



SPORT & YOUTH CRIME CONFERENCE

How sport makes a difference to young people at risk of exploitation





Celebrating Sport and Young People

Sport and Activity Enabler Role:

Connecting young people to sports and activities which provide positive distraction, improve health and wellbeing, improve confidence, self-esteem and aspirations and give young people the opportunity to try new things and build positive relationships with peers and adults.

Patterns emerging that contribute to success:

- **Persistence is key alongside building trusting relationships;** you need to give space where it's needed but able to keep in touch and carry on engaging even if the young people doesn't engage.
- **Thinking creatively about activities;** for example, if a young person doesn't know what they want to do; find out if they're a thrill seeker, a deep thinker or a team player and find activities to match accordingly.
- **Every young person has a myriad of strengths which sport can enhance, develop and celebrate.**
- **Young people on the sharp end of systemic inequalities often require more than one sports club per week,** it's the wrap around support or several different activities that often help and potentially make more sustainable change.
- **There is a lack of provision and gaps for sports providers that are able or have capacity to offer wrap around mentoring alongside sport or activity.** Funding and infrastructure support is an issue for many small providers across the county.
- **Giving young people the opportunity to try new things that they may not have said they wanted to try;** for example, people who thrive on adrenaline consider martial arts, rock climbing etc.
- **Using sport to develop resilience, overcoming challenges in sport and developing skill is a great way of supporting young people's development.**



Trying new things

In August the Missing Chats Service, with the support of the Sports and Activities Enabler, provided a small group of girls the opportunity to try Aerial Hoop at Kinetix in Witham.

This was a positive group activity in which 4 girls known to the Missing Team participated in trying out the challenges of Ariel Hooping with the support and instruction of a trainer.

Ariel Hoop was followed by shared food chosen by the girls, and an opportunity to chat about relevant issues and common themes, such as healthy relationships, in a safe space. The girls enjoyed themselves and consolidated friendships through this shared experience.

Facing your fears

Swimming lessons arranged for care experienced young person

“I didn't get the chance to learn to swim when I was growing up. I spent many years in the foster care system, and it had never been a priority. When I turned 18 I had pretty much accepted that I would never swim and I had become aquaphobic, to the point that walking out on a jetty or pier would make me panic. When a friend mentioned that they had seen a competition on Facebook advert for free adult swimming lessons I admittedly wasn't the most enthusiastic. However, I applied and won!! On the drive to my first lesson, I considered pulling out, just the thought of getting into a pool was petrifying, let alone the thought of actually swimming!

When I arrived at the pool, I met the swimming teacher Vicky, and that's when things changed for me. She totally understood my fears and she ensured that we went at a pace I was comfortable with. Having no one watching helped as well, and by the end of my first lesson my relationship with swimming had slightly changed. I was still fearful, but I could float and if I could float then maybe I could feel safer in the water.

On my second lesson I swam for the first time in my life. Vicky's encouragement and 1-1 tuition made me feel safe and I couldn't believe that I could learn so quickly. By my fourth lesson I swam a length of the pool unaided!

I feel really lucky to have had this experience and I can't thank Vicky and the STA Learn To Swim Campaign enough for giving me this opportunity and ongoing encouragement. It has changed my relationship with the water completely. I may never be an Olympic swimmer, but I can be safe in the water. That's something every person should have the opportunity to experience.”

From Young Person's support worker:

“I just wanted to provide some private feedback myself. J has not had a easy life so far but somehow he still has a huge heart, the ability to trust and the determination to follow through on his commitments. He was genuinely afraid of swimming, and I don't think I had appreciated the level of this fear until I brought him for his first lesson.

How you got him into the pool and to the point where he could swim in such a small amount of time blows my mind. Your emails to him providing encouragement and feedback have been so positively received, I could not have been more proud of J when he swam the length of the pool unaided, but I truly recognise that you have a special ability to connect and bring the best out in the people you coach.”



Using your strengths to overcome challenges

Having experienced criminal exploitation and issues with local gangs this young person has been mainly at home, NEET, with little contact with people outside of his immediate family. Having previously boxed before with clear talent, he has worked with the Sport Enabler who is a boxing coach to support him ahead of him joining a different boxing gym in a safer location for him to access.

“I’m H, I’m 16, we’ve been training hard, rigorously, but will be all worth it one day, we’ve been doing pad work, skipping, stuff to build endurance and make me a better boxer. Boxing is 100% what I want to do. The sessions have been helpful to get me active, stop me from smoking, keep my mind off things and achieving something. My fitness has improved from when I started, I couldn’t even run around the block. Thank you very much for coming, I appreciate it.”

He is now accessing a boxing gym outside of his area, with the support of ATF Basildon alongside the sessions with the Sport Enabler. He has valued the mentoring aspect of our sessions and the opportunity to focus on his self-development as well as his boxing training.





Thinking about activities creatively and working with what is

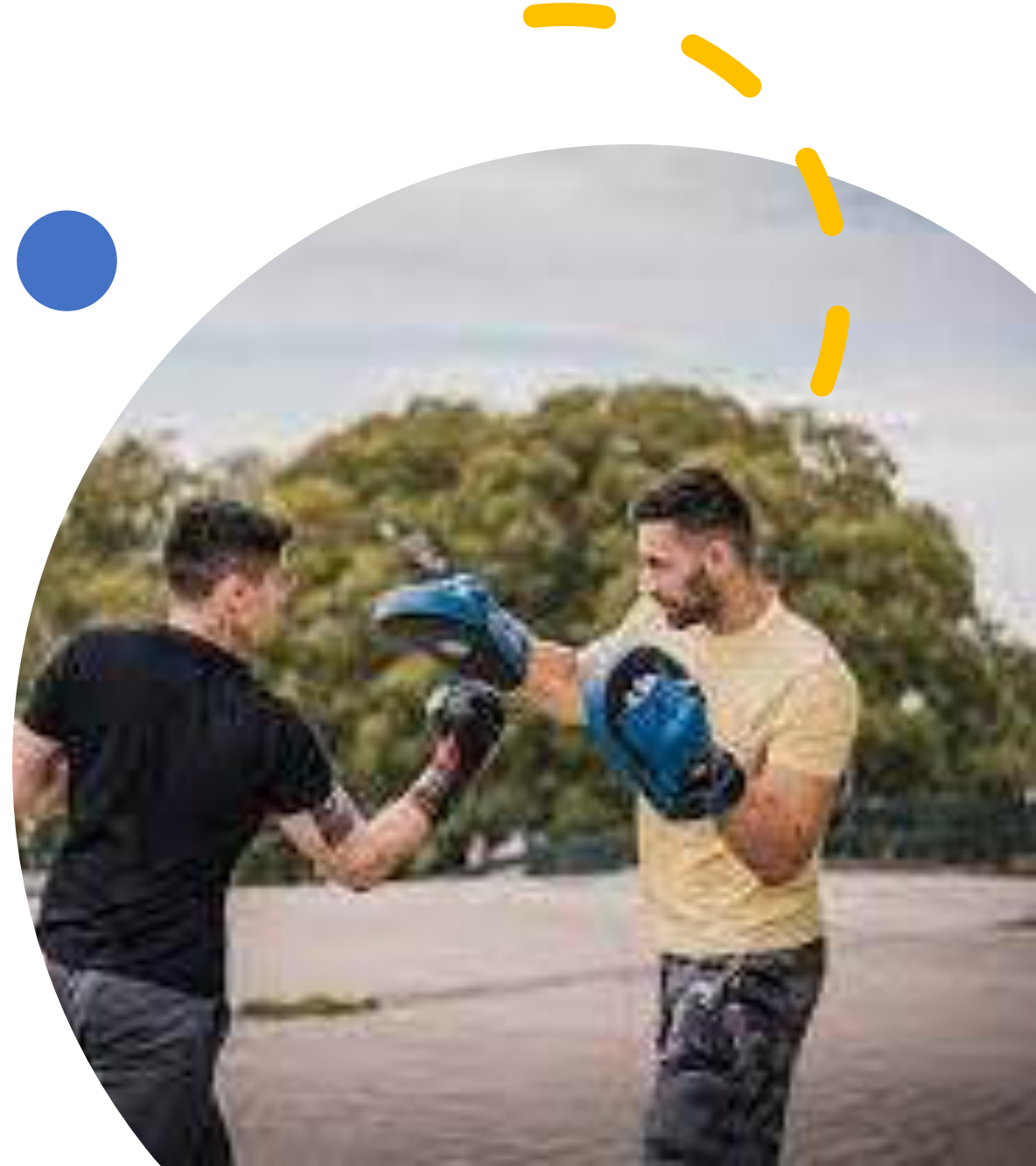
Working with a 13-year-old young person who was placed on a ward at a local hospital, following an adoption breakdown and mental health challenges. She was bored of being stuck on the ward and loves TikTok dancing and gymnastics. After the meeting her it became clear that doing something on the ward would really lift her spirits and relieve boredom. Hip Hop Pop, Harlow came to deliver the first hip hop dance session on the ward, which was fantastic. She was thrilled, and the tutor was brilliant at working alongside her. In the end the Young Person had us all learning a TikTok dance and invited another girl on the ward to join in and take part in her own creation of This Ward's Got Talent. Hip Hop Pop delivered two brilliant sessions, which only ended due to the Young Persons placement being moved out of area. It was a great way to show how sports and activities can take place in spaces that might not normally have them.

Trusting relationships

“I enjoy my time with Max, it’s good to get out and speak to someone. It’s good to be out of the house, it’s something to do. I feel I trust Max. He helps to improve on my social skills as well as my fitness.” D, 15-year-old male

Persistence is key.

L, a 17-year-old with experience of criminal exploitation has decided to turn his life around. With a passion for football and a willingness to find work and seek a more positive pathway for himself. Initially it was hard to engage with him, as understandably we were new people that he needed to build trust with, eventually he started playing football with ATF Basildon. After a few weeks, the Enabler made contact again to see how he was getting on and L agreed to meet to give some boxing a try. The Enabler met with L and did some sessions in his back garden using boxing and personal training activities which he enjoyed. Since, L has started a work placement arranged via ATF Basildon and has also joined a local boxing club. Despite some challenges, L continues to be making a significant effort to achieve the things he wants to and to take part in more positive activities in his life. He’s part of a local men’s football team and was proud to show me his two goals in 20 minutes on the pitch, is boxing at his local club and has begun his work placement.



The picture in 4.5 months...

- Referrals have been received, 68 are currently open
- Recruited 10 new LTOs (Locally Trusted Organisations),
- Types of Activities: Football, basketball, swimming, volleyball, sea swimming, horse riding, boxing, hip hop dancing, go karting, work placement, mentoring,
- Boxing equipment and basketball supplied for 2 young people,
- Reasons: Risk of, suspected or known criminal exploitation, missing episodes, care experienced, heard at MACE or RIC
- 35 with experiences of mental health challenges, ADHD, ASD (some awaiting diagnosis),
- 50 males and 18 females,
- Age range 11–18-year-olds,
- 20 separated migrant young people,
- 28 young people active and receiving provision,
- 11 on hold due to moving out of area or changes in circumstances that have caused a delay, 3 successful closure and are attending provision independently or reached end of agreed provision.
- 29 pending provision – all waiting to start with an LTO
- Of the young people referred 9 are receiving / received some form of 1-1 direct support from the Sports Enabler, 14 of these young people were engaged through the It's My Life Festival, 8 came via existing referrals.
- Turnaround time from referral to start of intervention on average is 4-6 weeks.

What increases safety for young people?

In an audit of young people closed to MACE 1, we identified four key factors which were frequently cited as reasons for reduced risks and increased safety for young people previously at high risk of exploitation:

- Re-integration into school/college/employment/training
- Improved relationships with key family members
- Gaining a trusted adult to talk openly and share feelings
- Developing a new and positive peer group

What do young people and their families tell us?

Young People

- Don't always recognise risks in the community
- Want more positive activities to engage with
- See exploiters as their friends
- Welcome support to engage in activities/education
- Feel a need to carry weapons

Families

- Keen for support to understand exploitation
- Want help from professionals to reduce risks for their child
- Want their child to have opportunity for more positive activities
- Welcome visible police patrols in local areas