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A north Glasgow riposte

Andy McLaren and Paul Fletcher take issue with *The Leisure Review's* understanding of the sporting opportunities available in north Glasgow and offer their own interpretation of how sport is delivered within the city, with a focus on the contribution made by their own company.

We read with some interest and incredulity the article headlined 'Cann do: getting Glasgow's legacy in early' published in The Leisure Review in December 2012. We feel that this was an incredibly one-sided (and inaccurate) article which does a disservice to the wide range of services being provided to promote sport and physical activity to young people across the north of Glasgow by a range of partners. Take a straw poll young people or service providers within the area and they will indicate that the service delivered by NG Homes reflects a very small contribution (less than 5%) to the overall sport and physical activity services being provided in north Glasgow.

Take, for example, the services delivered by our own organisation, A&M Training, an award-winning registered Scottish charity (SC041463) operated by former Scottish international footballer Andy McLaren. A&M Training delivers programmes designed to divert young people from anti-social behaviour, crime and violence and to improve health and wellbeing, soft and core skills through sport and physical activity. Its diversionary youth work is proven to contribute to reductions in youth crime and disorder, reduce issues of territorialism and improve health, wellbeing and community safety. We use professional coaches, current and former professional footballers and professional dancers to deliver coaching across 22 communities in Glasgow (currently nine areas across north Glasgow).

We deliver services six nights per week and to a weekly average of 1,200 to 1,400 young people for around four to six hours, figures that are independently monitored by funding partners. We work in some of Europe's most deprived communities, Springburn, Possilpark, Yoker, Lambhill, Drumchapel and Kingsway to name a few. We cater for young people aged between seven and 25.

A&M Training takes a youth work approach to promoting active and positive lifestyle choices and offer young people opportunities and pathways beyond the services delivered at a local level. We run a Friday-night football league for young people aged 14-plus, 48 weeks per year with 14 teams, and run regular dance competitions and showcase events at which young people have the chance to display the skills learned at coaching sessions. We have delivered showcases and award ceremonies at the Mitchell Theatre in Glasgow and in February 2012 we had 60 young people appear on stage at the Theatre Royal Glasgow as part of the annual Go Dance festival. This is an opportunity most, if not all, of these young people would never get as a result of being priced out of dance classes.

Every three months we run a seven-a-side football tournament for young people aged under-14 who are too young to compete in the Friday-night league. This keeps them interested and active in our coaching sessions as they have something to look forward to.

All services are free for participants and we provide football strips, dance uniforms, transport, venue hire and coaching within the www.theleisurereview.co.uk

"There is no need to be maverick when engaging young people. Services need to be consistent, honest, hard-working and be there for the long haul. That way you build up trust and long-lasting relationships with young people."

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programme. In recent months we have been offering additional sports including, golf, athletics, basketball, boxing and rugby in conjunction with partners from Youth Scotland and StreetGames UK. As part of this promotion of other sports we ran a multi-sports activity day in August 2012 which was attended by over 160 young people.

Beyond the delivery of our services we aim to offer opportunities for young people aged 15 to 21 to gain coaching experience and qualification in various sports and physical activities. We work with Youth Scotland to deliver Girls on the Move and Boys on the Beat programmes, which have seen a total of 42 young people gain Dance Leadership Level 1 and Youth Achievement Bronze Awards in the last eight months. We work with Sports Leaders UK to deliver Sports Leadership Level 1 and 2 awards to young people we work with. In the last eight months this has resulted in 40 young people achieving the Sports Leaders Level 1 award.

In addition we have recently formed a partnership with Scottish Football League 2 club Alloa Athletic which has seen four young men signed on pro-youth contracts. We regularly feed young men from our football programme through Alloa's coaching system in the hope that some (who generally cannot afford to play in organised teams) get signed up to the pro-youth set up.

We have recently introduced a volunteer development programme and engaged 21 young people. Following a training needs analysis with each young person, they have started a programme of training which will see them undertake certificated courses in first aid, child protection, health and safety, youth work, badminton basics, SFA Coach Education Levels 1, 2 & 3, and Scottish Cycling, Scottish Rowing, Scottish Basketball and Scottish Athletics basic coaching qualifications. We are working with national governing bodies and with the Commonwealth Games volunteering programme to signpost each young person to volunteering opportunities in the lead up to and during Glasgow 2014.

The positive impact of A&M Training's services within local communities can be evidenced from the following figures. At a meeting of the Operation Reclaim steering group on 23 September 2012 Strathclyde police indicated that in the period 1 July 2010 to 19 September 2012 that A&M Training activities had contributed to: a 37% reduction in vandalism calls; an 81% reduction in drinking in the street; a 44% reduction in reported youth disorder; a 57% reduction in police attending calls relating to young people; and a 26% reduction in disturbance calls.

Strathclyde police have indicated that gang culture and territorialism have been largely eradicated in the north of Glasgow as a result of our programmes. This is contrary to the suggestion in December 2012 article in The Leisure Review that there is "a marked disinclination [for young people] to leave their geographical area". Each Friday we have some 600 young people travelling across geographical boundaries to play sport and undertake physical activity. This is the more accurate reflection of young people in the north of Glasgow.

Strathclyde Fire and Rescue provided tactical assessments for the year 1 November 2011 to 30 November 2012, which showed a marked reduction in deliberate fires. This has been attributed to the youth engagement programme within the local fire station area.

As you will gather, there is nothing 'maverick' about the work that we do. There is no need to be maverick when engaging young people. Services need to be consistent, honest, hard-working and be there for the long haul. That way you build up trust and long-lasting relationships with young people. Short-term programmes, such as those highlighted in your December report, can be counter-productive.

Andy McLaren and Paul Fletcher are with A&M Training

The interview to which this article is a response, titled 'Cann do: getting Glasgow's legacy in early', is still available in the back issues section of *The Leisure Review*.

***The Leisure Review*, March 2013**

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