

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2023-10-YO19	Empire Fighting Chance
Visit Date	Visited By
20 th February 2024	Victoria Southwell
Overall aim of the funding	
To deliver a project that combines boxing and psychology to prevent 100 “at risk” young people in Bristol from entering the criminal justice system.	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Empire Fighting Chance (EFC) was established in 2006 and became a registered charity in 2014. EFC currently employs 34 staff and five consultants. A board of six Trustees, who meet quarterly, support the staff team. They have a strong mix of skills including finance, operations, business knowledge, running a charity, young people, marketing and communications and lived experience of the issues participants experience.</p> <p>EFC has a Gameplan for the period 2024 – 2026. This has identified five goals that will guide their work over the next three years and are underpinned by a series of ‘tactics’ to achieve the goals. The goals are; 1) Establish a global centre of excellence in Bristol; 2) Step up for our community; 3) Share our work nationally and internationally; 4) Stand up for what we believe; and 5) Get fit for the fight. Each goal has five measurable aims linked to it. The strategy was developed after staff were asked to come up with the core principles that would form a series of beliefs that underpin the plan. Trustees were then engaged in the plan being written and review progress at Trustee Meetings.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>At the assessment I met with Martin Bisp (Founder and CEO), Michael Fuller (Director of Growth) and Dave Phillips (Trustee and Treasurer).</p> <p>Martin set up EFC in 2006 in response to his frustration that the immediate area outside of the boxing club he helped to run was being negatively affected by anti-social behaviour. He challenged a group of young people who were causing a nuisance to come to the gym to train and this led to a growing number of young people starting to regularly attend sessions. This informal intervention soon grew to the point where some sessional coaches were employed to run sessions, leading to a curriculum eventually being developed that focused sessions on personal development goals and eventually the charity was established.</p> <p>Michael has been working with EFC since 2017 and leads the fundraising team. He works closely with the CEO on major donor applications and developing strategy. He is employed as a consultant rather than as a permanent member of staff.</p> <p>Dave has been a Trustee for seven years and is a retired Chartered Accountant and Operations Director. He is also on the board of another charity in Worcester. He meets with Martin regularly to set the annual budget, produce monthly management accounts, and provide support on operations. Whilst Martin meets with the Chair on a monthly basis, he meets with Dave most weeks.</p>	

Aims and Activities

Empire Fighting Chance aims to help young people through the provision of recreational and leisure time activities provided in the interest of social welfare. They use a powerful combination of non-contact boxing and intensive personal support to challenge and inspire young people aged 8-25 to realise their unique potential.

They deliver four psychologically informed non-contact boxing programmes that reach over 5,000 young people every year. These programmes are;

- Box Champions – combines non-contact boxing and psychology informed mentoring to give young people aged 8-25 the skills and inspiration to make positive changes in their lives;
- Box Therapy – a therapist combines non-contact boxing with therapeutic support to create a safe and engaging environment for young people aged 8-25 to explore their feelings and behaviours;
- Box Careers – combines non-contact boxing sessions with tailored career and education activities to support young people aged 16-25 on their journey into learning, training, and work;
- Box Juniors – mixed non-contact boxing classes with an Empire coach for young people aged 10-16, focused on boxing techniques, fitness and having fun.

Safeguarding

EFC has a detailed Safeguarding and Child Protection policy and their approach to safeguarding underpins all of the work that they do and is linked to England Boxing's standards. The policy is comprehensive and covers all areas of their work and clearly sets out processes and expectations. The Designated Safeguarding Lead is named, as is the Trustee with responsibility for Safeguarding, and there is also a detailed list of other staff members who are Deputy Safeguarding Leads that links them to specific weekly activities. The policy is reviewed annually.

All staff and unsupervised volunteers are DBS checked and at least 2 staff who are Safer Recruitment trained sit on recruitment panels. Staff receive extensive training around safeguarding as part of their induction and this is regularly refreshed. EFC use Upshot to record any safeguarding concerns.

EFC has an escalation and professional challenge policy where workers are given the means to raise concerns about the decisions made by other professionals or agencies. They also have a clear process for raising and monitoring concerns that do not meet the threshold to escalate externally but require attention.

Finances

Audited financial statements for the year ending 31 October 2022 show income of £1,175,448 against expenditure of £1,149,263 resulting in a surplus of £26,185, of which £7,580 was unrestricted. Net current assets are £674,534 with a reserve figure of £702,917, of which £612,012 is unrestricted. EFC have a rather ambiguous reserves policy statement that says current levels of reserves "are appropriate to meet Empire's working capital requirements". When questioned what measures were used to base this on the Treasurer said they would aim to never hold less than 6 months reserves.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show a growth in planned expenditure for their current financial year but a levelling out thereafter. A significant amount of funding has already been secured for both years, in part due to multiyear grants. EFC have made a deliberate decision to not bid for contracts from statutory sources, so their income comes from Trusts and Foundations, individual

giving, and events. Main funders include Comic Relief, Paul Hamlyn, Children in Need, Stone Family Foundation and The October Club.

Good financial systems are in place that are overseen by the COO and the Head of Operations. The Treasurer, who has a significant financial background, meets with the team regularly and supports the producing of management accounts and budgets. These are shared at Trustee meetings.

Current Situation and need

EFC has seen three young men that they work with lose their lives to knife crime in the past 18 months. These incidents reflect an alarming trend in increased youth violence and criminality in Bristol.

The rate of first-time entrants to the youth justice system in Bristol is significantly higher than the national average and is increasing. Current outreach from their gym in inner city Bristol is highlighting to EFC an increase in cases of youth crime and violence and a decrease in the age of those involved. EFC believes that this can be unequivocally linked to inequality, with choices and responses shaped by the challenges and conditions young people battle on a daily basis.

In the neighbourhoods that EFC work in, behavioural issues are exacerbated by territorialism (in the form of postcode rivalries), exploitation from gang leaders, social media (such as fights being filmed on phones) and fear of victimisation, which leads to some young people carrying knives. Young people's emotional and behavioural issues combine to prevent engagement in education, employment and meaningful relationships. This compounds their distress and a negative cycle ensues. Lack of trust, due to inconsistent, neglectful and sometimes violent relationships with adults can become a powerful barrier to gaining mainstream support from services. This is often compounded by a belief that professionals don't understand them and their experiences and that services don't reflect their needs or circumstances. The reality is though that delays in accessing support often mean that issues deepen and young people are pushed into punitive services like the Youth Justice System.

EFC will target young people from the most deprived neighbourhoods in Bristol, including Lower Layer Super Output areas in Ashley and Lawrence Hill, Barton Hill, Stapleton Road and St Pauls Grosvenor Road. All are amongst the worst 10% for crime according to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation. The project will support young people who have had multiple adverse childhood experiences, including violence, abuse, neglect, chaotic home lives and parental separation. These kinds of traumatic experiences are known to result in individuals struggling to form healthy attachments and self-regulate emotions and a need to feel safe and belong.

The project will aim to reduce a young person's engagement in destructive behaviours that could lead to them getting a criminal record. Participants will be triaged into one of two programmes depending on their needs – Box Champions (a 20-week course) or Box Therapy (a 12-week course). Both programmes are centred around a trusted relationship with a coach (a Youth worker for Box Champions and a therapist for Box Therapy). Sessions take place in a boxing gym, as this removes the stigma associated with mainstream services and is a place where young people feel safe, can make new friends and feel part of a family. Participants set goals to work towards, typically relating to emotions (such as reducing anger), behaviours (such as stopping violence) and situations (such as leaving a gang). Both programmes feature weekly sessions built around exercises to improve fitness and develop technical boxing skills that seamlessly weave in conversations to help the young person achieve their goals. A grant will pay for salary costs for coaches, therapists and project running costs.

Expected changes in Year 1	
Social Impact Area 1	
Social and Community Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced anti-social behaviour • Reduced gang participation • Increased social capital and trust
Social Impact Area 2	
Individual Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved self-esteem • Improved motivation • Improved managing emotions
Social Impact Area 3	
Health and Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased physical activity • Improved family relationships • Improved sense of mental wellbeing
Request and Budget	
<p>EFC is requesting £78,846 over 2 years towards the salary costs of coaches, therapists, monitoring and evaluation, project management and project running costs.</p> <p>£39,423 in year 1 - £15,418 (Coach salaries), £11,680 (therapist salaries), £5,431 (Project management), £5,142 (overheads) and £1,752 (monitoring and evaluation). £39,423 in year 2 - £15,418 (Coach salaries), £11,680 (therapist salaries), £5,431 (Project management), £5,142 (overheads) and £1,752 (monitoring and evaluation).</p>	
Conclusion and Recommendation	
<p>EFC is a dynamic organisation who are clearly experts in their field. They deliver a programme of support that both engages challenging young people and achieves significant changes for them. They have organically grown from a small and informal project into a well-run charity with ambitious plans for the future, without losing their grass roots feel.</p> <p>EFC has been at the forefront of youth crime and violence for many years. They have seen a number of young men they have worked with murdered and even on the day of the assessment a former staff member arrived at the gym with news that a young man who had been stabbed and killed the previous week had been his cousin. The impact of this escalation of violence across the city in the past couple of years is a constant reminder to EFC of what is at stake in the work that they do and the huge gaps that exist in supporting vulnerable and challenging young people.</p> <p>The support that EFC provides is undoubtedly well designed and effective. The gym that most work takes place in has been designed to be a neutral and safe space that acts as a leveller for the young people who attend. And a steady increase in work in other parts of Bristol, in schools, community venues and street outreach means that the programme is accessible to young people from a range of different communities. A large number of the staff have themselves either used the services of EFC or are from the local area, so possess an authenticity and vital relatability for the young people that they support.</p> <p>Bristol is experiencing a concerning period of knife violence and this is something that EFC have been challenging the city to address in a joined-up way for some time. EFC have become well networked and recognised globally for leading the way in working with young people who have previously been hard to engage. This has led to them developing significant knowledge about interventions and approaches in other countries, making them well placed to contribute to a city-wide approach to addressing</p>	

this issue. It is likely that they will play in key role in any strategy that is developed as the founder and CEO has extensive links with senior officials locally and a loud and influential voice. They definitely deserve to be around the table and pushing Bristol to do more in this area and are lobbying for an Office of Violence Prevention to be set up in Bristol as part of the Serious Violence Strategy.

That said whilst EFC are certainly an organisation on the up, it does raise the question of how much of an impact our funding would make. When compared to other proposals the difference between these applicants and EFC is stark. The team themselves described their current situation as them being “very popular with funders” and the information provided about current supporters and discussions being had with other new funders demonstrated this. I don’t doubt that if EFC were not awarded the grant that they would find it relatively easy to secure this funding from elsewhere. They are already having positive discussions with the National Lottery about a significant sized application for their work. They also have an established and well-resourced fundraising team who are building up a strong pipeline of new donors. When compared to the capacity of other applicants this makes this application less of a priority.

This request will certainly allow EFC to work with more young people, but if they were not successful in being awarded a grant the work they currently do would not be significantly impacted. The ability of other applicants to deliver work with this cohort is much more dependent on the outcome of their request to us, which again makes this application less of a priority. I also feel that other applicants will benefit more from our other areas of support, such as the Spark Programme and the Peer2Peer Exchanges. Whilst there is definite benefit in experienced practitioners being part of the cohort so that others can learn from them, I did feel that EFC’s response to these elements of our grant making was a little lukewarm. Questions about wider links to the Sport 4 Development sector and other similar charities suggested that partnering with others to learn and develop wasn’t massively valued and that the team see their intervention as being first in class.

Trustees may want to consider therefore if this application is a priority as when considered against other applications I would not recommend awarding funding for this request.

Recommended Priority Rating			
Risk =	Low	Difference to organisation =	Low
		Priority =	Low
Requested amount	£78,846	Recommended amount	£0