

Sporting Champions reach out to those that find it hard to engage in sport



Sporting Champions is a Sport England initiative bringing world-class athletes face to face with young people to inspire and motivate them. The scheme is aligned to the Sportivate programme and offers County Sport Partnerships visits by athlete role models that aim to encourage more young people to take part in sport, motivate them to continue and successfully transition into clubs. Working with young people who are 'harder to engage' in sport is important to the athletes, who actively seek opportunities to work with projects targeting young people that; have behavioural issues, have a disability, are from a deprived community or are not in employment.

Abdi Jama is a twice British Paralympian and Paralympic bronze medal holder in wheelchair basketball. He has played all over the world and was voted the 2012 international player of the year. Abdi became a Sporting Champion because he wanted to give something back to the community, raise awareness of disability and inspire people take to take up sport. Abdi made three visits to a **Sportivate disability coaching programme** held at Beaumont College, Lancaster that offers both residential and day programmes to learners aged between 18 and 25 with a broad range of physical and learning disabilities.



The coaching programme is a good example of effective partnership working between Sporting Champions, Cumbria University and Beaumont College. Abdi worked alongside five student volunteers from the University who helped coordinate sessions based around disability specific sports such as boccia and new age kurling. The project helped the students understand and put into practice a sports development programme and engaged eight young people from the college. The young people were committed to each session and looked forward to Abdi attending so much that staff from Beaumont College were asked to play online clips of Abdi taking part in sport so they could be inspired even at the sessions that he did not attend.



Abdi explained to the young people how he had got into Wheelchair basketball “**Ade Orogbenie a famous British wheelchair basketball player came to my school similar to what I'm doing now. He inspired me take up the sport and sign posted me to a local team, and now I'm a member of the British wheelchair basketball team**”.

Both the coaches and organisers were impressed by the effect Abdi had on the project; “**Abdi was full of enthusiasm and highly motivated. The young people loved having him present for their boccia and new age kurling sessions. His personality was infectious. Very pleasant and happy to share his experiences**”.

Patrick Scott

As a result Abdi hopes he is inspiring the young people in the same way “**I come from a disadvantaged background in Toxteth, Merseyside and I just want to give back and show the young people you can achieve anything you want to, there are no barriers**”

Alistair tackles anti- social behaviour



85% of the young people that met Alistair at the three sessions he attended have gone on to continue to regularly take part in sport at the Friday Night Project.

Alastair Patrick-Heselton a cerebral palsy Paralympic footballer attended a Sportivate project in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire. The area was seen as a hotspot for anti-social behaviour so a multi-sports activity session called the 'Friday Night Project' was established in a bid to steer young people in a positive direction and away from crime. The project engaged with 60 young people (45 male and 15 Female) that were at risk of being involved in anti-social behaviour.

Alistair described why he got involved with Sporting Champions **"After London 2012 I've had a little bit of a celebrity status as result I feel I need to use this better and inspire young men and women to take up sport"**. Alistair, an ex QPR player, talked about his involvement with the Premier League Club which appeared to motivate the young people in their skills training. Through his three visits to the project he took time to raise awareness of disability, many of the young people at the project did not understand his disability **"I had a brain trauma this is partly a hidden disability this project made the young people realise that some disabilities are hidden and that they can come in all different shapes and sizes."**

The organisers of the project were impressed by Alistair's contribution and the understanding of the needs of the young people, **"It was fantastic to have Alistair return to our project. He worked tirelessly throughout the whole three hour session to ensure that everyone had the full benefit of his attention and involvement. He is a true Sporting Champion and has proved to be a great asset to our project...and he always joins in the fun and banter!"** John Manitar

Tom makes Judo a 'can do' sport for disability

Tom Reed a British Judo Champion who narrowly missed out on a place at London 2012, is a Sporting Champion who is trying to build on the legacy of the London Paralympics Games.

Tom attended three Sportivate sessions at Mencap Lufton College, Somerset where he helped 13 young people with disabilities get to grips with Judo. He had a great reception from the young people Jack Harrison a participant said **"I liked learning new words in a different language, trying a new sport and enjoyed the coaching we had"**.

Tom thinks highly of the Sportivate coaches that he works with **"the coaches were great they inspire young people to take up sport, when I turn up it gives young people a chance to ask questions. A lot of the young people were asking me about local clubs and how to progress in the sport which is excellent"**. Mencap Lufton College really valued a visit from a Sporting Champion. Many of the young people involved expressed an enthusiasm for continuing to take part in Judo. As a result the college have sourced funding to help continue providing Judo to young people in their care.



Tom inspired 11 of the young people from the project to be part of a satellite club for people with learning difficulties. The aim of the club is to support them to take part in main club activities and eventually compete to a high level.

Courtney helps young people fight unemployment



Sporting Champions not only take part in the Sportivate programme to deliver coaching sessions once a project is underway but also engage with the recruitment of young people. Sporting Champion Courtney Fry a professional light heavyweight boxer and former Commonwealth Gold Medallist attended a recruitment scheme targeting young people aged 18-24 years that are unemployed and claiming Jobseekers allowance.

The Sportivate project is part of a six week work experience programme in Bury Council. The project has been set up through a partnership between Backing Young Bury, Bury Council, Bury Council Sport and Physical Activity Service, GreaterSport, Job Centre Plus, Work Programmes and O2.

Courtney addressed over 60 young people describing the way he used sport to stay out of trouble and increase his confidence. **'It was fantastic having Courtney as a Sporting Champion he engaged the young people, finding out what they would want from their future Sportivate sessions and inspiring / enthusing them to get involved with Sportivate and the project as a whole'** Pritish Patel, Principle Sport Development officer.

GreaterSport thought that a visit by a Sporting Champion would help to motivate the young people and encourage them to look forward to engaging in work experience combined with the opportunity to take part in a sporting activity. Courtney's background and sporting experience matched the needs of the young people and he spent valuable time talking with individual young people about his experiences and the way they could use sport as a positive outlet. Courtney will deliver a sport session for the young people involved in the project in the spring.

'I used to love sport but got mixed up with drugs maybe I could get back into it' One unemployed 24 year old participant.



Critical success factors

- Sporting Champions can draw on a range of personal experiences to connect with young people from a variety of backgrounds. Time is taken to make sure that the athlete role model matches the needs of young people.
- Each Sporting Champion is trained in equality and diversity. They can play a role in raising awareness and educating young people as well as supporting them with barriers they may face.
- A Sporting Champion can act as a role model for engaging in physical activity but can also work with young people to improve their self esteem and confidence.
- Young people value the one to one time with the Sporting Champion. The time taken by the athlete role model to work with individuals was specifically important to young people from these hard to reach groups.
- Repeat visits from Sporting Champions can positively impact on whether young people are retained within the project and whether they continue to take part in sport once the project is completed.