From looking at [the beginning of the] rugby academy - from the way that people didn't like each other - ... when it came to a match when one of those guys went down, the other one was there to support him ... It's like ... competition, competitiveness; get us all out on the rugby field, smash your way through 15 blokes, y'know, but have fun and pass the ball round. Matey boy gets tackled, three of us run in, get everyone off him, look after him, y'know, protect him, while someone gets the ball out again. Scrums as well, like ... cos you have to communicate with each other, hold it tight, squeeze and press together like y'know ...

**AP** *So, does sport force you to do that, to talk to each other?*

**BRETT** *Well, you have to or else you'll get hurt. If you're not communicating with your teammates you're gonna end up paying for it. You're gonna end up losing the ball for the team and you don't wanna be the odd one out ... If you're the only one who's not committing to the team you'll soon be noticed, y'know what I mean, you won't get passed the ball or anythin'. I mean, who's gonna give the ball to someone who's not gonna listen to anyone ...*

Indeed, for Brett, the transformations which had taken place during the 12 weeks of the rugby academy which he had attended had been something that he would never have imagined beforehand:

I think if someone could have video'd at the end of the rugby academy that team that we had ... 'cos there was a lot of conflicts in the team between people at first verging on fighting an' that comin' from the wings and outside and previous stuff an' that. But we all come together as a team. And we were doin' stuff in the classroom and on the pitch ... [and] after a few weeks ... the team gelled so well [that] we never lost ... Two people that were arguing at the start of it, they might have an argument in the classroom, but as soon as we got out on the pitch they'd support each other on the field ... Y'know, you never used to speak to each other on the wings but now it [was] different.

Testimonies of this nature provide textbook narratives of the functional role of sport; individual catharsis, social cohesion, character formation, inclusive practice - sport transforming people's lives; for the better, as a social good. For sure, the practical sporting activities of the Urban Stars project proved beneficial for those taking part, so much so that they could recognise these personal and social transformations taking shape. What Brett was also clear about was the way in which that transition had been facilitated by the various organisations that are in partnership with the project and the importance of the wide ranging networks, connections and avenues of referral which Urban Stars staff had at their disposal. Indeed, it is to a brief overview of these that we now turn.

### 5.3.4 SPORT AND PARTNERSHIP

Whilst the sports academy structure in place at Ashfield provides a comprehensive package of educational opportunity and wider institutional support, one of the reasons behind its effectiveness is the numerous partner agencies involved. Underpinning the work of Urban Stars is the prison operator SERCO whose physical education, residential and case worker staff are central points of reference. Working in conjunction with SERCO, Urban Stars facilitate day-to-day programme delivery linking with various other organisations within the voluntary sector (i.e. St Giles Trust,<sup>13</sup> Prince's Trust,<sup>14</sup> Catch 22<sup>15</sup>), in order to bolster programme provision and to provide as many opportunities as possible for the young people for whom they cater. For case worker Justin, the wider the network which Urban Stars have available to them, the more successful resident lifestyle change and post-custody resettlement is likely to be:

**JUSTIN** *At one end [in Ashfield] I work with case workers, YOTs and the young person ... Whilst I'm working with them and building up relationships ... hopes and dreams ... they get a [life] plan. We put that plan in place with the Youth Offending Team, plus a couple of decent bodies around the local area, and then when they get out we embed their new conditions [their plan] into their licence ... And obviously I just naturally keep in touch with the lads just to make sure that they're alright. And if it doesn't work out for them ... then I can help change things, so at that point I may have to do a bit more work ... that's the process.*

**AP** *So, it doesn't matter geographically where these young people are going?*

**JUSTIN** *We're stronger in some counties and cities than others ... but we're always exploring those options and partnerships ...*

**AP** *But irrespective of where they are they can contact you?*

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> See: <http://www.princes-trust.org.uk/?gclid=CLGNtOX25q4CFUEOfAodHj8Vkw>

<sup>15</sup> See: <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/>

**JUSTIN** *Yes ... 'Cos quite often it's that trust thing ... If they've got a little bit of trust in me then they'll ring me up and say, 'Actually, I need some help with this'... It's usually a five minute conversation normally or the following day I'll make a phone call to an agency and they'll get involved.*

At first glance it would be easy to misinterpret (and misunderstand) the operational scope and remit of Urban Stars provision within this specific context. On the face of things it is simply a provider of sporting opportunity. Closer investigation reveals, however, the breadth of the package which the programme provides and the depth of involvement which young people experience with respect to case worker support both inside and outside of custody. To this end, sport, it seems, is once again the 'hook' by which Urban Stars stimulates engagement in lifestyle change and only one small part of what the programme actually does, an issue which I raised with Justin during interview:

**AP** *So, sport is a really just a small part of it. Is it just a hook?*

**JUSTIN** *Well ... there's so much more to it ... If they're doing boxing you've got Barry Edwards (boxing coach) or, if they're doing rugby, you've got the rugby coaches and they're a massive part of it too because they've built that relationship. And it's that father-son thing, at a professional level. And then when they get out Barry might keep in touch with them or I will, or we both will, and it's that kind of sharing of care ... And they've got a couple of voices, y'know. I might be the person that's good at talking to their YOT whereas Andy might be a good person to talk to in terms of their boxing ... So, it becomes a personal kind of relationship really ... So, they've got a multitude of people to speak to that are pro-social in their life.*

And for the young people concerned, there was a feeling that the work that they did on the Urban Stars programme did not simply represent a series of false hopes and hollow promises but rather a sense of possibility and opportunity; a way out of prison and a way out of crime. For Majid this meant a change in attitude towards his lifestyle and towards his future:

**MAJID** *Well, hopefully, Justin is going to help me join a project called 'Fight for Change'. I'll join up with that ... And I'm thankful to Justin for trying to help me get into that ...*

**AP** *And will you do things at college as well?*

**MAJID** *Well, my dad's an electrician and he wanted me to follow in his footsteps and become an electrician as well and so I might do electronic engineering, or I might do Public Services ...*

What such testimony also bears witness to is the fact that Urban Stars project initiatives, no matter how far removed they are in terms of social setting, geography or circumstance, do operate within a co-ordinated network of joined-up thinking, hence the ability of Majid to progress from the sports academy within Ashfield to the 'Fight for Change' project on release. For him and for others, part of the role of Urban Stars was to make these connections; to hand-over young people to wider (trusted) community-based support

agencies and partners, and to ensure that the specific needs and interests of those concerned were appropriately and adequately met. Amidst such tailored provision there was at least the possibility that sporting hope would become reality.

### 5.3.5 EVERYONE DESERVES A '2ND CHANCE'

*Freedom man, I can't wait. Freedom ... do my licence ... and then go back to college ... I'm looking to work with my Dad in the future, get my own business. Everyone deserves a second chance, init. Y've got to learn from your mistakes.*

**DEAN, ASHFIELD SPORTS ACADEMY MEMBER**

A common criticism of post custody/resettlement transition packages is that despite the provision of structured programmes of support within custodial settings and the provision of multi-agency assistance within the community, there is little, if any, joined-up thinking between the two. Amidst a whole raft of new responsibilities (and a position of vulnerability and risk), too often, on release from prison, young people find themselves without the confidence or skills to engage with the agencies around them. For these young people the easiest way to survive is to return to the life that they know best and around which they feel most secure; a life of crime and chaos. Urban Stars aims to act as some form of corrective in this respect. By using sport as a means of engagement with residents in prison the initiative creates a climate in which young people can develop a sense of confidence and belief in themselves, trust in others, and hope for the future. At a practical level this means empowering them to think positively about life, to change patterns of negative thinking, to develop coherent self-advocacy, to interact with multi-agency support and, where appropriate, to re-establish familial connections and relationships. All of which is designed to give 'voice' to those with whom Urban Stars engage; a voice which, as a consequence of frustration or anger, may never before have been heard. With this voice in place, young people are able to better articulate their needs which, in turn, increases their chances of receiving appropriate help and support to make a successful transition back into society.



## 6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall aim of the Urban Stars initiative is to use sport to engage young people who are identified as marginalised from mainstream society, as well as those deemed to be 'vulnerable' because of their exclusion, or categorised as being 'at risk' of further exclusion.

The purpose of this report has been to provide evidence of the extent to which the Urban Stars programme (via Active Communities Network) is achieving this aim in three geographical locations: London, the West Midlands and South Gloucestershire. In so doing, the report has sought to portray the extent to which Urban Stars is meeting the needs of young people who are: (i) living in areas of high social deprivation and crime; (ii) on the periphery of crime; or (iii) already in custody. In this section we provide a series of conclusions and recommendations that have emerged from our research. These are presented as a template of 'best practice' in relation to the future establishment of programmes utilising sport to tackle youth crime and anti-social behaviour (via the approaches discussed within this report - including new Urban Stars programmes) within other geographical locations and sporting contexts. In this sense, the following discussion constitutes a series of key learning points which may be applied across the sector.



## 6.1 URBAN STARS AND ACTIVE COMMUNITIES NETWORK

The Urban Stars programme makes a valuable contribution to the personal and social development of those who engage with it. Carefully selected and highly trained programme staff (project leaders, youth workers, coaches) act as excellent role models and mentors to the young people concerned establishing long-term and highly supportive relationships. Active Communities Network oversees effective and efficient programme delivery across all of the pilot locations fulfilling its organisational aims and objectives whilst, at the same time, pro-actively facilitating collaborative links with a wide range of partners. Active Communities Network is well respected across the sport development and youth work sectors. As a consequence of its excellent track record, it has well established connections with community groups, criminal justice organisations and statutory and voluntary agencies, all of which serves to enhance its profile as a highly reputable service provider.

## 6.2 THE ROLE OF SPORT

Building upon previous research, and by way of in-depth empirical investigation, this report has sought to highlight the potential of sport to change the lives of young people. What its findings demonstrate is that sport can be effective not only in engaging marginalised youth but in tackling youth crime and re-offending. At the same time it can provide a variety of support mechanisms and life course pathways for those who choose to access the opportunities on offer. In the geographical and organisational contexts featured here, Active Communities Network is a key facilitator of such opportunities.

The importance of matching sporting activity to the specific needs and desires of a particular client group cannot be underestimated. These findings clearly testify that a 'one-size-fits-all' model of delivery fails to accommodate the socio-cultural diversity of young people's lives in the kinds of environments that Urban Stars seeks to inhabit. What these findings also demonstrate is that specific sports carry with them inherent value structures which, in addition to physical activity, engage young people at a moral and ethical level. For example, basic values (respect, commitment, perseverance etc.) are evident in and through the delivery of boxing both in the West Midlands and in South Gloucestershire where coaches insist upon the establishment of clear relational boundaries with young people and where personal discipline is presented as an integral part of the sporting experience. Crucial, in this respect, is not only the choice of sport but the kind of coaches that are employed to work in Urban Stars settings. Relevant training and accreditation can help to shape coach/client relations but coaches themselves should have at the heart of their work a desire to grow and nurture young people holistically. Where such desire is present, a much deeper level of client engagement is evident.

## 6.3 WORKFORCE, TRAINING AND PARTNERS



Of central importance to the success of Urban Stars is the presence of well trained staff who possess an in-depth understanding of sports development, youth work and the broader socio-cultural environments within which they operate. The frequency and depth of engagement by young people in and through sport is often determined by their more general engagement with particular sporting activities and this, in turn, is impacted by the kinds of individuals and agencies involved in delivery. Hence, prior to the expansion of Urban Stars into new geographical areas, or the establishment of projects with similar aims, it is suggested that some form of scoping exercise should be undertaken to discern the social and cultural complexion of the environments under consideration and that this should include consultation with various local agencies (i.e. statutory, private). Following this, targeted sporting intervention can be designed and specific (preferred) partners may be identified; that is, partners which have the appropriate experience of working with young people in a particular locales (and, if necessary, in particular sporting contexts) and who are 'fit for purpose' in terms of the skills, knowledge and resources which they bring. In terms of what can be done to enable projects to achieve more from partnerships as a whole, the following issues are put forward:

Strategic consultation with local statutory agencies. In the initial stages of establishing partnerships it is essential for partner agencies to know the following 'start-up' information:

- What are the aims of the project? Who does it seek to target, and why? How does it work? Who delivers the sessions?
- What is the project's track-record (e.g. what sort of change(s) might the initiative seek to bring about in the range of young people being engaged?);
- How many delivery sessions are offered? How long is each session? How many young people are targeted per session? (i.e., how big or small are the groups?)
- How long can the partner agency access the 'services' on offer? How much will it/does it cost to be a partner agency?

For those agencies working to closely monitor change in young people (either through formal community rehabilitation programmes or reparative placements), it is equally important to know whether changes in socio-psychological behaviour are to be monitored and/or evaluated by project staff. For example, the West Midlands Youth Offending Service requested 'proof' of how the programme might work to induce positive behaviour, and enquired as to why Urban Stars was keen to establish a referral based scheme to engage young offenders through the medium of boxing.

## 6.4 ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

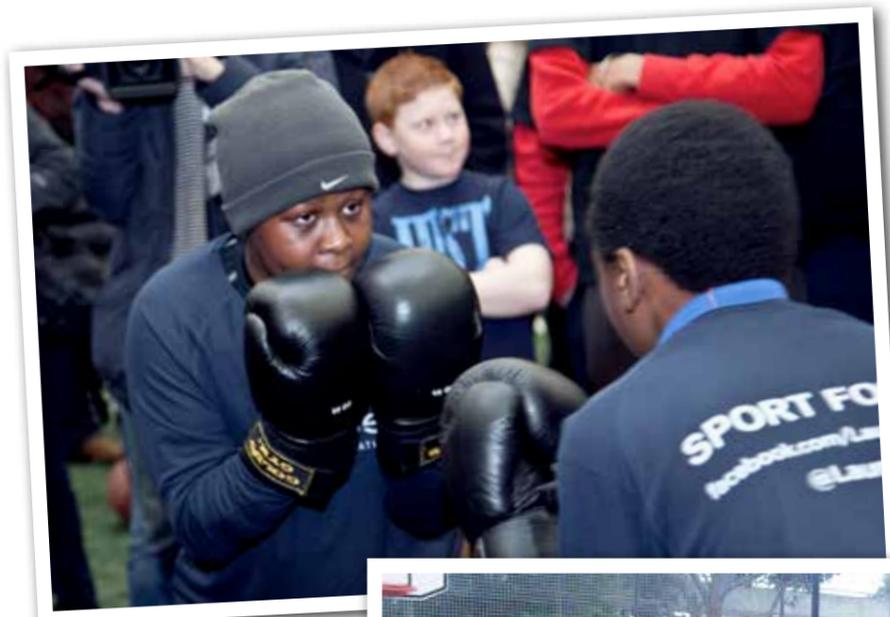
Role models have long since been (and remain) an important avenue via which young people engage with certain sports and, where fame and notoriety is concerned) often act as an inspirational force especially where their life stories depict achievement in the face of adversity. Role models also act as a key source of inspiration at the local level and it is clear that Active Communities Network staff members are often seen as key role models by the young people who engage with the programme. Indeed, these findings indicate that this is a key component of the success of the Urban Stars programme. Regular and frequent contact between young people and Active Communities Network staff members provides the foundations for the development of trust relationships which, in turn, can facilitate processes of informal mentoring. There is evidence in this report of the way in which this kind of one-to-one contact can greatly enhance the sporting (and wider personal) experiences of young people. It is clear, for example, that some of the coach/client scenarios in boxing had developed over time into mentor/mentee relationships, where emotional wellbeing had become as important (if not more) than physical development and sporting prowess and where a sense of 'surrogate fatherhood' was evident.

The underlying philosophy being put forward here differs greatly from that of traditional mentoring where the mentor (whilst commonly acting in an inspirational capacity) is often someone who is far removed from the life experiences of the mentee. This 'new' mentoring model encourages the establishment of trust and self-worth on the part of the mentee via an altogether more tangible peer-mentoring relationship where the regularity, frequency and consistency of contact are paramount. Trust is also established and reinforced by way of the similar life experiences which mentor and mentee share and where inspiration and encouragement (for both parties) is derived from the fact that the mentor in question has managed (and chosen) to exchange those experiences for a more positive and productive lifestyle. In this way, Urban Stars combines the work of role models and mentors to re-define mentoring along the lines of equality and shared experience whilst, at the same time, providing opportunities for participants to graduate to the role of mentor. In turn, such a model facilitates the development of 'youth leadership' opportunities for those concerned, raising aspirations, broadening horizons and providing pathways to further achievement.



## 6.5 PARTNERSHIP WORKING IN PRACTICE

As we have seen, partnership is a central facet of Urban Stars delivery and brings with it several key benefits. The Urban Stars approach to partnership working has been clearly identified in this report as an area of 'best practice' and one which should be adhered to by similar programmes/projects across the sector. At the same time, for the practical outworking of partnership arrangements to be effective there needs to be coherence across the organisational landscape. In order to safeguard the success of the Urban Stars programme, it is essential that close working relationships are protected and maintained, specifically those between: the Laureus Sport For Good Foundation and Active Communities Network, Active Communities Network and local delivery partners, and local delivery partners and the local statutory, voluntary and community sectors.



In terms of the three geographical locations considered in this report, the generic benefits of partnership working can be summarised as follows:

- Greater potential for growth and the embedding of local projects into the fabric of a community by working closely with existing groups who have established roles and functions to serve;
- A pooling of necessary (and often complimentary) skills, strengths, perspectives and qualified professional staff. This generates a greater 'critical mass' of staff to support young people;
- More targeted reach and impact on disadvantaged young people as each partner agency had its own specialism(s) in supporting young people to develop in a particular way;
- Joint partnership/project ventures not only give Urban Stars a more diverse evidence-base from which to make claims and substantiate impact and reach, but they can also provide increased negotiating power when establishing referral-based work and when attracting funding from different agencies;
- Snowball marketing strategies as partner agencies may invest in joint marketing and publicity.

In turn, it is clear that partnerships between Urban Stars and partner agencies are most effective when the following characteristics and practices are in place:

- Congruency between the aims, objectives and ethos of Urban Stars and partner agency initiatives when reaching out and impacting disadvantaged young people (the 'win-win' effect);
- Attitudes, behaviours and skills of Urban Stars staff (empathetic, friendly, welcoming, understanding, nurturing attitude) were favoured, as were the possession of skills and talents that complimented both agencies in a way that made a 'good (business) sense', and the willingness of staff to work together);
- Flexibility of services and products supplied to partners from Urban Stars, and the extent to which 'supply' meets the demands of partners (inclusion of partners during initial design of Urban Stars service for the partner agency was important in clarifying overall involvement, responsibility, authority and ownership of the product and day-to-day/weekly operations);
- Impact of Urban Stars on young people flowed through to the partner agencies (e.g. when young people returned to agencies with a changed outlook on life, with a calm, less confrontational attitude).

## 6.6 ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS AND ONWARD PROGRESSION PATHWAYS

Just as chosen partners must establish a sound infrastructure upon which to base their operations and the skills and resources to enable successful programme delivery, they must also be able to facilitate onward progression for the young people with whom they work. A further characteristic of effective partnership working is the provision of clear, well-thought out and accessible progressive pathways from Urban Stars delivery to partner agency initiatives and beyond (e.g. free accredited sports courses, coaching and mentoring opportunities, 'constructive' volunteering leading onto more meaningful job roles, exit routes into sport).

In order to maximise the potential of programme participants, sporting intervention should not be viewed as an end in and of itself. Rather, it should continue to be seen as a possible stepping-stone to further engagement in similar or wider activities (be they sport-related or not). Hence, from the outset, programme design should include clear exit strategies and referral pathways with appropriate links to relevant agencies and support networks (see, for example, the work of Urban Stars at Ashfield HMP and YOI). Key here is the channelling of young people into accredited vocational and/or educational pathways. In turn, it is important that youth workers themselves gain training and accreditation in order to enhance the ability of the sector to deliver the best possible support for the young people and communities with whom they work (such as through the recently launched 1st4sport VRQ in Using Sport to Tackle Youth Crime qualification, developed via the Urban Stars partnership between Active Communities Network and the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation).

## 6.7 COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

These findings suggest that the successful communication and marketing of Urban Stars programmes depends upon both targeted and wider promotional strategies and the creative use of social media. At a practical level, effective promotional materials make explicit the specific aims and objectives of the sporting activities on offer and the skills sets being facilitated - thereby allowing young people to become more aware of the potential opportunities which engagement offers. As we have seen, one of the ways in which to encourage programme engagement and to empower young people is by allowing them to have ownership over the design and delivery of sessions. A greater sense of ownership brings with it a greater sense of obligation with respect to investment. In terms of the specific programme activities in play, there is a need to include integrated, small-group sessions as well as catering for individual target groups. Off-site bonding opportunities (e.g., attending amateur boxing events, cinema, bowling, alternative sports, etc) also appear popular with participants. There is evidence to suggest that a less gendered approach to publicity and marketing may pay dividends as might the facilitation of sessions more inclusive and attractive to young women by removing barriers to their participating and supporting their entry and access to local sessions targeted for them.

## 6.8 EVIDENCE IN SUCCESS

The above findings bear testament to the fact that internal and external evaluation and research evidence is invaluable in relation to the progression and development of effective practice. In turn, they also provide evidence that, irrespective of its location, the Urban Stars programme is meeting its aims and objectives to use sport to engage young people who are identified as marginalised, vulnerable, or in danger of being excluded from mainstream society. One of the areas in which the programme may need to evolve as it continues to refine its operations is through an assessment of its various internal structures and monitoring/evaluation mechanisms; that is, to further develop client feedback protocols, to promote further opportunities for feedback with partner agencies, and to explore various methods of communication/feedback with project delivery personnel (i.e. coaches, mentors, etc.). At present these mechanisms appear to work in a highly effective and efficient manner. However, as the programme expands in relation to its geographical scope and remit then it is likely that creative thought will need to be given to the way in which the present standard of internal evaluation is to be maintained given the level of resources available.

Another area of concern relates to the accessing of data/statistics relating to the demographic context within which Urban Stars is delivered. In order that Active Communities Network can effectively evidence (measure) the impact and success of its programmes, it is important that the organisation has access to relevant 'hard' data. Such data are notoriously difficult to obtain due to a lack of resources across the sector, all of which means that other forms of data gathering (i.e. self-reporting) have to be relied upon. Hence, an on-going problem for organisations such as Active Communities Network is the ability to adequately demonstrate the impact of the work which they undertake in relation to crime rates and re-offending. Indeed, this would seem to be the case for a number of local and national programmes working to address youth crime as statistics are often unavailable from police or community safety agencies at the micro-level. Those responsible for developing future projects in this area should be mindful to take such issues into account.



## 6.9 NURTURING 'YOUTH VOICE'

In recent years social and academic commentators have strongly advocated the importance of consultation and the incorporation of youth 'voice' within the design and delivery of work with young people. This view stands in stark contrast to the instrumental and non-consultative approach symptomatic of many organisations which, in the past, have failed to gain any real purchase on social inequalities. It is evident that Urban Stars project workers understand the importance of utilising a youth informed, 'bottom up' approach to their work. More importantly, it is clear that partner agencies also understand the need to adopt a 'grassroots' approach to delivery.

Of course, the ability of social inclusion projects to develop the personal attributes and characteristics of participants and their social and community engagement is nothing new.

However, increasing academic and practitioner scrutiny has been placed upon the ability of such interventions to provide a platform for young people to articulate their ideas. To this end, the importance of 'voice' has become evident in the quest to provide social inclusion interventions that not only divert young people's attention away from various forms of anti-social behaviour but also provide participants with a sense of empowerment. For example, media and social commentary surrounding the London Riots of 2011 has alluded to the need for a greater engagement with youth. In light of these events, an increased emphasis has been placed by Urban Stars staff on creating opportunities for participants to air their views. In this context 'voice' is seen as a tool via which participants can take further ownership of their intervention experiences and, as a result, contribute to the specific workings of the projects concerned. At the same time Urban Stars staff are aware that utilising youth voice is a difficult and sensitive process especially given the feelings of inferiority and inadequacy experienced by some of the young people with whom they work. In response to this Urban Stars London have created a 'Youth Practitioner Forum' that provides a space for partners and young people to come together to discuss how they can collaborate more effectively.

This kind of approach to working with young people, coupled with the modern-day attraction and inherent values of sport, creates an innovative and highly effective model of youth engagement, youth development and community safety which is applicable to a range of social and geographical contexts.



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A close-up photograph of a person's back and right arm. The person is wearing a vibrant purple t-shirt. On the back of the t-shirt, the website address "www.activecommunities.org" is printed in white, sans-serif font. The person is holding a red basketball with black lines under their right arm. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be an outdoor sports court with a grey floor and a chain-link fence.

[www.activecommunities.org](http://www.activecommunities.org)

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