

# URBAN STARS

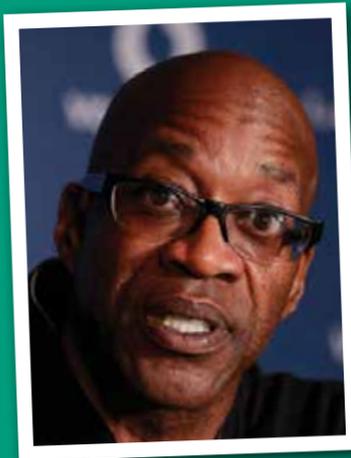
Sport, crime prevention  
and community action





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## FOREWORD 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. It's 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 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 Laureus Sport For Good Foundation has in recent years 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: the implementation of 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 work closely with Active Communities Network 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.

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).

## 1.1 THE RESEARCH

This independent research investigation sought to explore the opinions, attitudes and perceptions of young people, project leaders/workers and community stakeholders towards the Urban Stars initiative and associated projects. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and interpretations of these respondent groups within the context of the geographical locations under consideration. During the course of their investigations, the research team were granted open access to all of the activities and resources of Active Communities Network.

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 participants, 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, the potential of sport 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.

## 1.2 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 the engagement of young people (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 the 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).

The report is thus grounded in first-person opinions, perspectives, perceptions and subjective experiences, offering evidence of trends and patterns of sporting engagement as well as an overall sense of the 'impact' of the Urban Stars programme. 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 specifically 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.

## 1.3 KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the report are as follows:

### URBAN STARS LONDON

In London, Urban Stars operates against a back drop 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.

In London, football is effective because of its ability to draw in participants and its capacity to facilitate peoples' collective desires to come together and reach out to others, thereby justifying its logical inclusion as an outreach vehicle.

At a social level, football is identified by programme participants as having the ability to bring people together and to overcome geographical tensions and rivalries providing opportunities for young people to engage with others and to recognise and put aside their differences. Urban Stars works effectively in helping young people to develop personal characteristics that would be conducive to them dealing more appropriately with 'post-code' rivalries: 70% of participants confirmed that they were willing to stay away from (more reluctant to get involved with) gangs and gang-related activity as a consequence of programme engagement. Residential trips were identified by programme participants as central to the development of social (relationship building and communication) skills.

As a result of sustained engagement, young people recognised the broader lifestyle benefits associated with Urban Stars programme engagement and acknowledged the genuine passion, care and concern demonstrated by project workers towards the holistic development of participants. Urban Stars appears uniquely attractive because of this.

When discussing 'transferable skills', participants claimed that they had valued the opportunity to develop their confidence, empathy, punctuality and team-building skills. More importantly, participants recognised the potential of these skills and attributes to benefit their lives and lifestyles.

Urban Stars staff were identified as key role models and mentors who participants held in high regard. Young people valued the impact that these individuals had upon their lives. When asked about their involvement in Urban Stars, some respondents outlined how they had become role models for others and many aspired to be longer-term mentors. Similar issues were evident where a number of successful Urban Stars partnerships had been established.

## URBAN STARS WEST MIDLANDS

Boxing is the sport which is most appealing to a number of local statutory and voluntary agency partners involved with Urban Stars in the West Midlands. Emphasis is placed upon providing weekly training programs with targeted small groups from a range of different organisations in and through specific referral programmes, i.e. with young people who have either served custodial sentences, are participating in community rehabilitation programmes through local Youth Offending Services, or have been referred via partnerships with local Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Bespoke packages allow boxing to be incorporated as an adjunct to other sustained forms of support that young people receive as part of their rehabilitation, i.e. cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). It is valued both by unemployed young people and those not presently in education or training as something constructive which positively impacts their free time as a consequence of the fact that Urban Stars delivery is not simply about the acquisition of physical skill and technique but is underpinned by an educational focus enabling committed and talented young people to gain accredited sports qualifications and to embark on activity pathways involving a disciplined, purposeful and focused approach to daily life.

For targeted young people deemed to be 'at-risk' of further isolation and exclusion, boxing sessions are valued as 'safe spaces' that are strategically accessible at times when individuals could potentially gravitate towards 'trouble spots' in local neighbourhoods. For stakeholders, community partners and grassroots development workers, boxing is seen as having enormous 'transformative' and 'empowering' potential to foster positive youth development and to facilitate social change in the lives of committed young people.

Boxing not only promotes 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 professional sports coaches. Coaches are often seen as 'substitute' or 'surrogate' family-figures providing the right kind of support, nurturing the right kind of attitude and listening to young people in a way that they are unaccustomed. The transition from role model/participant to longer-term mentor/mentee relationships focuses on personal/life skills and individual journeys of self-development. This means that talented young sports people can not only be identified but also supported over time thereby enabling individuals to reach their own sporting/personal goals.

Youth workers, learning mentors, and sports coaches attest to the empowering potential of the social aspects of boxing, stating that sessions enable marginalised young people to congregate, to make friends, and to meet groups of professionals working to foster positive social change in their lives.

In the West Midlands, boxing is strategically used to enhance aspects of young people's personal and character development, as well as their social and community engagement potential. Findings illustrate that participants were significantly impacted by programme engagement especially in those areas of development 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 own 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 to be more motivated and goal-orientated (94%).

Boxing across the West Midlands is also identified as enabling young people to stay away from the 'wrong crowds' (94%), and as helping young people feel less confrontational (92%), more tolerant (91%) and patient (88%). It is also crucial in helping young people identify role-models and people they admire (88%), and makes them more aware of people and organisations they can turn to for help (88%). For some it instilled a greater sense of belonging (57%).

## URBAN STARS SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE (ASHFIELD HMP & YOI)

Since inception the Urban Stars programme has engaged 165 residents at Ashfield HMP & YOI, 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 Urban Stars project staff 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>1</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>2</sup> and a national average of 74% for those serving sentences of one year and under<sup>3</sup>).

By encouraging residents to pursue some form of sporting interest, Urban Stars attracts young men who have an existing interest in (and passion for) sport, as well as those who have little, if any, previous sporting exposure.

For a number of Ashfield residents the Urban Stars programme provides a means by which they can start to think about life in an altogether more positive way. For some young men, sport provides a way of re-directing their thoughts and energies and of experiencing a sense of achievement.

The positive impact of sporting involvement for Ashfield residents is demonstrated by the greater ability of participants to: organise their time (78%), stay away from 'trouble' (i.e. gangs) (78%), appreciate the importance of hard work (67%), and work both independently (67%) and as part of a team (56%). Sport also has an impact in terms of the willingness of participants to help others (67%) and their ability to be more empathetic (67%).

A further benefit of sporting involvement for young people at Ashfield is that they are able to come into contact with (and get to know) a range of other residents who, under normal circumstances, they would not have the opportunity to interact with. In this sense, sport is a means by which participants are able to develop socially as well as individually.

A key element of successful programme delivery at Ashfield is the provision of mentoring alongside practical sports coaching and qualifications. The underlying philosophy here differs from that of traditional mentoring where a structured programme of regular meetings is put in 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

<sup>1</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>2</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>3</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.

the mentee. Mentoring support is also provided 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. Further mentoring support is provided by peers, i.e. those who are, or have been, part of an Urban Stars programme during their time at Ashfield. This peer-mentoring arrangement facilitates the establishment of trust on the basis of the similarly negative lifestyle experiences which mentor and mentee share with inspiration being derived from the fact that mentors have chosen to exchange those experiences for an altogether more positive and productive approach to life.

As a consequence of their engagement with the Urban Stars programme, Ashfield residents experience an increase in the range of activities which they engage in whilst in custody (78%). Importantly, participants also experience increases in a number of recorded social characteristics such as: their communication skills (56%), the number of friends they can call upon (56%), the amount of fun/enjoyment that they experience (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 residents) (56%). Participants also recognise an increase in their sense of belonging (67%), patience (67%), and their ability to be less confrontational (56%).

By using sport as a means of engagement with residents in prison, Urban Stars 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 develop coherent self-advocacy, to interact with multi-agency support and, where appropriate, to re-establish familial connections and relationships.



## 1.4 CONCLUSIONS

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.

Evidence from this study suggests that:

Sport can be effective not only in engaging marginalised youth but in tackling youth crime and reducing re-offending. At the same time it can provide a variety of support mechanisms and life course pathways. In the geographical and organisational contexts featured in this research, Active Communities Network is a key facilitator of such opportunities.

Of central importance to the success of Urban Stars is the presence of carefully selected and well trained staff who possess an in-depth understanding of sports development, youth work and the broader socio-cultural environments within which they operate.

Role models act as a 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 Urban Stars programme. This is a key component of the success of the initiative and a highly valued facet of participant experience.

Formal and informal mentoring also forms a key part of participant experience. This takes place at various levels: via project workers/leaders, coaches, and peers; each stage/phase of which reinforces the support on offer. Peer mentoring encourages the establishment of trust and self-worth on the part of the mentee via the establishment of tangible relationships. 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 chosen to exchange those experiences for a more positive and productive lifestyle. In this way, Urban Stars re-defines mentoring along the lines of equality and shared experience.

Partnership is a central facet of Urban Stars delivery and brings with it several key benefits. 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.

Effective partnership-working entails 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 continue to be viewed as a stepping-stone to further engagement in similar or wider educational/career activities (be they sport-related or not).

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 aware of the potential opportunities which engagement offers.

Irrespective of geographical 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 'at risk' of being excluded from mainstream society. However, if the project is to expand, then it is likely that further thought will need to be given to the way in which the present standard of internal evaluation is to be maintained. One area of concern is 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 is presently difficult to come by. 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. This is an issue which needs to be addressed in a wider research and performance context across the sector.

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 the kinds of social inequalities that young people suffer. It is evident that Urban Stars project workers understand the importance of utilising a youth informed, 'bottom up' approach to their work. It is clear that partner agencies also understand the need to adopt a 'grassroots' approach to delivery.

## 1.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This research has explored the Urban Stars programme across specific geographical sites and locations within the UK. As the programme expands across additional sites, further research will be required to investigate the experiences and perceptions of alternative population groups. In addition, there is a need to investigate the impact of the programme over time. Such investigations would present opportunities for in-depth, comparative analysis.



## 2.0 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.



## 2.1 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.

## 2.2 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.

## 2.3 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:

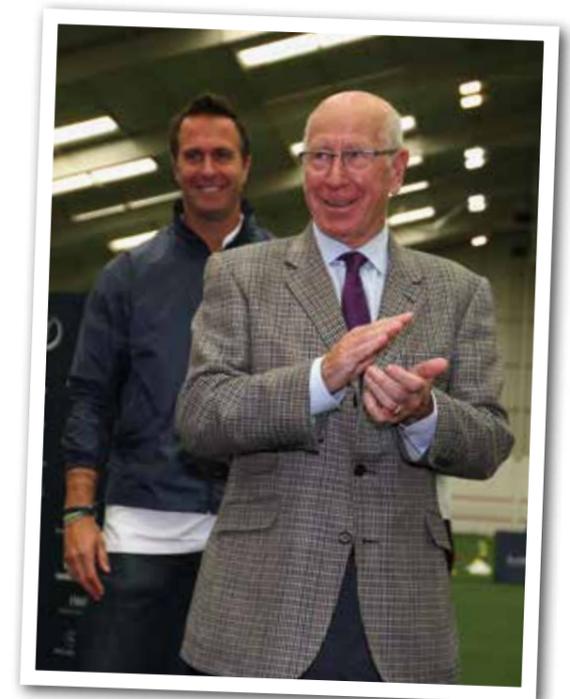
- What are the aims of the project? Who does it seek to target, and why? How does it work? Who delivers the sessions?
- What is the project's track-record (e.g. what sort of change(s) might the initiative seek to bring about in the range of young people being engaged?);
- How many delivery sessions are 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.

## 2.4 ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

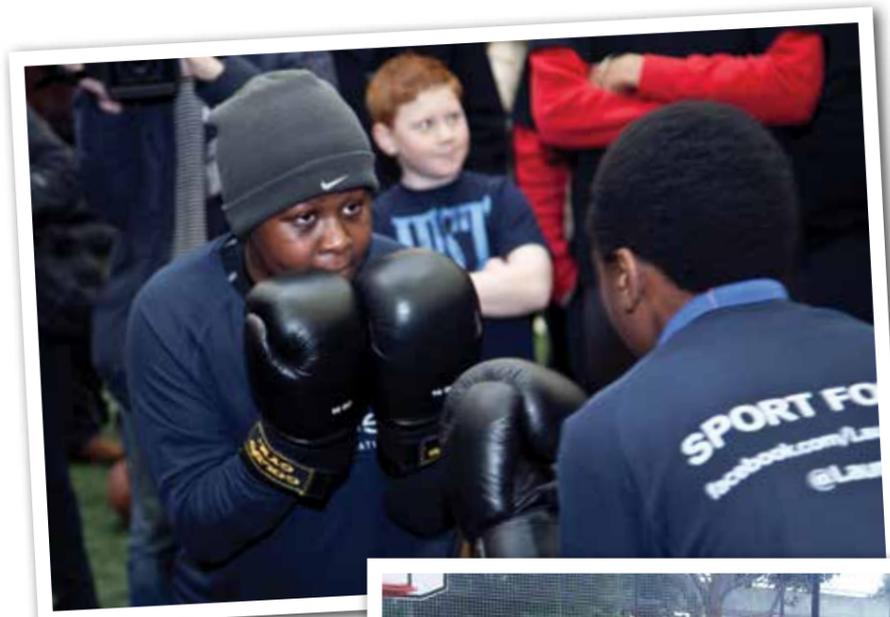
Role models have long since been (and remain) an important avenue via which young people engage with certain sports and, where fame and notoriety is concerned) often act as an inspirational force especially where their life stories depict achievement in the face of adversity. Role models also act as 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 initiative. 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.



## 2.5 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).

## 2.6 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).

## 2.7 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.

## 2.8 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.



## 2.9 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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