



**WATERFRONT  
BOXING**

**WATERFRONT SPORTS  
AND EDUCATION ACADEMY**

**COMMUNITY ASSET CASE STUDY**

# IN BRIEF



**Name:** Waterfront Sports and Education Academy

**Type:** Re-roofing and then a rebuild of boxing club following a fire

**Type of organisation:** A charity – Waterfront Sports and Education Academy

**Sports:** Boxing; Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu; Box Fit; Cardio Box, fitness training, personal training, Zumba, Pilates & wrestling

**Overall cost:** £290,000

**Sport England contribution:** £81,862.  
The grant was primarily used to repair a leaking roof and to refurbish the changing rooms.

**Other significant funding:** £200,000 insurance payment (via the landlord) following a fire.

## PEOPLE AND PLACE

### Category

#### ONS Urban / Rural

Top tier classification	Urban
Second tier classification	City and Town

#### Geographical setting

Location description:	An urban setting to the north of Leicester city centre
Local Authority Population	348,343 <sup>1</sup>

#### Local Authority and Region

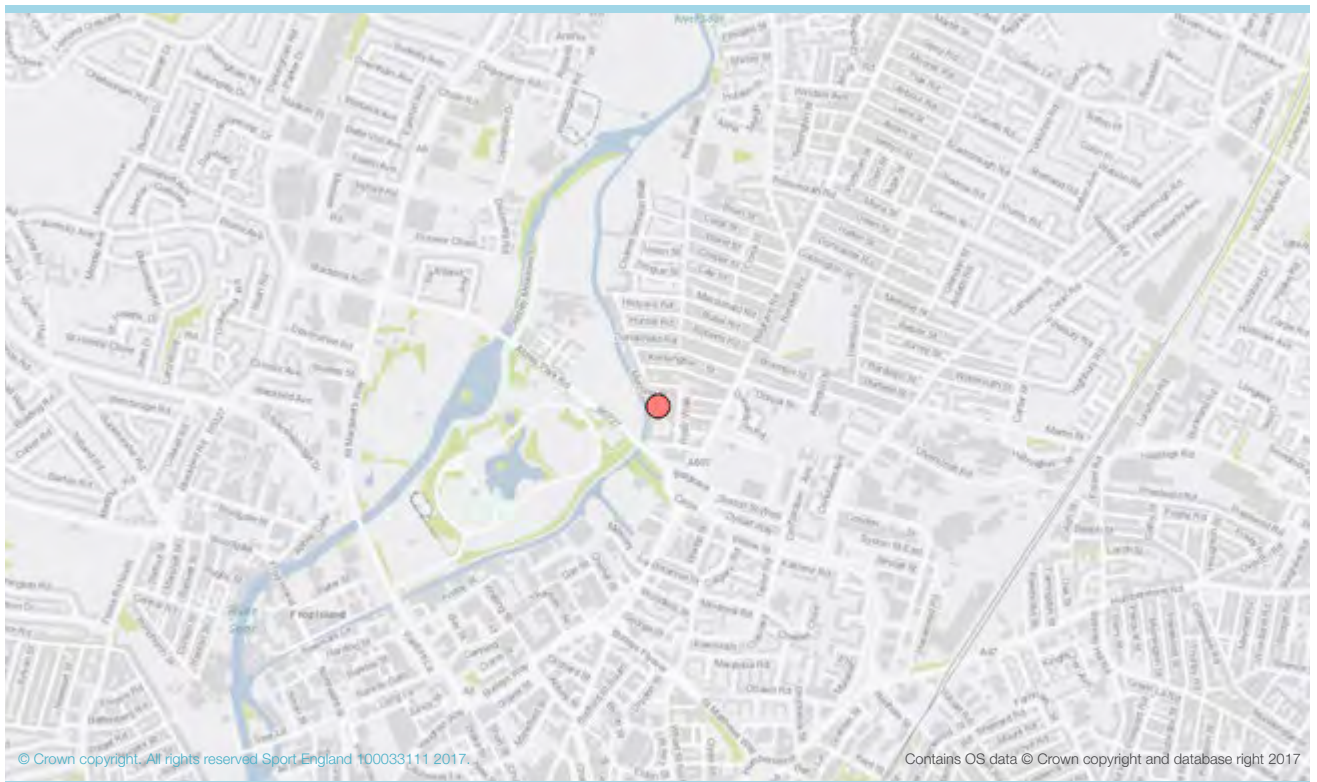
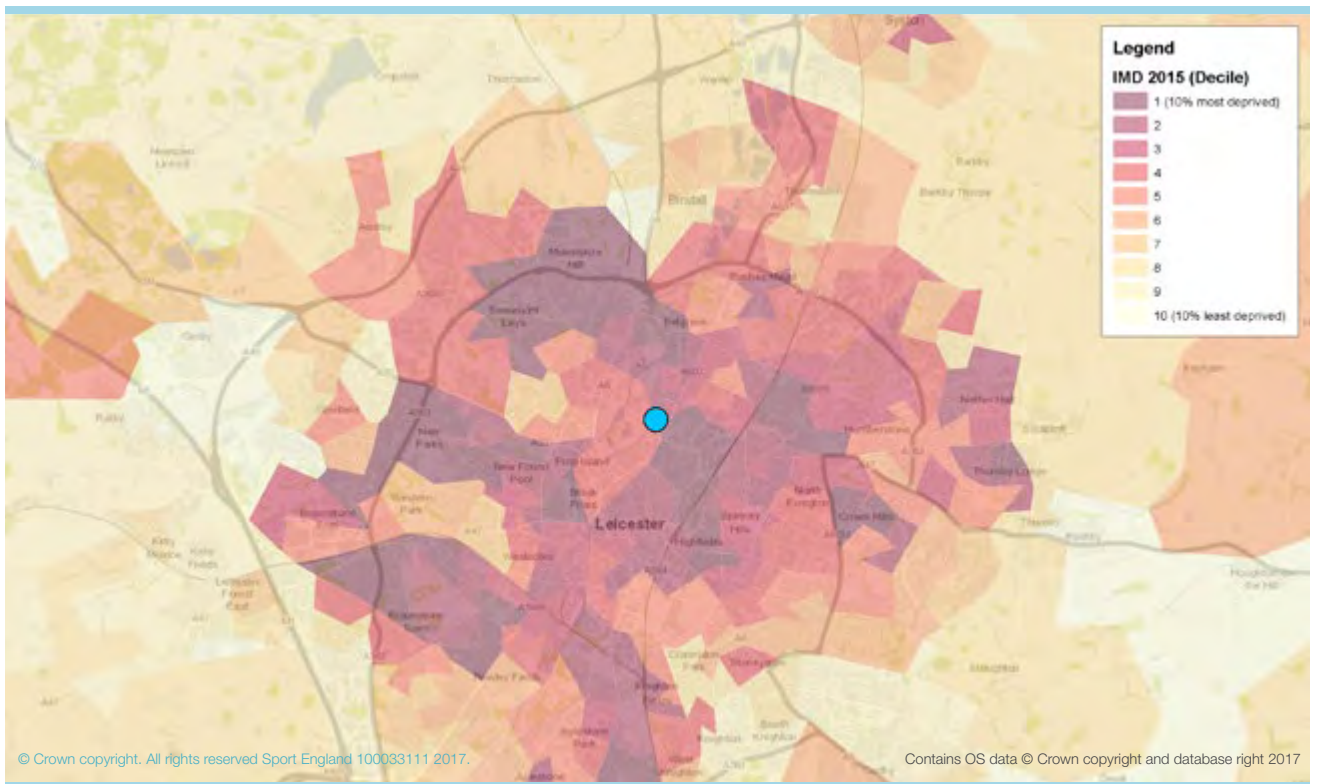
Local authority	Leicester
Region	East Midlands

#### IMD

LSOA ranking position	4,710 <sup>2</sup> This is in the top 15% most deprived neighbourhoods in England.
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1 Source: Mid-Year Population Estimates 2016, ONS

2 Each LSOA is ranked out of 32,844 LSOAs in England; where 1 is the most deprived



# RESOURCES

## PROJECT COST:

**Total project cost: £290,000**

**Purpose:** Re-roofing and then a rebuild of boxing club following a fire

## SPORT ENGLAND CONTRIBUTION

**Inspired Facilities Fund:** £81,862 to repair and improve Waterfront's facilities at a time when the club was concerned that the state of their building was putting off women and other new audiences.

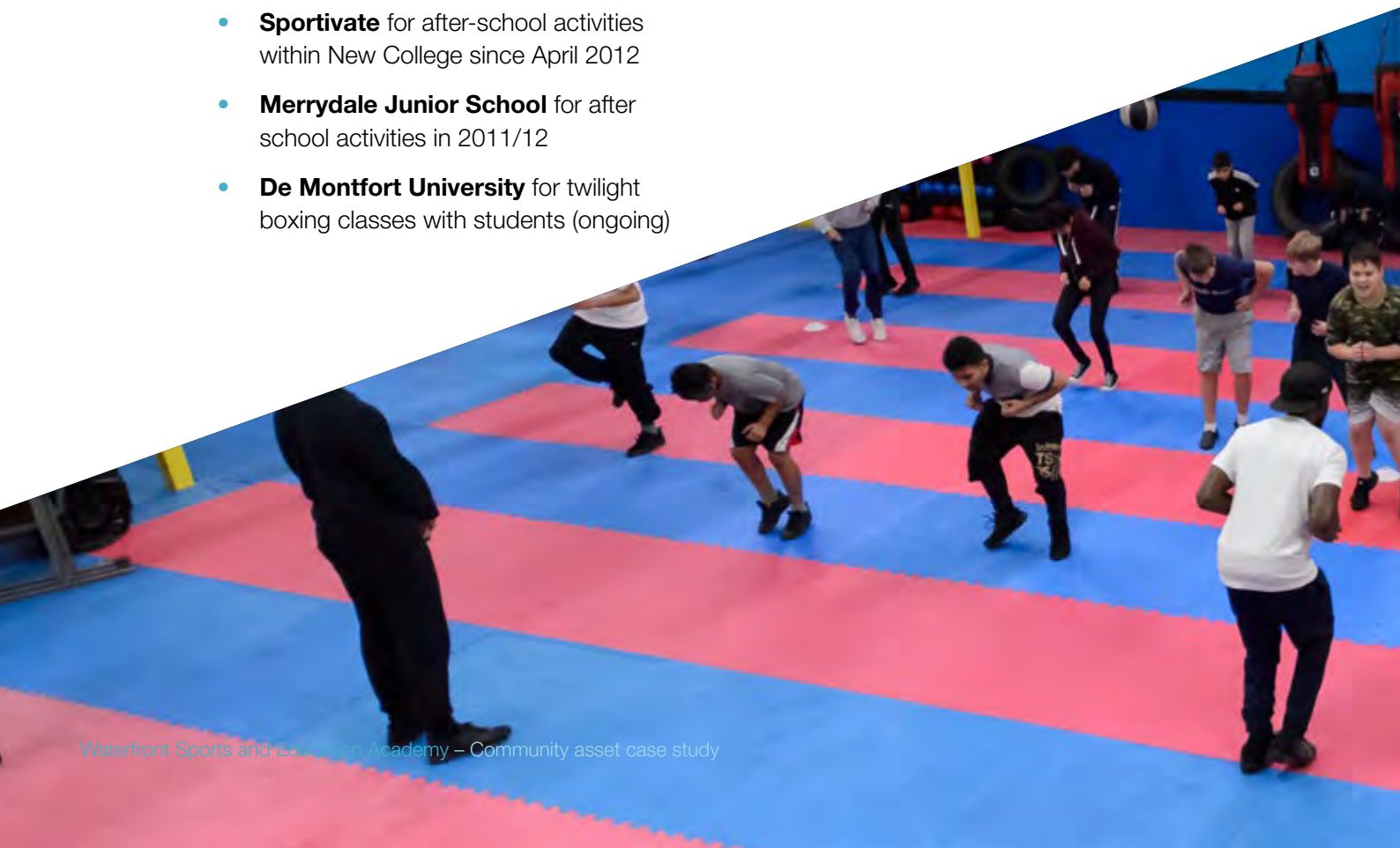
## OTHER GRANT FUNDING

Lots of grant funding for project based work, starting in 2010. Sources include:

- **£12,000** from Sported for workshops with young people
- **Leicester City Council** for youth services and holiday schemes
- **Sportivate** for after-school activities within New College since April 2012
- **Merrydale Junior School** for after school activities in 2011/12
- **De Montfort University** for twilight boxing classes with students (ongoing)

## OTHER SOURCES OF FINANCE

- **£80,000** from the Norman Gill Charity for electrical upgrades and the installation of fire safety doors
- **£8,000** from Samworth Brothers for development of a mezzanine office/workshop/kitchen/music studio
- **£10,000** Samworth Brothers are paying sponsorship of staff posts via their Sports Opportunity Fund.





## OTHER SUPPORT

**Most significant:** Waterfront have received plenty of in-kind support, from sources such as: the haulage company whose premises they used, Norman Gill builders, Barratt Homes, Marks Electrical, and Leicester architects providing pro-bono time.

**Local authority:** No capital support but ongoing work with the local schools summer schemes and sport development.

**Political:** Waterfront approached their local MP for support but nothing came of this.

**Professional:** Waterfront's trustees had business and local authority experience, including their treasurer (a rates assessor) and the chair (libraries experience).

**Local Community:** Waterfront's entrepreneurial approach has driven its development and drawn in lots of support from the community including support from friends and contacts who are chartered surveyors, lawyers, accountants etc.



# THE JOURNEY

## KEY EVENTS AND MILESTONES

Date	Event
1999	Six friends meet for boxing, martial arts and fitness training in the back room of a haulage company
2001	Leicester Nirvana club established, with over 300 members
2010	Name changed to Waterfront Boxing
March 2012	The club becomes 'Waterfront Boxing Active Centre Community Interest Company'
June 2012	Sport England grant awarded
July 2012	Building work commences on replacing leaking roof
September 2014	Club converted to a charity; 'Waterfront Sports and Education Academy'
December 2015	Fire. Building closes.
January 2016	Fire clean up and re-build commences
February 2016	Re-opening
June 2017	Final stages of re-build, installation of heating as final stage.

## FIRST IDEAS

**The spark:** The club started as a place where half a dozen friends from different martial arts and boxing backgrounds wanted to spend time training together. They found some space at a haulage company (now the Waterfront Boxing Academy) and sessions were invite only. After a couple of years the group had grown to about 300 which coincided with the haulage company struggling and therefore giving over more space to them.

**Knowledge of the audience:** The club talked to people in the community and started to plan how they saw the club developing; *"We did a 'mind-map' in 2003 of what was needed. Everything on that map we are now doing,"* says Michael Burgess, CEO, *"The young people are our driver; they started the youth club sessions. At every step it's us asking them what they want."* Activities now on offer include: community outreach, youth clubs, Connexions advice services, engaging with excluded pupils, non-contact boxing, training in schools/colleges healthy eating classes, IT and literacy/numeracy education.

**The location:** Waterfront's setting was, in some sense, accidental – driven by what was available. But its location means that it is easy to access and serve the local population: it's a ten-minute walk from the city centre in Belgrave, one of the more deprived and mixed wards in Leicester. According to the 2011 census the religious make up of Belgrave is 54.6% Hindu, 14.3% Christian, 14.1% Muslim, 6.4% no religion, 5.5% Sikh and 0.3% Buddhist. The Asian community based in and around Belgrave Road have been residents since the early 1970s.

## FIRST STEPS

The first steps as a community club occurred after local young people started seeing people with gym kit and boxing gloves going in and out of the building. The six friends started to teach classes of different martial arts but it quickly became clear that the main demand was to learn boxing.

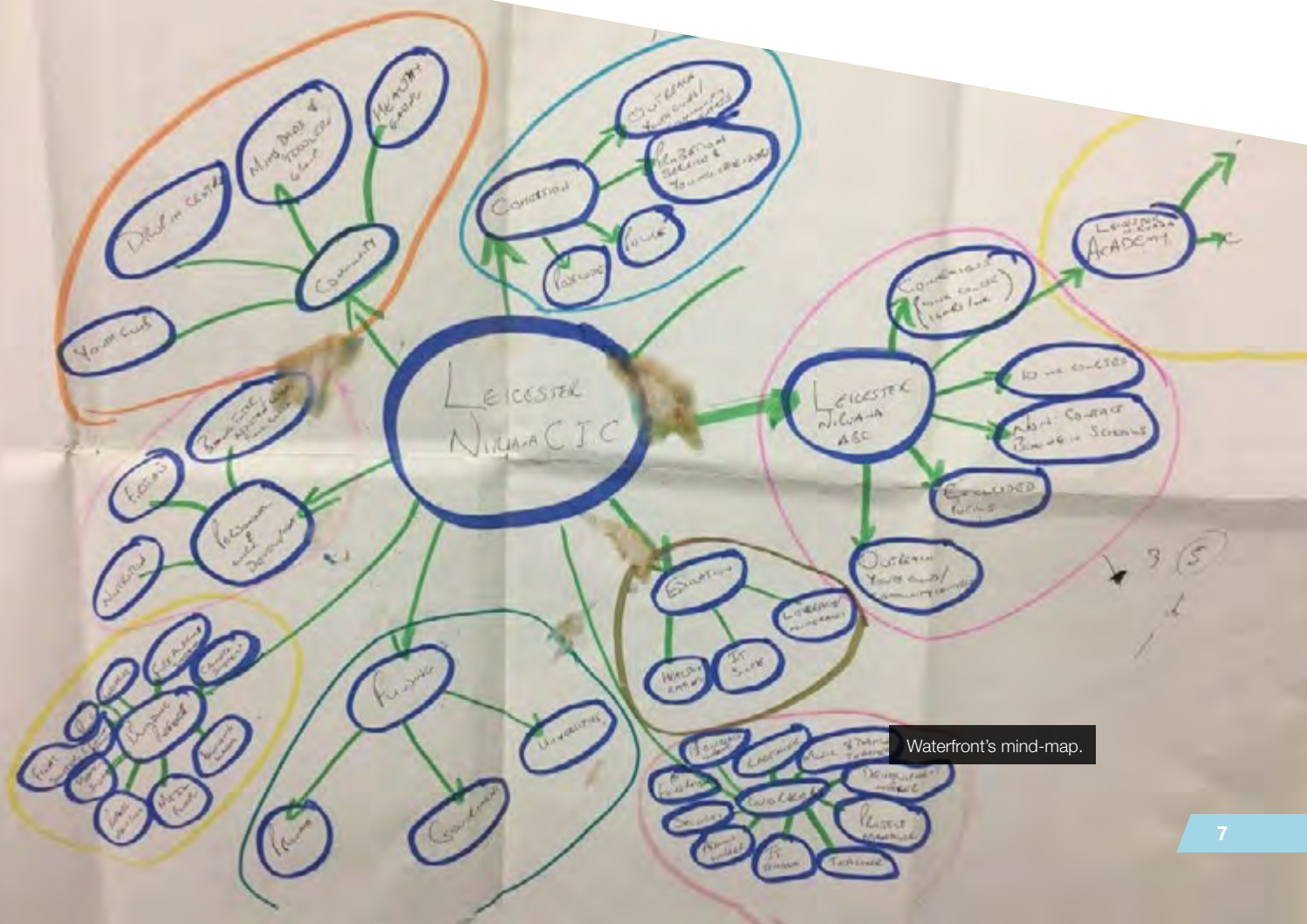
## FORMATION

The three main protagonists (Michael Lewis, then chair, Michael Burgess, then centre manager and Mahesh Patel, treasurer) agreed that they should develop the building as a community boxing club. Michael Lewis was head of libraries at Leicester Council and wanted to pursue his career by becoming a trustee. He said *"I'd been teaching kickboxing non-stop for three years in a voluntary capacity and was a bit bored with it by then"*. Michael Burgess decided to be responsible for day-to-day management as a volunteer until sponsorship (from Samworth Brothers) created a paid role in April 2014.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

Waterfront agreed their first five-year plan in 2003. They knew that if it was *"just a gym then it would likely fail and it would have a much better chance if it was linked to the community"*. They knew they had good skills between them: Michael Lewis's role as head of libraries brought him into contact with elected councillors and so he had an understanding of how local authorities worked. But they also recruited trustees who had backgrounds in finance, surveying, building work and law; and *"friends who could help us"*.

In terms of developing the programme they all had experience of youth work and boxing coaching. They were also confident that they could recruit people from the local community who could teach or coach other activities that would be of interest to local people.



Waterfront's mind-map.



## FUNDING

The team used to be funded to deliver youth work provision, but have decided against this model due to the short-term nature of the funding pots. Their CEO Michael Burgess told us *“We’ve now stopped the youth work as we get funding, success and then money runs out and stops... We will start it again but when we do it will be continuous and self-funding”*.

The club also gets funding for delivering alternate education as an Open College Network provider.

The project has a long-term goal of being self-sufficient. They do not want to apply for funding until they know they are ready and in the prime position to make the most of the investment. For instance, they’ve invited the Big Lottery to visit the project to begin to familiarise themselves with its aims, objectives and provision. They want the Lottery to be absolutely convinced that they are ready for a larger investment: *“We’ve invited the Lottery guy in to get to know us to see what we have done with nothing. He’ll advise us if we’re ready to apply. I want us to be self-sufficient”*.

## DEVELOPMENT

No external planning permission was necessary for the building works as the grant was used for two internal jobs.

The idea for developing the building was developed through understanding local needs by *“listening to people, talking to them”*. The critical event in terms of the club’s development, according to Michael Lewis was the 2012 Olympic Games:

***“THE OLYMPICS WAS HUGE, ABSOLUTELY MASSIVE. UNTIL THAT POINT IT WAS DIFFICULT GETTING GIRLS IN TO THE CENTRE. IT WAS THE BOXING AND THE TAEKWONDO PARTICULARLY THAT MEANT WE HAD UP TO 50 GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANTING TO ATTEND SESSIONS. WE NEEDED TO START CHANGING THE FACILITY, BETTER SHOWERS, BETTER TOILETS”***

This was also the time when Muslim women started to use the centre: *“One woman told us that they wanted to do something on their own doorstep, they didn’t want to have to go into the city centre”*, – Michael Lewis, chair.



The Muslim group 'Zfit' are now based at the club and the partnership is important for both parties as it provides a safe space for the women to exercise and socialise and it brings wider communities to the centre. Zfit lead coach explained *"It was hard picking somewhere where the ladies are comfortable. The environment is friendly and comfortable... we fitted in quite nice. We have women's only sessions as some come from communities who prefer ladies only environment. We use the changing rooms they were really accommodating"*.

Michael Lewis says that the husbands haven't started using the centre yet but the children do. This started when the centre began updating its website with information and putting information up on the walls about what was going on.

## INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Waterfront have had a couple of small grants from the local authority to run a summer play scheme and first aid. This has brought in small amounts of revenue. Grants totalling £22,000 have come in for Box Smart of which £10,000 is from the local police and the Crime Commission:

*"First, we just got on with what we were doing, we were contacted by a policeman Gary Bailey who got us to apply to the Home Office where we got funded to work with young people in the area, by going to meetings we started to find out there were organisations out there that could help us or sign-post us in the right direction"*.

Gary's membership and involvement not only helped reduce local tensions and create contact between police and young people, but also led by chance (via his mother) to financial support from Norman Gill, a local builder/businessman. Gill funded re-wiring, doors and fire safety upgrades and also brought in-kind support from other local businesses. Safety work included installing an enclosed passageway which also meant Muslim women could get from reception to the back room without encountering men training.



Waterfront brings together people of various age groups, ethnic groups and circumstances. A partnership with ZFit has been key to encouraging local women to attend the club.

## THE FUTURE

Waterfront plan to expand the school provision on site and bring in more money. If this is a success they hope to save enough money to have a deposit to buy the building. Organisationally, the trustees intend to take a more back-seat position at the club. They're currently trying to line up young people to up-skill and prepare for a gradual handover of operations. Michael Burgess describes this process:

***“IT’S TIME TO LET THE NEW BLOOD COME THROUGH AND LET GO. WE’RE WORKING WITH FOUR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE AROUND 20 YEARS OLD AND HAVE BEEN GROWING WITH US FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS. WE TAKE THEM TO MEETINGS SO THEY UNDERSTAND THE ORGANISATION”***

**MICHAEL BURGESS. CEO**

The aim is to handover the operation completely within three to four years and then remain involved in a purely advisory capacity.

## USP

Everyone spoken to said that the main USP was the people involved in running the club. Michael Burgess was seen as ‘a big personality’. The organisation have adapted their learning styles to suit the different young people in the centre – particularly the education centre on the first floor. Martin, the head of education, had originally trained as an amateur boxer at Waterfront and three years ago helped set up the alternative education provision. It currently attracts 35 young people.

There’s a real ‘community feel’ to Waterfront, which is very locally rooted, it’s not a facility that people travel a long way to use. Mick Murphy is from Leicester Partnership Schools and refers young people who are excluded or about to be excluded to the two alternative provisions (boxing and car mechanics) that Waterfront run. He observed that young people who finish their involvement at the end of Year 11 often come back to train or volunteer if they are local but not if they live in a different part of the city: *“I often bump into people who have become sports coaches as a result of attending Water front sessions”*.

Mick was also a boxer himself and says *“the centre has a good reputation”* and that *“the staff are not seen as teachers, and the young people can relate to them. They’re friendly and approachable but can also get the message across”*. He described the changes in one young person as being a being *“a huge difference. At the start he wouldn’t talk to anybody but quickly he was smiling, happy, having conversations and good social interaction with other young people”*.



A strong volunteering ethos has been developed at Waterfront, providing pathways and succession plans.

# IMPACT



## USAGE

- Throughput: even following the fire they have doubled capacity, from c.300 to at least 600 visits (throughput) a week and 27,968 from February 2016 – April 2017.
- Unique users: 2,113 since opening
- Gender: More girls attend now since Waterfront's partnership with local Muslim group, 'ZFit' who are now based on site. Muslim women attend three or four times a week doing Zumba, keep fit, box-a-size and Pilates. Many now also volunteer.

(The club collects basic details of members – name, address, email, phone number and next of kin – but do not do other evaluation or collect other data. They are considering some evaluation systems).

## OTHER LOCAL IMPACT

### **Local accessibility / lower socio-economic groups**

Waterfront aim to be accessible to all the community as well as affordable for local people. The recreational boxing offer is priced to be inclusive at £2 per child and £3 per adult.

### **Volunteering development**

Nik, a university student, had been coming to Waterfront since he was nine. He started boxing training and kept it going all summer and when he wasn't doing that he hung around the place playing pool and keeping fit. Then; *"one day the printer broke down and I fixed it and then I started doing the posters and helping out on the music sessions. I have been a boxing coach for four years and also do event management and DJing across the country. I also have a key for the building so often open or lock up"*. Nik also coordinates

the 'busy bee' volunteering programme which involves other organisations encouraging the use of volunteering and nominating people for awards given out by the Waterfront club.

## SPORT ENGLAND OUTCOMES

Through our funding, we aim to nurture projects which address the five health, social and economic outcomes set out in the [Government's Sporting Future strategy](#). We feel that Waterfront strongly supports two of these outcomes in particular; individual development and social and community development.

### **Community Asset Fund – Key Outcome: Community Development**

The club brings together people of various age groups, ethnic groups and circumstances. Many women now attend the club through the partnership with Zfit. Zfit is a local women's fitness group who deliver fitness and social sessions to a mainly Muslim female community. Since finding a secure 'base' for the delivery the project has had a major impact on the lives of the women they work with and the wider community:

*"[It] enabled women from different communities to come together. People break down their own barriers. People now travel to me because they know me so it's attracting people from different areas to come here. A lot of them hadn't heard of Waterfront before."*

Zfit Lead

The partnership came about through Leicester Community Business, who introduced the two agencies. The two instantly bonded and wanted to work together:

*"It was like a marriage – the ethos was the same. It is community based and a lot of work together."*

Zfit Lead



## OTHER STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

The project feels they contribute to all of the five key outcomes but that they now need to evidence this.

**Personal development:** The number of young people attending alternative education classes is increasing as is the number achieving National Open College Network qualifications. Mick Murphy reports daily on young people and the local education authority make spot visits (although they did acknowledge that it's difficult to quantify progress without students taking formal qualifications).<sup>3</sup>

Both Mick and Martin described the importance of the alternative education programmes as preparing young people for the next steps, getting into college or an apprenticeship or some type of paid work. Martin also said the boxing *“breaks down any barriers they have, gets rid of lot of negative energy and tension and gives them confidence and self-esteem”*.

Martin suggested that the attrition rate at the club is higher for young people who attend open sessions than the alternative education boxing provision because they can manage their development much better:

***“WE ALSO EMBED LEARNING WITHIN THE BOXING PROGRAMME; LEARNING COMBINATIONS HELPS WITH THEIR MATHS SKILLS, SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS IMPROVE BECAUSE OF THE BOXING TRAINING. IT CAN HELP THEIR TIME KEEPING, EATING PATTERNS AS WELL AS THEIR GENERAL ATTITUDE”***



Increasing numbers of young people are attending the alternative education classes at the club. Martin, head of education at waterfront, feels that boxing plays an important part in the success of these classes.

There are also clear progress routes and volunteering opportunities across the organisation.

**Community development:** Sagar has been attending the club since primary school and now plays an important volunteering role at the centre. He described the impact the club has on the local community:

*“It brings the community together and it plays a really good part in that. Everyone can have internet access and while on the network are safe and come here for social life. It’s not stressful at all, I chill out with friends and do some training, help the community”.*

Zfit organisers also think that the club has a family approach, which helps engage the local community: *“It’s very family oriented here. It’s known as a place where people feel safe. It keeps the young people off the streets and introduces them to sports and better activities. Getting the women in now brings their children in too”.*

**New ways of working:** The organisation are keen to ensure that their provision fits what the audience/community wants. All the rooms apart from the music studio on the first floor were described as ‘flexible spaces’, often changed to suit the needs of users. For example, the work room was previously a dance studio, and before that an arts room.



Waterfront’s journey towards becoming a community club started when local young people started seeing the club’s original group of six friends with gym kit and boxing gloves going in and out of their training sessions.

**“YOU NEED TO BE RELEVANT TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE YOU ARE WORKING WITH IN ORDER TO GET THEIR RESPECT. ONE STUDENT HAD BEEN IN 12 DIFFERENT EDUCATION PLACEMENTS BEFORE HE ARRIVED HERE AND NOW HE’S SETTLED”.**

Waterfront is an organisation that isn't concerned with superficialities – it's a labyrinth of half-finished rooms – but they take pride in the fact that they work for the people who used them.

**Innovations:** Working in partnership with Zfit is bringing many new innovative areas of working now and in the future:

*“It’s an evolving partnership. We work together and have that mentality and work together in partnership. Waterfront’s work was boxing and kids, and ours was women, which was missing so it’s introduces that and so much scope for growth. Seminars for healthy eating, community sport for obesity, we have a kitchen up here, so are teaching healthier cooking at home”.*

Zfit lead



## TIPS FROM WATERFRONT

- Take your time and believe in yourself
- Invest in the right staff
- Don't chase funds for the sake of it.

## WHAT THEY WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

'Nothing!'

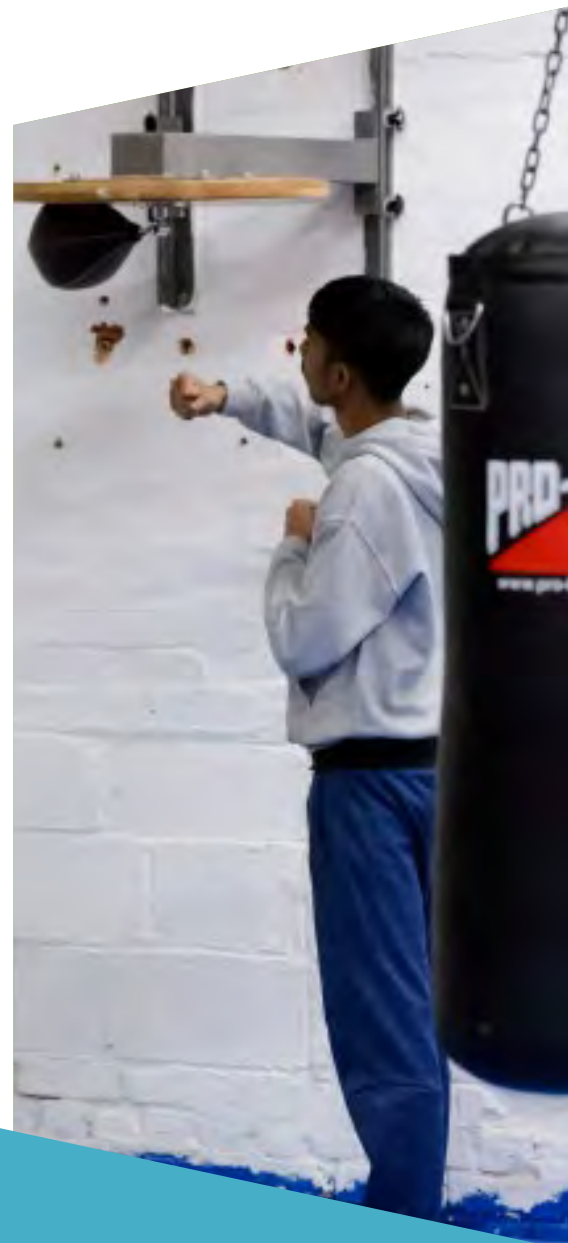
## GOOD PRACTICE BY WATERFRONT

- They listened to what the community want. Waterfront were particularly good at recognising that the 2012 Olympics was an opportunity to involve new groups of people and worked hard to make sure these groups' expectations were realised
- The chair of trustees is fully involved in the centre, he continues to coach and train there and his three sons have all taken up volunteering roles in martial arts coaching, music production etc.
- The recruitment of Muslim women into the club
- They've developed a strong volunteering ethos, providing pathways and succession plans
- Their alternative education provision which matches the interest of excluded young people
- They work closely with other agencies in Leicester and in different community centres. They also have a mobile boxing ring and can host this in community venues. They're known as an organisation that 'can do it'.

## LEARNING FOR SPORT ENGLAND AND OTHER SUPPORTERS

Waterfront are an organisation that wants to demonstrate that they can deliver on very little resources and as such do not want to be pushed into formal grant applications or partnerships if they are not ready.

They are also to some extent an informal, grass roots organisation that have developed organically – at times this may require flexibility from strategic agencies if they are to support them.



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