

Leading London homeless charity given award for using sport to support people in crisis



One of London's leading homeless charities has been praised for an innovative project which uses sport to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Single Homeless Project's (SHP) Sports Project helps hundreds of people across 11 boroughs get active and enjoy taking part in a range of sports, including boxing, football, yoga, and cycling.

The aim is to remove the barriers homeless people, or those at risk of homelessness, face to regular exercise and in doing so, help them enjoy the many physical and mental health benefits of being active, improve their social confidence, and help them overcome and cope with any challenges they are experiencing.

Earlier this week the charity, which has also recently introduced women-only sessions and is lobbying other organisations to embed physical activity as part of the core support for homelessness, won the Community Impact Award, in association with 4Global, at the London Sport Awards.

The annual Awards, supported by the City of London Corporation, shines a spotlight on grassroots sport clubs, groups, teams, and projects which are delivering not only fantastic support to individuals, but whose efforts have a positive impact on the wider community.

With the number of people sleeping rough in London rising by 24% last year, the demand for the SHP's support has never been greater – with the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis adding more pressure to Londoners at risk of homelessness.

In that context, SHP's Sports Project was an obvious choice for the London Sports Award's judges. Since it launched in 2017, the Sports Project has successfully helped hundreds of people – with 92% of all participants seeing an improvement in their physical health and 89% saying their mental wellbeing has been boosted by taking part. There has also been a 31% drop in substance abuse among participants.

Sam Sainsbury, sports manager at SHP, outlined why the work is so important and the SHP's approach so successful: "The people who come to our sessions might have very different experiences and circumstances, but no one is turned away."

"We've found sport is a great gateway. It is often the first thing many people have engaged in with SHP. It makes them want to engage with their health and their recovery."

As the project has grown, SHP has also started holding events like its annual sports days, which bring together people from across London. Sam recalled a touching story he had from one client whose life changed for the better after a sports day last year: "I was talking to him afterwards and he said that it was that day that had changed his life, nothing else, just that day. He recently finished rehab and is now looking for work."

They aren't alone; 15% of the people the Sports Project works with go on to engage with the SHP's education, training, and employment teams, where they are given tailored career advice, helped through skills and training workshops, and supported through subsequent job interviews.

With the cost-of-living crisis placing more and more people under financial strain, the charity is expecting demand for its services to increase further over the coming months. A charity which was already busy is about to get even busier.

But what does it mean to staff to win this award? Sam explained: "Just being shortlisted for this was an honour. The recognition we've received is reassuring that our work is making a difference."

The Sports Project operates across Camden, Islington, Westminster, Wandsworth, Hammersmith and Fulham, Lewisham, Greenwich, Redbridge, Lambeth, Waltham Forest, and Newham.

For more on the London Sport Awards, visit: www.londonsport.org or to learn more about the Single Homeless Project, visit: www.shp.org.uk.