

**EMPIRE  
FIGHTING  
CHANCE**

# **STEPPING UP OUR FIGHT**

**Our impact in 2023**

“

Ryan has gone from being involved in two knife incidents and two overdoses to no incidents since attending Empire. He has gone from never wanting to exercise and having such bad social anxiety to now really enjoying exercise and loving being part of a group. Ryan has had so many interventions previously and nothing worked for him until Empire. Ryan has been transformed.

Mum of Ryan, 14

”

“

**This programme has changed this young person's life.**

Families Plus, South Gloucestershire Council

”

“

**It makes me feel like I belong somewhere. Everyone is really friendly and always there to cheer you up or make you laugh. It has helped me to control my emotions and I am less likely to get into a fight at school.**

Layla, 14

”



## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4	BOX CAREERS.....	20
WHO WE ARE .....	6	THE YEAR IN NUMBERS .....	22
THE EMPIRE WAY .....	8	YOUNG PEOPLE'S STORIES.....	24
TACKLING YOUTH VIOLENCE IN BRISTOL.....	10	WORKING IN WALES.....	30
LEARNING EXCHANGE WITH MEDELLÍN.....	12	TRANSFORMING YOUNG LIVES THROUGH BOXING CLUBS.....	32
STEPPING UP FOR OUR COMMUNITY.....	14	SHARING OUR WORK WIDELY.....	34
BOX CHAMPIONS.....	16	OUR FUTURE PLANS .....	36
BOX THERAPY.....	18		

# INTRODUCTION

This year, another young man we were supporting was murdered on Bristol's streets. Eddie Kinuthia had his life tragically cut short by knife crime. This fatal incident and a spike in youth violence forced us to take a hard look at our work and our home city. Taking inspiration from how other countries are tackling youth violence, we stepped up our fight for young people. We improved our boxing and psychology programmes, intensified our role in Bristol and grew a national movement of organisations using our work in their communities. We left 2023 proud of the increased impact that we're having on young people's lives in Bristol and other places across the country.

The fatal stabbing of Eddie reflects an alarming escalation of youth violence in Bristol. Gangs are becoming more active, serious violent incidents are happening more frequently and those involved are getting younger. From our boxing gym in inner-city Bristol, we have needed to work with more young people than ever before who are involved in gangs, knife crime and violence.

We looked at how cities across the world had successfully reduced youth violence. Among other things, we launched a knowledge exchange with Medellin in Colombia, a city that was once the murder capital of the world. We used what we learned to strengthen our work with young people involved in violence and take on greater responsibility for improving our local community.

Outside Bristol, we stepped up our efforts to increase our impact across the UK. We enhanced our presence in South Wales and built a powerful movement of over 30 boxing clubs and other organisations from across the country delivering our work in their local area. Our efforts resulted in us reaching nearly 10,000 young people in 2023, double the number in the previous year.

Our success this year was only possible through the support of many individuals and organisations from across Bristol, the UK and the world. We are very grateful to all those that we worked alongside this year to transform the lives of young people. We hope that you enjoy reading our story of 2023.



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## WHO WE ARE

Empire Fighting Chance was born on Bristol's streets in 2006 to fight the destructive impact of inequality on the lives of young people. Arising from the renowned Empire Amateur Boxing Club in inner-city Bristol, we have grown to become a leading sport for development charity. We have developed a powerful way of working that combines boxing and psychology to give young people a fighting chance to realise their full potential and live safe, healthy, happy lives.

## WHO WE SUPPORT

We fight for young people hit by the brutal effects of inequality, including poverty, poor housing and discrimination. Despite the extraordinarily difficult circumstances young people face, we've yet to meet a young person without strength and potential to build a better future. But many get stuck. We exist for those who struggle with their mental health and those who express their distress in ways that can lead them into trouble, such as gang membership and substance misuse. Their struggles prevent them from engaging in education and employment. Feeling excluded from mainstream services, young people don't get the support they need, resulting in issues escalating until they reach a point of personal crisis.

## WHAT WE DO

We have created an alternative way of working with young people experiencing disadvantage that recognises what they have been through and what they need. Our model combines boxing with psychologically informed support, delivered by someone they trust and who is fighting in their corner. Young people gain support in a way that is enjoyable and feels safe, encouraging them to turn up, engage and go on to make positive changes to their lives.

We use our model to:

- **Deliver:** we design and deliver programmes for young people that combine boxing and psychology.
- **Train:** we share our work with others so they can deliver it in their local communities.
- **Fight:** we take what we learn from our work to inspire systemic changes that improve young lives.

We have developed four programmes for young people:

- **Box Champions:** boxing combined with mentoring delivered by a youth worker.
- **Box Therapy:** boxing combined with a therapeutic intervention provided by a therapist.
- **Box Careers:** boxing combined with support to shift mindsets, and access to career opportunities.
- **Box Juniors:** regular boxing sessions open to all young people, giving the alumni of our programmes the opportunity to continue their growth.

## OUR IMPACT

We reach nearly 10,000 young people each year across the UK. Our work gives young people resources to transform their lives, such as self-regulation to manage emotions and behaviour, a support network and a positive outlook for the future. Young people draw on these to improve their mental health, reduce destructive behaviour, engage better with education and progress into employment. To widen our impact, we are inspiring changes in Bristol and beyond to help create places where all young people can thrive.



**I've had three children at Empire. Each child has shown progress. One has stopped cutting themselves. One has stopped hitting me as much. And the other who doesn't open up to anyone finally started talking to their coach about what was wrong.**

Parent of Reece, Keira and Mason, 9, 10 and 14





# THE EMPIRE WAY

On the face of it, our work is based on a simple concept. Young people learn to box while talking to a trained professional to gain support to improve their lives. But there is far more to our work than meets the eye. There are six special ingredients that are fundamental to our work being effective. Together, these combine to form a proven and scalable model for transforming young lives.

“

I can see how this has worked so well for Jayden. Being able to move whilst processing feelings and being able to talk whilst exercising works wonders. We have found that (coach) Matt goes the extra mile with Jayden; he can talk openly to him, trust him and know that during his session that's his time.

Parent of Jayden, 14

”

## IN AND OF THE COMMUNITY

- Born and bred in the community
- Physical presence in the community
- Leadership and staff representative of the community

## AUTHENTIC AND CREDIBLE BOXING

- High quality boxing training to be attractive to young people
- Mental and physical health benefits of boxing
- Use of boxing to build trust and share psychology

## PSYCHOLOGICALLY INFORMED

- Trusted relationship with a young person
- Physically and emotionally safe space
- Use of relevant and evidence-based psychology

## IN THEIR CORNER

- Unconditional support for young people
- Positive image of young people
- Platforms for youth leadership within and beyond Empire

## CONNECTIONS AND INTELLIGENCE

- Wide range of routes into and out of Empire
- Intelligence from our work and streets to drive continuous improvement
- Strong relationships with families of young people

## ENTREPRENEURIAL AND ADAPTABLE

- Calculated risks to overcome complex issues
- Sources of income that give us flexibility to do work we believe in
- Responsive to meet the changing needs of young people

# TACKLING YOUTH VIOLENCE IN BRISTOL

In the past 18 months, three young men we were working with have been stabbed to death on the streets. Violent incidents are escalating in both severity and frequency and those involved are getting younger. We felt compelled to act to stop this crisis. Our starting point was to look at how cities across the world had tackled the issue. We used what we learned to take bold actions to tackle youth violence in our home city.

## INSPIRATION FROM AROUND THE WORLD

At the start of the year our efforts to reduce violence were recognised by Peace in our Cities, who invited us to join their global network of cities and organisations working to reduce and prevent urban violence. Through the network, we participated in knowledge exchange initiatives with cities that have successfully reduced youth violence, including Medellin in Colombia, Oakland, USA and Edmonton in Canada. Peace in our Cities visited Bristol to evaluate Empire's and our city's efforts in tackling violence and offer recommendations.



**It is an honour to advance violence prevention work in Bristol together with Empire Fighting Chance. Empire is a dream partner because of the credibility it already enjoys with the communities of Bristol. Together, we are working to cut violence and show the world that progress is possible with commitment and leadership.**

Alfredo Malaret Baldo, Urban Violence Officer, University of San Diego and co-facilitator of the Peace in Our Cities network



## INTERRUPTING VIOLENCE IN BRISTOL

We recruited our first 'violence interrupter' who has lived experience of gangs, links to local gangs and a track record of helping young people exit them. We started fast-tracking individuals known to be involved in gangs, improved the intelligence we get from the streets so that we're aware of disputes, and negotiated peaceful settlements between rival gangs to break cycles of violence. We also upskilled our team of coaches and therapists so they can better support individuals involved in violence.

## WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE MOST AT RISK OF INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENCE

We launched a new intensive project to support young people at high risk of involvement in violence and gangs. We pick up individuals from their neighbourhoods and bring them to our gym six times a week. Our 'violence interrupter' mentors them during boxing sessions by drawing on their lived experience. They then connect them with our staff and partners for specialist support, such as our Box Careers programme. Considering the level of exclusion and risk faced by this group of young people, initial results are promising:



**26** young people at high risk of involvement in violence have participated in the programme



**6** young people have taken part in Box Careers to help with their long-term prospects



**15** young people are attending their sessions regularly and reducing their involvement in violence

## WORKING TOGETHER TO TACKLE YOUTH VIOLENCE

We worked alongside Peace in our Cities and local institutions to explore the development of an Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) for inner-city Bristol. Operating independently of Empire and other agents, the OVP would bring organisations and communities together to create a joined-up approach to tackling youth violence. With support from Bristol's Mayor and Director of Public Health, we generated momentum for the initiative. Working closely with partners, we aim to move into implementation phase in 2024.



**There is an urgent need in Bristol for an organisation to lead an effort to stop retributory cycles of youth-related stabbings in the short term and coordinate an ecosystem of prevention in the long term.**

Report from Peace in our Cities following an evaluation of youth violence in Bristol





# LEARNING EXCHANGE WITH MEDELLÍN

The city of Medellín has undergone nothing short of a transformation since achieving its status as the murder capital of the world in 1991, when 16 people were killed every day. As part of our efforts to identify solutions to youth violence from around the world, we wanted to understand how the city had cut its homicide and poverty rates so dramatically. We participated in an intensive learning exchange with Medellín, which has included a visit, hosting a delegation in Bristol and a regular, ongoing dialogue.

## VISIT TO MEDELLÍN

Early in the year a delegation from Empire travelled to Colombia. We explored Medellín with an itinerary carefully crafted by our expert guide, Santiago Uribe Rocha, the city's former Chief Resilience Officer. The experience highlighted how we were using several of the strategies that Medellín's transformation had been built upon, including the use of sport, entrepreneurial thinking and a determination to make services and opportunities accessible to those who benefit from them the most.

## LESSONS FOR EMPIRE

We identified strategies that had been successful in Medellín that we could take home. We adapted them to become key approaches to strengthen our organisation, local community and wider city. Examples include:

- Collaborating more closely with organisations that work with young people in our local area.
- Increasing our intelligence on the young people that we support and their communities.
- Taking a leadership role in our city to inspire systemic change.

## PUTTING LEARNING INTO ACTION

We used inspiration and ideas from Medellín to take many practical actions. Highlights include:

- Piloting a new leadership programme for young people to become agents of change in their community while developing new skills.
- Updating the design plans for the extension to the Empire gym so that we can share our space with local organisations that can provide additional support for young people and their families.
- Creating a new role at Empire dedicated to strengthening relationships with organisations in our local community and gathering intelligence on emerging issues facing young people.
- Exploring the creation of an Office of Violence Prevention for inner-city Bristol.

“

**Empire Fighting Chance is one of the best of many institutions that I've seen around the world working on youth violence prevention. When I visited Empire, I could see that it had built all of what it is doing upon one amazing value – trust. And building trust with the community is the most important thing an institution can do, as it leads to people feeling safe and protected. It's a major shift that cities should focus on.**

Santiago Uribe Rocha, Executive Director at Medellín Resilience Office Corporation

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# STEPPING UP FOR OUR COMMUNITY

Our learning exchange with Medellín inspired us to take on greater responsibility for improving our local community in inner-city Bristol and other communities across the city hit by inequality. We stepped up our efforts to invest in, and share and collaborate with these communities and speak out on their behalf. By doing so, we're helping to create communities where their young people have a better chance of realising their full potential.



**During this young person's time at Empire, he has been on a programme to reintegrate into school. We have seen huge changes in his attitude towards peers and staff: he is presenting as a lot calmer and more motivated to succeed. He has really enjoyed his time at Empire and it has definitely sparked a passion for boxing, as well as an increased awareness of self-regulation.**

Soundwell Academy about Aaron, 12



## BECOMING MORE CONNECTED

We created a new role to make us more connected with others who work with young people and more aware of what's going on locally. As a result, we reached more young people from our local community and expanded the network that we can use to direct individuals to for additional support and opportunities.

## GROWING OUR WORK WITH SCHOOLS

We increased the number of schools we worked in across Bristol and South Wales and deepened our relationships with them. Our Schools Liaison Officer approached schools, worked closely with them to identify students who would benefit from our work and shared the progress they made.

## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR COMMUNITY

We created a small team with connections in the city to expand our network of employers that can offer young people opportunities. Several local companies stepped up, including Boston Tea Party, Everyone Active and RedRock Recruitment. We're raising awareness among companies of the challenges faced by young people and encouraging them to recognise this by offering them opportunities.

## WORKING ALONGSIDE FAMILIES

We launched a 'Parent Board' of parents and carers to help shape how we work with families. They helped us to create a more structured approach to working with parents/carers of the young people on our programmes. Our Family Liaison Officer contacts them at the start, middle and end of their child's programme. This vital interaction helps ensure young people turn up to their sessions and gives us insights that improve our work.

83%

**of teachers said that Empire Fighting Chance had made a positive difference to their students**

83%

**of parents said that Box Champions made a positive difference to their child**

77%

**of parents would recommend Box Therapy to other parents**



**There has been a complete change in Ethan since attending Empire. He is not as angry as he was and is now able to control his temper so much better.**

Parent of Ethan, 17







## In 2023...

2,798 young people participated in our Box Champions programme, giving them the opportunity to improve their mental health and behaviour, build healthier relationships and achieve other positive changes.

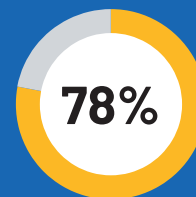
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**I really like coming here because the coaches can relate to me. They understand what the struggle is like and that makes me feel safe.**

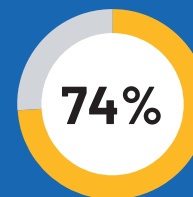
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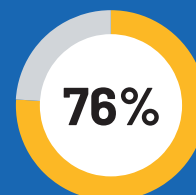
# BOX CHAMPIONS



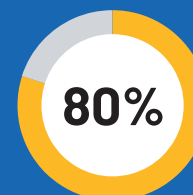
are  
more  
confident



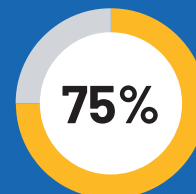
felt more in  
control of  
their life



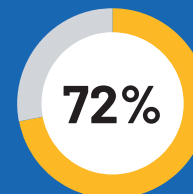
felt better  
about  
themselves



stopped  
getting into  
trouble



are  
more  
motivated



are more  
positive about  
their future

### HOW IT WORKS:

Our flagship programme features a coach mentoring young people to achieve their goals during boxing sessions. Coaches draw upon session plans that use boxing drills, games and metaphors to share Empire's psychological principles for healthy thinking and positive action.

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023



- Developed our third version of Box Champions, adding new psychological principles and including examples of how young people could apply them to their lives
- Employed a nutritionist to enrich Box Champions with knowledge that we can share with young people about healthy eating
- Grew our Apprentice Programme, which features alumni of Box Champions helping our coaches to deliver the programme to their peers.



Chris (therapist) is kind, thoughtful, supportive and encouraging. Having a safe space to go when she's experienced the kind of trauma she has is priceless. He's listened to her, guided her and allowed her a space to really release some of the frustration and anger she's bottled up. It gives her confidence to speak to new people, to express herself and to reclaim a little of who she is.

Parent of Taylor, 16

# BOX THERAPY

## In 2023...

338 young people participated in our Box Therapy programme, enabling them to improve how they manage their emotions, reduce negative behaviour and take steps to improve their lives.

95%

felt safe  
at  
Empire

97%

felt heard,  
understood  
and respected

81%

improved  
their mental  
wellbeing

74%

improved  
their self  
esteem

### HOW IT WORKS:

Empire's take on therapy features a therapist delivering a therapeutic intervention during boxing sessions. Therapists use boxing to connect young people with rich psychological knowledge and help them use it to improve their lives.

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023

- Successfully piloted our Box Therapy ACTivation Toolkit featuring 25 session plans that present the six principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy through boxing drills and games
- Increased the capacity of our Box Therapy team to respond to rising demand, and provided greater support to Empire's therapists through strengthening our provision of clinical supervision
- Expanded our use of a group format for Box Therapy so that we can see more young people and make use of the benefits of peer interaction.





## In 2023...

218 young people participated in our Box Careers programme, helping them on their journey into work and a healthier, brighter future.

“

**I feel this is my safe space where I can reveal the true me. It's helped me return to school and have a pathway figured out for my future. I feel a lot more confident about my career choices for when I leave school and what I have to do to get to the next step.**

Grace, 16

”

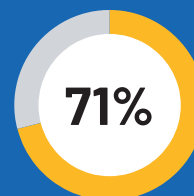
# BOX CAREERS



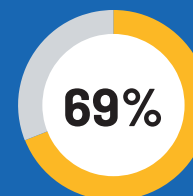
**150** individuals  
earned one  
or more  
qualifications  
through us



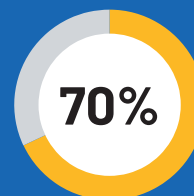
**75** individuals  
progressed into  
employment,  
training or further  
education



**are more  
positive about  
their future  
career**



**felt more  
informed about  
their career  
choices**



**feel more  
motivated**

## HOW IT WORKS:

A coach helps young people to develop a positive mindset and a career pathway during boxing sessions. Young people are then offered suitable employment and other progression opportunities and gain support to access and make the best use of these.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2023



- Successfully completed an employment project to support 54 young people's progression into employment for the West of England Combined Authority (WECA)
- Established three main pathways for young people to progress into work through our network of employers – sport and leisure, music and the arts, food and hospitality
- 28 young people completed our Level One Assistant Gym Instructor course, which culminates in a qualification to work in a gym.

# THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

In 2023 we reached

**9,593** young people

We supported

**3,354** young people ourselves

We trained boxing clubs and youth services to support

**6,239** young people

## OUR REACH

### DIRECT DELIVERY SITES

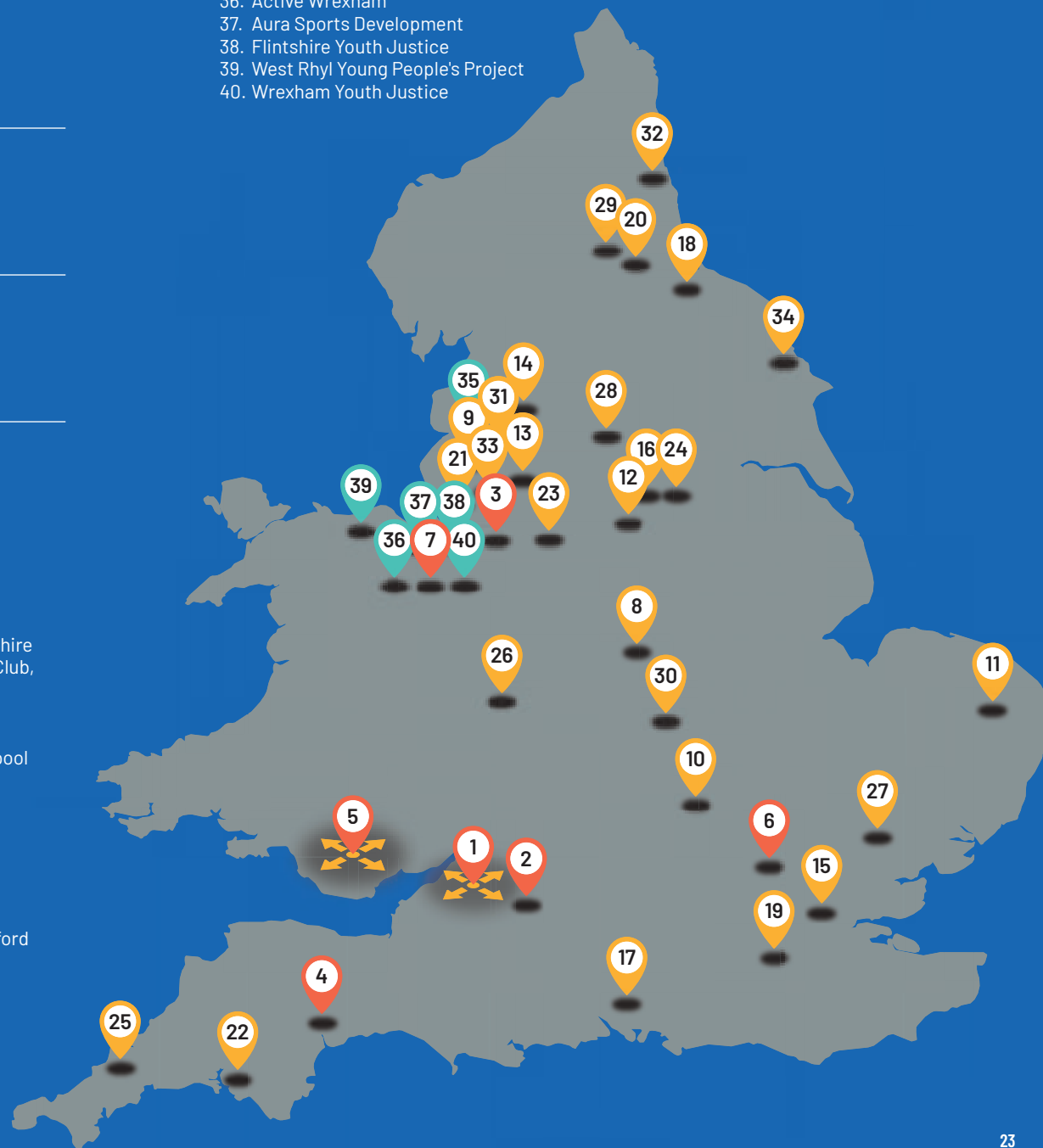
1. Bristol
2. Bath & Somerset
3. Cheshire
4. Exeter City Football Club
5. South Wales
6. Watford Football Club Community Trust
7. Wrexham

### BOXING CLUBS

8. Atlas Boxing and Fitness Club, Leicester
9. Birch Green Boxing Club, Skelmersdale
10. Boxing Clever, Milton Keynes
11. Broadside Warriors, Norwich
12. Brendan Ingle Foundation, Sheffield
13. Collyhurst and Moston Amateur Boxing Club, Greater Manchester
14. Clayton Amateur Boxing Club, Accrington
15. Dagenham Amateur Boxing Club, East London
16. Dinnington Community Boxing Club, Rotherham
17. Eastleigh Amateur Boxing Club, Hampshire
18. East Middlesbrough Amateur Boxing Club, Middlesbrough
19. Epsom Boxing Academy, Surrey
20. Fight Fitness Guru, County Durham
21. Lee Jones Amateur Boxing Club, Liverpool
22. Legends Boxing Gym, Plymouth
23. Macclesfield Boxing Club, Macclesfield
24. Millennium Amateur Boxing Club, Rotherham
25. Newquay Boxing Academy, Newquay
26. Priory Park Boxing Club, Dudley
27. Rayne Boxing Club, Essex
28. Sanctus Fitness and Boxing Gym, Bradford
29. Seconds Out Boxing Academy, County Durham
30. Team Shoe-Box, Northampton
31. Technique Boxing Club, Blackburn
32. Tyneside Boxing Club, Tyneside
33. Wildcard Boxing Club, St Helens
34. Westway Boxing Club, Scarborough

### YOUTH AND SPORT PARTNERS

35. Active Lancashire
36. Active Wrexham
37. Aura Sports Development
38. Flintshire Youth Justice
39. West Rhyl Young People's Project
40. Wrexham Youth Justice





## YOUNG PEOPLE'S STORIES



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## MATTY'S STORY

**Matty, 14, was referred to Empire by Vale of Glamorgan's Youth Offending Service owing to violent behaviour. He lacked stability in his life as a result of his parents separating. Matty was constantly moving between homes. He had become vulnerable to criminal exploitation and got involved in dangerous, illegal activities. Matty had committed many offences and was excluded from school. He saw no hope for his future.**

Matty joined Box Champions and was matched with coach Oli. At first Matty found it hard. Oli saw that 'Matty was struggling to control his emotions. He found it very hard to concentrate on the boxing exercises and became frustrated when he couldn't do something. He became moody and withdrawn and refused to take part in the session.'

We were patient with Matty and were rewarded with his trust. He told us that he could be easily provoked, which made him disappointed in himself. We helped Matty to recognise that whatever feelings he had, whether negative or positive, were normal but what was affecting him was how he was reacting to them.

We highlighted to Matty the ease with which he became overwhelmed by emotion during sessions. He'd rush into boxing drills using excessive aggression rather than focusing on quality punches and shot selection. Matty used the drills to learn to stay calm in pressurised situations and to react deliberately and positively. We then supported Matty in taking this learning from the ring into his life.

By the end, Matty was a calmer, more confident and more focused individual. As a result, he engaged much better with school, stopped engaging in criminal activity and saw hope for his future.

“

**Matty has been a lot better in school and he's having no trouble in the streets any more.**

Matty's dad

”

## ANGELICA'S STORY

**Angelica, 17, lives at home with her parents, who both have addiction problems and issues with depression, anger and suicidal ideation. Angelica has a history of self-harm, has attempted suicide five times, has disordered eating and is significantly underweight. She was referred to Empire by her school following two physical assaults on the street by a known female group, which left her feeling unsafe and unable to go outside by herself or see friends. Angelica felt as if she was 'going through life looking over my shoulder'.**

Angelica joined Box Therapy and was matched with therapist Elaine. Angelica was timid to begin with. She often recoiled from making contact with the boxing pads, but increasingly enjoyed the feeling it gave her. She began to find that the relief of anger she got from self-harm was possible through boxing. Boxing also shifted the way Angelica saw herself – from a fragile to a strong individual.

Angelica valued boxing so much that she asked for and received boxing gloves for her birthday, a gift she cherishes.

As the programme progressed, Angelica found her voice. She disclosed multiple incidents of sexual abuse, which were the root cause of her suicide attempts and self-harm. This was the first time that she'd shared this beyond her family. Helping Angelica explore and manage the impact of the abuse on her emotions and behaviour became the central focus for her sessions.

Elaine helped Angelica to recognise her extraordinary resilience and how far she had come with processing her trauma. We got her to challenge the negative self-talk that was bringing her down and reduce the feelings of hostility she held towards herself. As her self-confidence grew Angelica's world reopened, and she felt able to hold her head higher, walk about on her own and reconnect with her friends.

“

**Having a safe space to talk openly has been such a help for her. Before attending Empire, Angelica wouldn't leave the house. She was too frightened owing to the bullying she has suffered. However, in the last few weeks she has started to go out on her own, even going into town, which is such a huge step forward for her.**

Angelica's mum

”



## DARCY'S STORY

**Darcy, 14, is from Bristol and was referred to Empire because of deteriorating mental health. She had low self-esteem and had lost motivation for life. She was expressing her distress through cutting down on her food intake. Darcy hated school and did not see the point of it. Her family were battling every day to get her to attend. When she did attend, she behaved badly. Owing to regularly receiving detentions, she was placed on disciplinary action. This resulted in Darcy taking an overdose.**

Darcy joined Box Champions and was matched with coach Matt. Shortly after her sessions began Darcy told Matt that she was being bullied at school, which was why she hated it so much and avoided attending. She would bring her struggles back home, which was affecting relationships with her family.

Darcy started to notice how boxing was helping her to release negative emotions and feel calm. Matt helped Darcy to recognise there was nothing wrong with how she'd been feeling, which lifted a weight from her shoulders. With Matt's support, she began to stop fighting negative thoughts and push through difficult situations. Darcy started feeling better about herself, less anxious and more positive about life. She even auditioned for a major talent show at her school, something she told us that she'd never have done before.

Matt helped Darcy to understand the damage she was causing to her future by not attending school. They worked through her struggles, such as the bullying, and identified the positive things education could bring into her life. Darcy's attendance improved and she began receiving rewards for her effort in lessons.

“

**Darcy can see how much the boxing and mentoring is helping her, especially with her mental health. She feels strong in herself. Her school attendance has improved and her behaviour has got so much better. She is coming home with merits and being on the good chart every day.**

Darcy's mum

”

## CARTER'S STORY

**Carter, 17, was referred to Empire after being expelled from his college and regularly getting into trouble in his neighbourhood in Bristol. He'd had a turbulent home life. Carter's father had been in and out of prison for most of his childhood. He'd recently left prison and moved back in with Carter and his mum, putting a big strain on the family. Carter then had to spend time away from his home to lie low from a gang that was threatening him. Carter's mum turned to us as her son was 'going down the wrong path'.**

Carter joined Box Champions and was matched with coach Matt. Initially Carter didn't want to talk about what was going on for him. So we focused on using boxing to grow Carter's self-confidence through mastering the sport and building fitness. Carter recognised the impact exercise was having on his life: 'Before my sessions started, I would come home and be rude and disrespectful to my mum. Now I'm much calmer.'

As Carter's confidence grew, he started to recognise he had the ability to create a better future. We encouraged him to join Empire's Box Careers programme. Our careers coach worked with Carter to create a career path and he started taking up opportunities to move along it. Carter completed our 12-week Level 1 Gym Instructor course, giving him a qualification to work in a local gym. He met professional rugby players from Bristol Bears to talk about working in the sports industry. He attended a CV and interview workshop hosted by recruitment company RedRock Recruitment.

A few days later Carter was interviewed for a job at a streetwear clothing store and was offered the position. We were proud of Carter for taking his first step towards a brighter future.

“

**Carter has loved the sessions with Empire. To see how his confidence has grown since attending has been the best feeling ever for a parent. I can't remember the last time I saw him this confident and happy. All I can say is how much he's thriving since attending Empire.**

Carter's mum

”

# WORKING IN WALES

We chose South Wales as the first location to operate in outside Bristol owing to the level of need for our boxing programmes and its close proximity to our home city. Since launching a small project in Barry in 2017 we have firmly established ourselves across the region, transforming young lives across 11 local authority areas. Our success in Wales over seven years and in multiple locations proved to us that what we do works outside Bristol, inspiring us to share it with others right across the UK. Here we share two projects that we're delivering in the region.

## FIGHTING CRIME IN TORFAEN

We are being funded by Gwent Police to support Torfaen's young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system. We're helping individuals like Aiden, whose father and brothers have been to prison for violence and who is on a reduced timetable at school owing to his behaviour. We are delivering Box Champions and Box Therapy out of several schools to prevent 150 young people from entering the criminal justice system. Young people are making excellent progress. For example, 88% of the latest cohort reported that working with Empire stopped them getting into trouble.

## CHANGING LIVES AT COLCOT GYM

For the past seven years we've been working out of Colcot Amateur Boxing Club's gym in the heart of Barry. We've been working closely with the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Offending Service, who are referring young people to us who are on the edge of the youth justice system. By framing what we do as 'coming to box at the Colcot gym' we have been attracting young people who do not engage with mainstream services. From the gym, we have been delivering Box Champions and Box Therapy to give young people inspiration, guidance and resources to turn their lives around.



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**Every coach I've had the experience of working with has been great at engaging with young people. One young person had been struggling with his anger, which was having a negative impact on his behaviour when out in the community. His coach has been helping him manage those feelings and find better coping mechanisms. The young person has identified a change in his ability to manage his anger, which is positive, as none of the previously tried courses and techniques had worked.**

Prevention Officer, Children and Young People Services, Vale of Glamorgan Council

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# TRANSFORMING YOUNG LIVES THROUGH BOXING CLUBS

We are scaling up our impact by growing a movement of organisations delivering our work in their communities. We have been prioritising boxing clubs as they are often based in communities hit by inequality, have credibility in their local area and offer the perfect setting to deliver our boxing programmes. We have worked alongside boxing's governing body, England Boxing, to train and support 27 clubs across all nine regions of the country. Several are flying. Here we share the journey of one of our fabulous partners - Boxing Clever from Milton Keynes.

Powered by

**EMPIRE  
FIGHTING  
CHANCE**

**BOXING  
CLEVER**

96%

can now identify  
risky behaviours and  
their consequences

81%

of young people  
working with Boxing  
Clever look more  
positively towards  
their future

83%

can better manage  
their needs and  
feelings

## INSPIRATION AT THE EMPIRE GYM

In March 2023 Boxing Clever joined four other boxing clubs at the Empire Gym for our two-day orientation programme. The aim is to inspire clubs to create a social programme that can have long-term impact in their local area. Our co-founders shared our story of how we transitioned from an amateur boxing club into a sustainable charity. The clubs also heard from the Empire team about all aspects of our organisation, from our programmes and operations to school sales and monitoring and evaluation. The clubs left the gym with Empire's Box Champions Handbook, our 'bible' for delivering our flagship programme.

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**Our experience of working with Empire has been nothing short of extraordinary. Their guidance, support and training have propelled us to new heights in our mission to empower young people through boxing, mentoring and education. The impact of our partnership with Empire is not only measurable in numbers but also in the transformed lives of the young individuals we serve.**

Claire Byrne, Head of Programmes,  
Boxing Clever

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## TAILORED, ONGOING SUPPORT

We make sure that the support we offer matches what each boxing club needs. Boxing Clever had already been delivering a social programme in Milton Keynes. Our support was focused on taking this to the next level. Boxing Clever benefited from bi-weekly meetings with our Growth and Development Manager, two days of intensive training on the delivery of Box Champions, online workshops with Empire specialists and various operational tools, such as our referral and evaluation forms.

## THE RESULT

Prior to our partnership Boxing Clever was working informally with a handful of groups at their gym. The club adapted Box Champions and started delivering our structured programme to individuals and small groups in their gym and in local schools. Boxing Clever is now reaching many more young people in Milton Keynes and having a deeper impact on their lives. The future looks even brighter. The club received their first major grant, started securing income from schools, transitioned from volunteers to paid staff and expanded their coaching team.

# SHARING OUR WORK WIDELY

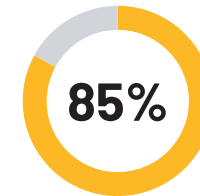
Our work is ripe for use by all kinds of organisations that work with young people. It has proved to be particularly popular with Sport England's Active Partnerships, who are working to increase physical activity levels in their local area. Here we share the story of our partnership with Active Lancashire and also Wrexham Youth Justice, who deliver our work to young people involved in crime as an alternative to a custodial sentence.



## WORKING WITH WREXHAM YOUTH JUSTICE

Wrexham Youth Justice (WYJ) is a service in North Wales that prevents young people from getting involved in crime and antisocial behaviour. We trained WYJ to offer Empire's Box Champions programme to young people as an alternative to a custodial sentence. We have also embedded an Empire coach in their setting so WYJ can reach more young people and observe how we deliver our work.

WYJ initially delivered Box Champions in a basic workshop with a single punch bag hanging off the wall. After being impressed by the results, WYJ decided they needed a better space. They got planning permission to turn an empty unit next to their offices into their very own boxing gym. In July 2023 the grand opening of WYJ's 'The Gym' took place. Together we're achieving outstanding results for young people.



**of young people who completed WYJ's boxing programme have not reoffended. The reoffending rate of 15% compares favourably with the national average of 33%**

## WORKING WITH ACTIVE LANCASHIRE

In 2023 we launched a partnership with Active Lancashire, who exist to make sport and physical activity accessible to everyone in the county. In June, staff from Active Lancashire and selected organisations joined us for our two-day orientation programme at the Empire gym. In August an Empire team made the journey north to Lancashire to deliver further training. We've now trained up 14 individuals from organisations selected by Active Lancashire.

Active Lancashire erected a mini boxing gym at Pendle Youth Employment Service Hub and started delivering Box Champions for young people in their community. Although it's very early days, they are already seeing evidence that the work is having a positive impact on young people. One young person had this to say: 'I feel better at accepting my feelings and then letting them go, without judging them or myself.'



**Working alongside Empire Fighting Chance has been positive, insightful and really enjoyable. This is mainly owing to the passion, sincerity, knowledge and kindness we've experienced in every single member of the team. The supportive and empowering culture Empire creates with young people seamlessly translated into our partnership.**

Ronan McMahon, Active Lancashire





# OUR FUTURE PLANS

Towards the end of 2023 we developed a new strategy for Empire. We set ourselves five priorities to guide our work over the next three years. These priorities will ensure that we push on and increase our impact on young people's lives in Bristol and beyond.

## 1. ESTABLISH A GLOBAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN BRISTOL

We will get all our programmes in Bristol operating on the right scale and at a standard at which we are confident to share them with others. We'll also develop our gym to create an environment that will allow us to do world-class work and showcase it to others.

## 2. STEP UP FOR OUR COMMUNITY

We will take on greater responsibility for our local community and other communities hit by inequality in Bristol. We'll sharpen our focus on those who need us the most, advocate for changes that improve communities and share our knowledge and space with others who are active in young people's lives.

## 3. SHARE OUR WORK NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

We will expand our network of trained partners who are delivering our work in England and Wales and consider working in Northern Ireland and Scotland. We'll also use the growing interest in our work from across the world to explore how best to share our work with partners in other countries.

## 4. STAND UP FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE

We will enhance our profile at a national and global level and become a more outspoken organisation. We'll use our increased influence to achieve changes that benefit young people and our community and help us to scale up our work and promote our partners.

## 5. GET FIT FOR THE FIGHT

We will strengthen our organisation so that we are equipped to do the best job we can for young people. We'll grow our income in a way that's sustainable, invest in the Empire team and provide more opportunities for young people to shape our work.





## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

3SIXTY Real Estate, Anderson Financial Management, Artworks Solutions, Basil Brown Charitable Trust, Bristol Boxing, Brandwells Construction, Children in Need, Chimo Trust, Comic Relief, Fidelity Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, Greggs Foundation, Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner, Hargreaves Foundation, Henry Smith Charity, Innox Foundation, Lovett Foundation, Medlock Charitable Trust, Mobius Works, Newby Trust, Nisbet Trust, The October Club, Oasis Schools, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Portishead Nautical Trust, Prudence Trust, Raise Your Hands, RH Amar, RedRock Consulting, Romodham Trust, Spielman Charitable Trust, Société Générale, St James's Place, St James Place Business Partnering South, Stone Family Foundation, Subway 'Bristol & West', Swan Wealth Management, Tuixen Foundation, Uplands Retail and West of England Combined Authority.

## A FINAL MESSAGE FROM US

Thank you to everyone who has supported Empire Fighting Chance during 2023. Our achievements this past year were only made possible through your kindness and commitment to our work. We look forward to working with you in 2024 as we continue our mission to transform young people's lives.





For more information, call 0117 233 8700  
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