

**Thames Gateway London Partnership**

**Innovative community safety initiative using a youth football programme with local professional football clubs to combat truancy, reduce the number of young offenders, provide life skills and promote community cohesion in deprived communities.**



**Who is involved?**

The Thames Gateway London Partnership (TGLP) aims to deliver the economic, physical and social regeneration of the Thames Gateway in London. The Thames Gateway covers an area that extends east from the City of London on both sides of the River Thames, with a new 'Bridge' planned to link the two sides. TGLP was established in 1995 as a not for profit unincorporated association. It is a sub-regional alliance between 13 local authorities (Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge, Bexley,

Greenwich, Dartford, Thurrock, Lewisham and the City of London, five universities, two health federations, the Learning & Skills Council London East and the London Development Agency. The TGLP works together with the private sector (e.g. Ford, and Canary Wharf), local communities and strategic agencies.

TGLP seeks to bring about high quality and sustainable regeneration of the whole of the Thames Gateway London; to promote economic and social investment and equality of opportunity; to create employment, community and environmental benefits for local people, businesses and employees, reflecting their needs and aspirations.

The partnership was largely a local authority led initiative focusing on the regeneration of East London. In 2000 the Thames Gateway was chosen by Office of Deputy Prime Minister as a showcase for development and regeneration because of its location and economic importance. As a result it attracted other partners and expanded its coverage outside of London into North Kent and Essex. It is now the responsibility of the Government-led body - the Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership, which recognizes that a major improvement to London's infrastructure is essential to maintain and further maximize London's attractiveness for investment. The partnership will lead to the development of good

quality new housing with good access to jobs and services for all income groups to help meet a local and regional shortage.

## Approach to CSR

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“The TGLP was set up to deliver improvements to society in the form of social and environmental regeneration, so we are aiming to deliver corporate social responsibility through our general approach”, said Ophelia Soares a Programme Manager at TGLP. This has been achieved through working in partnership at the community level. There are a number of projects within the partnership that promote corporate social responsibility (CSR). For example: the Community Safety 5 year programme called the ‘Community Safety Dimension’ which encompassed youth crime diversion, mentoring, traveling in safety, identification of crime hotspots and safe industrial sites; Transport - two transit schemes (the extensions to the Docklands Light Railway in the sub-region, and Crossrail) which will provide the transport infrastructure that will allow people to visit and invest in the poorer areas of East London and also provide those communities with access to a variety of transport systems for making the journey to work. The construction of the proposed bridge will generate at least 17,000 local jobs and the new transport system will provide opportunities for local employment. The economic regeneration will also provide jobs in construction of the proposed 120,000 homes to be provided in the next ten years.

This case study is concentrating on the role of sport and youth football in addressing community issues. The Thames Gateway Youth Football Project (TGYFP) provides sporting and educational opportunities to vulnerable young people who are marginalized by poverty, low aspiration, poor self-image and discrimination, in areas of deprivation and high crime across east London.

## The drivers

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The main driver for the establishment of the TGYFP was the social issue: There were pockets of high unemployment in deprived and socially excluded areas, where investment in housing, transport and other infrastructure had been ignored. The establishment of the youth football programme was a recognition that the TGLP needed a people focus at a local level, as much of the partnership work was about developing infrastructure e.g. transport improvements, rather than meeting ‘grass-roots’ community needs.

## The initiative

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The TGLP recognized that youth crime was an important issue. Football was identified as a potential major influence in raising standards, life skills and expectations of youths who may be vulnerable to

committing crime. As a result in 1998, the CEO of TGLP, heads of Departments of Community Schemes at four East London professional football clubs and a representative from the Community Programme in Professional Football met to establish the TGYFP.

The TGYFP aims to provide development opportunities to vulnerable young people (5 to 24 years of age). It works with local authorities, the private sector and local communities to combat social exclusion, to reduce crime and to support the social and economic regeneration of the Thames Gateway. The project, now in its sixth year, has six main elements;

- *Estates programme* – on-site drop-in sessions are established for estates with particular problems of deprivation identified through the government index of multiple deprivation and local partners;
- *Education to employment programme* – the project improves basic skills and provides opportunities for young people and volunteers to obtain specialist Football Association recognized coaching qualifications leading to employment opportunities in football and recreation;
- *After schools club* – this project was designed to divert young people living in high-crime areas during the critical time two hours immediately after school and consists of football coaching sessions;
- *Fit 4 life incentive scheme* – this project targets child victims of crime and is in partnership with a number of organizations including local probation services and pupil referral units. It involves sessions, through football, that enhance young people's self esteem and confidence and allows them to make positive choices about their future;
- *Healthy living programme* - a football coach visits schools to provide advice and guidance on exercise, fitness, nutrition and drug awareness; and
- *Young women's development* – this project aims to increase participation by young women, initially through providing female only taster sessions in schools and estates, with a view to setting up weekly coaching sessions. The programme links to professional football clubs' girls and women development programmes, in order to deliver a co-ordinated service and achieve maximum benefit for communities.

The TGYFP is currently working in eight boroughs: Barking & Dagenham, Bexley, Greenwich, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Thurrock and Tower Hamlets and the City of London. It has been sponsored by Skillswork, a government Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund programme, which provided over half a million pounds over four years. Among current major sponsors are: the Children's Fund, New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Ford of Britain is the project's main commercial sponsor providing £20,000 a year for the project in Dagenham.

## Challenges

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Another positive outcome of the project has been overcoming the rivalry between the football clubs which, at the beginning, meant that cooperation amongst them was difficult. Essential in overcoming this, or any other challenge, was a good governance system. There is an advisory steering group with terms of reference that reports directly to the TGLP board. The group comprises the project manager and coordinator, heads of community schemes for each football club, the regional director of the Community Programme in Professional Football and the deputy chief executive of the TGLP and is chaired by the vice chairman of West Ham United Football Club. It meets twice a year or more if needed. There are also once a month meetings between the TGYFP officers/coaches based at the clubs and the TGYFP manager and coordinator. This close coordination ensures any problems are addressed quickly and in a transparent manner.

## Benefits

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The main benefit has been social cohesion – helping to get young people interested in sport and to realize other opportunities to crime. In 2002/03 the project worked with 5,585 young people, of whom 29% were female and 35% were from minority ethnic groups and delivered 1,478 weeks of training. In the last three years 23 young people have achieved their level 2 coaching certificates and gained employment at various football clubs.

“Communities do notice a difference in improved behaviour and reduced crime rate. Although much of the evidence of benefits is anecdotal, there is a definite legacy... coaches do influence the kids, long after the hour or two of football has ended,” said Ophelia Soares, the Programme Manager for TGYFP. Testimonials include;

“I wanted to write to you to underline our support for a really priceless operation. It has played a key role as a diversionary activity for local youth and will have had a far from insignificant impact on the reduction of crime and disorder locally” Superintendent John Powell, Metropolitan Police, Bexleyheath.

“Since the start of the project on the estate we have witnessed a marked improvement of those participating, in both self-esteem and their willingness to participate in the wider community...for once young people from the estate feel they are getting the best of something rather than the worst. It is noticeable that the incidents of tension between young people from refugee families and other people on the estates have dropped off considerably” Arthur Wiggins, Detached Youth Worker, Rainham and South Hornchurch.

An evaluation of the project was last performed in 2001 by the University of East London. It demonstrated that the project was reaching its target beneficiaries and having a measurable impact on their lives. For example, in the after schools clubs, from 117 self-completion questionnaires, it was found that 27% of the young people behaved better after school and 41% felt better about themselves. 66% of youths admitted to previously indulging in anti-social behaviour and four to six weeks after the football finished there was a 12% reduction. The success of the TGYFP in Dagenham has led Ford to replicate many of the project's ideas in its factory community in Genk, Belgium and similar discussions regarding best practice are currently taking place with Cologne, Germany.

### **Why is it CSR?**

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The project demonstrates social responsibility as it is targeting young people with limited opportunities who are at risk of social exclusion. It focuses on delivering benefits to some of London's most deprived areas where local services, such as the people referral unit, find it particularly difficult to engage with young people. Football provides that engagement.

### **What next?**

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TGYFP would like to conduct a thorough evaluation of the project and be able to measure the progress of beneficiaries after they have left the project. Ultimately, TGLP would like the TGYFP to be considered a model project.

### **For more information**

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