

A young man with curly hair is shown in profile, sitting in a boxing ring. He is holding a microphone in his hands. The entire image is overlaid with a solid orange color. In the background, the ropes of the boxing ring are visible, and a sign with the word "EVERLAST" can be seen on the left.

# EMPIRE FIGHTING CHANCE

OUR IMPACT  
IN 2019

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# Empire Fighting Chance

*“These days we know that mental health is so important and that it affects so many people, so how do we start to deal with that?”*

*In the UK we have a great affinity with sport – and I think boxing in particular – that can have a really positive impact.*

*The thought of sitting down in a chair, one to one, with a therapist, can be a real deterrent. However, this is the sort of place where you don’t even realise you are being cured, but you are. Centres like this are so vital, but it’s a time when it seems like they are having to close their doors more and more.*

*What is being achieved here is so important, especially for our young people. It really is incredible to see.”*

The Duke of Sussex, Prince Harry, speaking to *Bristol Post* in February 2019.

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## INTRODUCTION

Empire Fighting Chance was born on the streets of Bristol in 2006 to fight the impact of deprivation on the lives of young people. Arising from the Empire Amateur Boxing Club in inner-city Bristol, we have grown to become a multiregional charity using a pioneering approach that harnesses the power of boxing.

We combine non-contact boxing and intensive personal support to challenge and inspire vulnerable young people to realise their unique potential. We use the sport to mentor, educate, and to provide therapy and careers support. With us, young people do not access a 'service' but participate in sport and gain support in ways that feel natural. As a result, young people turn up, trust us and make changes in their lives.

We are proud to share our story of 2019 with you. During the past 12 months we have dramatically extended our impact on young people's lives. We increased the number of young people we support to 4,245, scaled up our pioneering 'Boxing Therapy' and Careers programmes, and started to teach other organisations how to deliver our work within communities hit by deprivation.

We had so many good things happen in 2019 that it is difficult to pick out our highlights. But the following moments do stand out for us:

- Hosting the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at our boxing gym in inner-city Bristol
- Smashing our fundraising target for our very own race, the Keynsham 10K
- Each time we heard from young people and their parents about the profound impact that we are having on their lives.

Everything you will read about in our 2019 Impact Report was achieved through collaboration. We wish to thank everyone whom we have worked alongside to transform young people's lives.







## WHO WE ARE

Our story began 13 years ago at the Empire Amateur Boxing Club, one of Bristol's oldest and most successful sports clubs. We started out as a small boxing project in St Pauls to divert young people involved in trouble. We are now a multiregional charity delivering award-winning youth services, using boxing's street credibility to attract young people and weaving in personal development points whilst they train.

### Who we support

Most of the young people whom we see live in poverty, poor housing and workless households. Exposed to toxic living conditions, they experience anger, anxiety, depression and other behavioural and emotional distress. More often than not, their mood is expressed in ways that can lead them into trouble – many have been excluded from school or involved in risky, anti-social and criminal behaviour. Their multiple, complex issues prevent engagement in education and employment. Most arrive at our doors after a series of failed interventions and are heading towards a life of poor health, unemployment and even prison.

### What we do

We offer five services to young men and women aged 8 to 25:

- Non-contact boxing sessions: we facilitate engaging physical activities, such as speedball workouts, pad work and shadow boxing. We deliver one-to-one, group, female-only and family classes, always integrating personal development messages focused on improving physical and mental health
- Training with the Champions: our flagship programme is a 20-week programme integrating non-contact boxing, psychological

education and mentoring. Designed by a psychologist, each week's session is named after a famous boxing champion and features a structured programme of physical activities and evidence-based messages to create healthier thinking

- Education: we integrate education support into our boxing sessions that complements learning in school, such as remedial maths and English
- 'Boxing Therapy': qualified therapists weave in therapy while young people train to help them to manage their emotions and change negative ways of behaving
- HELLOFUTURE: our boxing and careers programme assists young people in progressing into employment, education and further training.

### Our impact

We now support nearly 4,500 young people each year. Our enjoyable and holistic approach transforms how young men and women think and behave. Despite the chronic adversity that they face, young people are returning to school, exiting gangs, finding employment and feeling healthier and happier. More widely, we are persuading policy makers and practitioners to use sports-based interventions within deprived neighbourhoods to tackle issues faced by young people.

## WHY IT WORKS

Boxing is central to our work. Our sports-based approach offers young people an enjoyable experience that they can be proud of telling their friends and family about. With us, young people participate in sport and gain support in ways that feel natural. Boxing is popular throughout the world and can be accessed by people from all walks of life, making our work very suitable for expansion. We have taken several of boxing's qualities and used them to shape what we do.



### Participation

We use boxing to attract young people to our programmes and ensure that they turn up each week. Young people find learning to box enjoyable, while the sport has credibility among their friends and family. Boxing overcomes the stigma associated with traditional support, for rather than accessing a service or seeing a professional, young people participate in sport and receive support naturally.

### Trust

Young people will only listen to us if we have earned their trust. This can be difficult, as those we support often have a history of poor relationships with adults. We use boxing to gain young people's confidence and to break down barriers to honest communication with our staff. We have found that as young people focus on the physical activity, such as hitting a punch bag, they relax, drop their guard and open up.

### Physiology

Our physical activities change young people's brain chemistry, leading to good mental health and wellbeing. Exercise releases the

'feel-good' chemicals serotonin, endorphins and dopamine, creating happier moods and reducing the risk of depression. The sport also reduces anxiety through improved regulation of cortisol, the stress hormone.

### Self-belief

We use boxing to improve young people's self-esteem and self-confidence, building blocks for making changes to how they think and behave. As fitness and boxing skills increase, young people feel better about themselves and their abilities. More often than not, young people start their programme with their head down and finish it standing tall.

### Change

We use boxing as a vehicle for young people to make emotional and behavioural changes. Boxing helps young people to clear their mind and open it up to new possibilities. Gaps between physical activities present natural opportunities for us to weave in personal development activities, such as mentoring, psychological education, therapy and careers support.



## OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS

In 2019 we supported

**4,245** young people

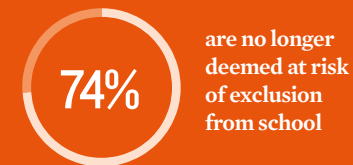
### YOUNG PEOPLE IMPROVED THEIR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING



### YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOPED POSITIVE ATTITUDES



### YOUNG PEOPLE IMPROVED THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATION



### YOUNG PEOPLE REDUCED THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN RISKY, ANTI-SOCIAL AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR



### YOUNG PEOPLE IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS



### YOUNG PEOPLE PROGRESSED TOWARDS EMPLOYMENT









IMAGES IN THIS SECTION ARE FOR  
ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY AND  
NOT RELATED TO INDIVIDUAL STORIES

## ALFIE'S STORY

Alfie (not his real name) is a 16-year-old male who was feeling very unmotivated, experiencing low mood and self-harming. He was missing a lot of school owing to his struggle with mental health.

When Alfie first came to us he was very shy, softly spoken and visibly anxious and uncomfortable in our gym in Bristol. Over the course of his weekly sessions, Alfie started to open up to his coach about his anxiety and struggles at school.

During sessions Alfie learnt practical ways to deal with his stress and anxiety. Our coach helped Alfie to set goals in the months leading up to his GCSEs. Together they created revision and fitness plans, the latter featuring twice-weekly runs and limiting fizzy drinks to two a week. Our coach started to notice a clear increase in Alfie's motivation.

Alfie's nan noticed a huge difference when Alfie came out of his weekly session, as he was more confident, happier in himself and talkative. Alfie's mum told us that her son now opens up to his family, socialises with friends and gets involved in new activities. But the biggest change was in how Alfie managed his stress and coped with his anxiety. The whole family has been so impressed with how calm Alfie had been in the lead-up to his exams.

Owing to his commitment, Alfie was the 'Champion of the Month' for June 2019. We spoke to Mum after Alfie received his GCSE results: two at grade 9 and the rest as passes. He is now trying to pass his electrician course to start an apprenticeship.

*"It's the best thing he's done and helps him cope better in stressful situations like school."*

Alfie's mum



## DANA'S STORY

Dana (not her real name) is a 14-year-old female from Bristol. Dana suffered sexual abuse by a family member over a long period of time and experienced depression, anxiety and trauma. Her mother referred Dana to us after struggling with her violent behaviour and poor attendance at school.

Dana joined a small-group session with a female coach. When she first started coming to us she refused to talk to her coach and would only respond with one-word answers. She would lie on the floor of our gym during sessions and often refused to do the exercises.

But Dana kept coming back and even introduced her sister to the sessions. Over time, Dana came out of her shell. She started engaging in the exercises and interacting with her coach. She became more sociable and grew close to one of the other girls, who started to have a positive influence on Dana.

After three months, Dana's mum noticed a huge difference. Her daughter seemed happier, more confident and less angry. She started to take pride in her appearance, improved her attendance at school and came out of her bedroom to interact with her family.

## ISAAC'S STORY

As part of our multiregional expansion, we trained partners from youth-work or sporting backgrounds to deliver our programme in Devon and Cornwall. Our first partners, Inspire South West, based in Barnstaple, Devon, received a referral for Isaac from his school, Swimbridge Primary School, to help with his challenging behaviour in class.

Inspire South West worked with Isaac every Tuesday over the course of 12 weeks, focusing on personal development messages relating to confidence and self-esteem to help with his behaviour. Owing to his hard work, Isaac learnt to regulate his emotions and went from being excluded from many classes to receiving the Head Teacher's Award. Isaac continues to make progress and has become a positive role model for other pupils experiencing similar difficulties.

*"It's been a joy following Isaac's progress over the weeks; seeing an angry and frustrated pupil transform into a genuinely happier and more confident child speaks volumes about the success of this programme. The best part of the programme is that Isaac understands the process and knows he has lifelong skills to support him in navigating through other challenges he may encounter along the way."*

Inspire South West Founder and Director,  
Lyn Brown

## SID'S STORY

Sid (not his real name) is a 20-year-old male from Bristol. Sid struggles with psychosis, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism. Sid had previously had therapy through NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). He has an eight-month-old daughter and is currently completing his college course in mechanics.

When Sid started with us he explained that he wanted to be a better role model for his daughter. Sid attended his sessions consistently, working hard every week. Sid and his coach set a plan for each month, featuring small, achievable goals to build momentum for bigger shifts in lifestyle. For example, his goals for June (which he achieved) were to increase interaction with his mother, apply for jobs and run at least twice a week. Sid and his coach discussed his progress each week.

Sid has become very committed to Empire Fighting Chance. He speaks to younger children about the benefits of our work and joined in on our inaugural Youth Members Council, where our young people could discuss ideas on how they could be better represented by the charity.

*“Coming to Empire Fighting Chance has given me a new lease of life. The support is what makes the difference; being asked how my week was and having someone to talk to every week helps me so much.”*





## A MULTIREGIONAL CHARITY

We have now proved that our sports-based approach achieves positive results in multiple locations. Our vision is to take what we have created to thousands of young people across the world. In places near to our home city of Bristol we are delivering our programmes ourselves. In places further afield, we are scaling up through collaboration, training exceptional local organisations to deliver our programme. In 2019 we evolved into an established multiregional charity.

### South Wales

We successfully established ourselves in South Wales. With the support of the Dulverton Trust, we are now delivering our work in deprived neighbourhoods across 15 areas of South Wales.

#### Highlights in South Wales include:

- Supporting over 500 young people, with our results comparable to those achieved in Bristol
- Building partnerships with multiple organisations, including 33 schools, boxing clubs, local authorities, South Wales Police and Cardiff City Football Club

- Doubling income that we receive from schools to deliver our projects to their pupils. We are very proud that over 80% of schools renew their contract with us each year.

### Cornwall, Devon and North Wales

We were thrilled to take our work to new areas of the country. In 2019 we were busy identifying and training organisations in Cornwall, Devon and North Wales to deliver our work. We have high standards – we only chose organisations with our passion for transforming young lives and a proven track record of working with young people experiencing complex, multiple issues.

#### Highlights of the year include:

- Training five organisations from Wales to deliver our programme, including Tiger Bay ABC, Llanrumney Phoenix Boxing Club, Active Wrexham, Rhyl High School and West Rhyl Young People's Project
- Training four organisations in Devon and Cornwall, including Inspire South West, Space, Plymouth Hope and Christchurch Activities for Young People
- Our first partner, Inspire South West, launching our programme in Barnstaple, North Devon. Working with low numbers initially with plans to increase in 2020.

### Gloucestershire and Herefordshire

In October we received significant multi-year funding from the Youth Endowment Fund to expand our work in towns in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire.

The YEF funding enabled us to recruit our first dedicated coach for the Gloucestershire and Herefordshire area, with school bookings scheduled for early 2020.

## SHARING THE MAGIC

Many young people arrive at our doors after a series of failed interventions. In contrast, our sports-based approach is achieving outstanding results. We share our magic ingredients with governments, other youth providers and the public to change policies, practices and attitudes. During 2019 we widened our influence through scaling up our work and by gaining national media coverage throughout the year.

### A royal visit to Easton

In February the Duke and Duchess of Sussex fought heavy snow to visit our boxing gym in inner-city Bristol. The visit gave young people, our staff and the local community an opportunity to celebrate our work with royalty. The visit generated extensive media coverage – the BBC, ITV, *The Times* and a whole host of other local, regional, national and foreign media picked up on the story. It gave us a platform to communicate our sports-based approach to improving mental health. Our phone did not stop ringing for weeks!

*“The thought of sitting down in a chair, one to one, with a therapist, can be a real deterrent. However, this is the sort of place where you don’t even realise you are being cured, but you are.”*

The Duke of Sussex, during the visit

### Knife Crime and Me

In April we featured in Alex Beresford’s knife-crime documentary, *Knife Crime and Me*. Aired on ITV, the documentary gave us the opportunity to communicate the importance of using sport and taking an early-intervention approach to tackling crime. The Bristol-born TV personality subsequently decided to become an ambassador for us.

*“Whilst I was here filming I got a great feeling for their passion and what they are doing to help young people. It’s not just about boxing; it goes deeper than that. My role as ambassador is important to me and I want to spread the word about the work that Empire Fighting Chance is doing and help them to expand their reach.”*

Alex Beresford



### Boxing and ADHD

In July the BBC ran a feature on our work in South Wales. The feature put a spotlight on how boxing and personal support can help young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) channel their excess energy and improve their life skills. The feature included support from other organisations for our approach, including from the UK ADHD Partnership.

*“Sporting activities, such as boxing, are so good for children with ADHD. Boxing, especially, teaches impulse control and channels emotions in a constructive way. People with ADHD are often fun, creative and engaging. They might simply need help to channel their energy, and sport is great way to do this.”*

Susan Young, President of the UK ADHD Partnership

### Crimewatch Roadshow

In September we featured on BBC1’s *Crimewatch Roadshow* as an example of how proceeds from crime are being used to improve communities. The programme showcased how our approach can offer young people on the edge of the criminal justice system a different path to take.

We ran a police-facilitated session with several schools in Bristol, which enabled young people to train together and interact with people from different backgrounds. It also helped to instil greater respect for the police:

*“Before we came here we thought they (the police) were jokes, wet wipes. We thought they were all racist like the ones we see on TV in America.*

*Now we think they are good; they’re alright. We didn’t think they would be as nice as they are.”*

R.B. and R.C., two pupils participating in the police sessions





## PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMPANIES

We offer companies a unique experience – our help to improve their business in exchange for their support to transform young lives. Working with us can improve a company's culture, develop staff and create a stronger brand. Our partnership with Mobius Works in 2019 illustrates the significant value companies can bring to our work and the benefits we offer in return.



Award-winning integrated services company Mobius Works set themselves a goal of raising £10,000 for our work and to help us in all sorts of other ways.

In May at Knowle Golf Club, 89 golfers braved the rain to represent 45 companies in the competition. The day raised £5,000 for the charity. Fox Davidson were crowned the winners, with Steven Cox taking top honours in the individual competition.

Later in May Mobius staff joined #TeamEmpire for the annual Bristol 10K, raising hundreds of pounds for our work. Some of their staff went on to run the Bristol Half Marathon in September too!

In September, Mobius joined Sam, our sports psychologist, and coaches Matt and Dan at our gym. Staff learnt boxing techniques and how to apply the psychological principles that underpin our work to their professional and personal lives. Mobius staff learnt, for example, the 'magic of mini goals' – setting small, achievable goals to build confidence and momentum.

In October, Mobius sponsored our annual 10K in Keynsham, Bristol. Their staff donned Empire Fighting Chance vests and joined nearly 700 runners taking part. Others volunteered their time to help us manage the race.

In November, Mobius held their quiz night, raising £1,108 for our work.

We are grateful for the support of all of the following other organisations that supported us throughout the year.



IN 2019 #TEAMEMPIRE RAN

5,840 MILES,

AND HELPED US RAISE OVER

£45,000

#TeamEmpire are a group of amazing people doing extraordinary things to help us transform young people's lives. They run, cycle, bake and do all sorts of other activities to raise money for Empire Fighting Chance.

In 2019

→ **640** runners crossed the start line of the Keynsham 10K, our very own race with Bitton Road Runners

→ **22** teams competed at our annual quiz night, raising £4,840

→ **100** people took part in The 100 Day Challenge, training for 100 days before running the Great Bristol Half Marathon

→ **£4,700** raised at our first 'Race Day', giving hundreds of guests a wonderful day of horse racing and entertainment at Bath Racecourse

→ **143** people took part in a sponsored challenge for us

→ **£17,180** raised from sponsorship alone

→ **1** person ran a half marathon dressed as a panda



To become part of #TeamEmpire in 2020, visit our website or follow us on social media.



## OUR FUTURE PLANS

2019 was an outstanding year for Empire Fighting Chance. We enter 2020 as an established multiregional charity with a portfolio of proven, creative services that combine boxing with intensive personal support. With strong foundations in place, we will continue to expand our work. We have found ways to increase our impact on young people's lives without also growing our organisation. We have three priorities to guide us during the year ahead:

### 1. Test our expansion model

We will build on the strong start we made in 2019 and continue to unearth exceptional organisations and train them to deliver our work. We will combine our expertise with the local knowledge and networks of our new partners in Cornwall, Devon and North Wales.

### 2. Scale up our delivery

We will continue to expand our presence in Bristol and South Wales and launch programmes in nearby Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. We will improve what we offer to young people by taking 'Boxing Therapy' and Careers support outside Bristol and to all of our delivery sites.

### 3. Positively influence policies and practices

Our growing presence across the UK gives us a stronger platform from which to influence policies and practices that affect young people's lives. We will intensify our efforts to encourage policy makers and practitioners to adopt sports-based approaches for young people within communities.





## A FINAL MESSAGE FROM US

Thank you to everyone who has supported Empire Fighting Chance this year. We are humbled that you have chosen to help us. Your support made all of our achievements in 2019 possible. We look forward to continuing to work together to transform young lives in the future.



For more information, call 0117 908 6655  
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