**Summary**

Football For All is a project which uses football to engage with the current and past residents of YMCA (Hanley). Through consistent participation they have developed individually and as a group overcoming personal and social stresses. Whilst maintaining a Football For All ethos they are striving to challenge themselves further and be a shining example to other young men and women in similar homeless circumstances.

**Main Article:**

Partnership: YMCA (Hanley) and Stoke-on-Trent City Council Sports Development  
Venue: Hanley Park Astro Turf Pitch  
Time: 6-7 p.m.  
Day: Wednesday

**Overview:**

The project set out to address the lack of structured football sessions for the YMCA residents. The majority of participants are homeless due to a varied number of social reasons. It was agreed that each session would consist of a warm up, skill development, and small sided game whilst focusing on communication, team work, respect and team structure.

The following barriers to participation were:

- Cost
- Transport
- Venue
- Cost of qualified staff
- Strategic guidance
- Conflict between park users

The YMCA (Hanley) provides housing for residents who are mainly male aged between 16 and 30. Through a Sportivate partnership (Stoke-on-Trent City Council - Engage & YMCA) it was agreed to commence evening football coaching once a week for anyone with an interest in football. To overcome three main barriers (cost, transport and venue) it was agreed to use the neighbouring park’s community use astro turf pitch (ATP). The park ATP is actively used by the local community including ethnic groups from a wide range of nationalities. The pitch has not traditionally been accessed by the YMCA residents as a minority of them have struggled to relax in such diverse company and social tensions have sometimes run high.
**Delivery and Outcomes:**

Each session attracted a variety of participants with a wide range of ability, attitudes, individual skills and personal issues. It was common during the early stages to refuse a minority of those wishing to join in access to the court due to signs of their being under the influence of banned substances. This brought a lot of unwanted strain to the session but through the partnership with the YMCA and peer pressure this was quickly resolved resulting in full participation by all who attended over the following weeks.

Participants are mainly YMCA residents with a handful being ex YMCA residents who had been allowed to attend after agreeing to observe the YMCA’s ethos around attitude and behaviour. However the skills of the coaching staff and patience of the whole group was severely tested by three individuals who consistently exhibited violent verbal outbursts, physical intimidation and verbal manipulation. One of the individuals had recently avoided a prison sentence through the police curfew tag scheme and had to vacate the session immediately once it ended to ensure they were home on time for their curfew. Unfortunately two of the individuals were asked to leave the group during the programme as their behaviour had became too much of a detriment to the remainder of participants.

During the programme attendance levels rose to a high of 22 participants with the number of weekly attendees gradually settling at approximately 14. Throughout the sessions the group dynamics and outlook have gradually changed, the group was initially formed to allow anyone from the YMCA to play but participants gradually began to crave a more competitive element while maintaining an all-inclusive philosophy. This was resolved when the group organised themselves by electing a captain and two vice captains and developed further by arranging a series of friendly match’s against the Salvation Army (Hanley). The results were two wins (19-14 & 5-2) and one loss (1-17). The matches were a great success as both teams not only played football but also bonded off the field. They have also arranged a second training session on a Sunday afternoon which they govern themselves.

The journey so far has taken a committed group of young men who have persevered with internal pressures from aggressive and disrespectful attendees, venue problems and their own change in long term goals to continue to attend and offer anyone who wishes the chance to take part in a fun and all inclusive football session.

**The Future:**

The future for the YMCA football group is to complete the following;

- Establishing a team name, constitution and club roles and responsibilities
- Funding for training, kit etc
- Co-coordinating and participating in a local small sided football inclusion league using the local park and their own ATP

**More Information:**

For more information regarding Sportivate (Stoke-on-Trent City Council) or the YMCA football group please contact;

Leslie Eyre (S.o.T City Council) 01782-236930