

Written evidence submitted by Laureus Sport for Good

The impact of Covid-19 on the Sport for Development Sector

Introduction to Laureus and the Sport for Development Sector

Sport for development (SfD) is defined as the intentional use of sport and physical activity as a tool to bring about positive change in the lives of people and communities. In the UK, there are countless organisations who are using sport to engage vulnerable and disenfranchised young people and their families and provide vital support.

The Laureus Sport for Good Foundation exists to use the power of sport to end violence, discrimination and disadvantage, proving that sport has the power to change the world. Founded under the patronage of Nelson Mandela in 2000, Laureus is currently investing in and supporting 200 sport for development initiatives in more than 45 countries, including 20 interventions in the UK. Through grant-funding, capacity building, coalition development and evaluation and learning, we work across six social focus areas aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals; Health, Education, Employability, Women and Girls, Inclusive Society and Peaceful Society.

Many of the organisations that Laureus support work with young people in some of the most deprived communities in the UK: communities where unemployment, academic underachievement, anti-social behaviour and crime are prevalent; where opportunities to take part in sport and recreational opportunities are already limited; where young people from different faiths and cultures conflict and become isolated; and ultimately their chances of securing better lives for themselves and their families are stifled by deprivation and the barriers it puts in front of them. The SfD interventions delivered by these organisations provide much needed safe spaces and networks of support to enable vulnerable and hard to reach young people a space to develop and transform their lives.

This sector has been greatly impacted by the current Covid-19 pandemic. The vast majority of SfD organisations are small and community-based, operating on limited resources, creative ideas, and strong personal commitments from staff and volunteers. Covid-19 related challenges have meant that many of these organisations are having to close their doors or adapt provision whilst their participants, already hard to reach and vulnerable, are being left without the safe and inclusive spaces to find help.

This paper seeks to evidence the immediate impact that Covid-19 has had on the participants of SfD programmes and the organisations that deliver them; weigh the response of government departments and other arms-length bodies including DCMS, Sport England and Laureus; speculate on the long-term impact of Covid-19 on the SfD sector; and, suggest what support will be required to combat future challenges. It draws upon input from our 200+ global partners with a specific focus on our UK-based partners.

Immediate impact of Covid-19 on the Sport for Development sector

Impact on SfD participants

The current pandemic has amplified the inequalities that participants of SfD programmes are already experiencing on a daily basis. In many ways, it has highlighted the socio-economic divide. Whilst many SfD organisations have adapted their programming with innovative

solutions to Covid-19 related challenges, they are acutely aware that not all participants have a space at home to exercise or to follow online activities. Restrictions affects the more vulnerable participants' ability to get to open spaces, and when they do use public spaces it puts them more at risk of contracting the virus themselves.

SfD programmes provide physically and emotionally safe environments where young people can develop away from harmful influences. Well-conceived and carefully implemented SfD programmes can teach young and vulnerable people a range of skills, including leadership, organisational skills, communication and teamwork. Covid-19 related restrictions have meant that some SfD organisations have had to close their doors, leaving young people without the safe and inclusive spaces to find help and support that are usually provided by programmes and their partners. One UK-based Laureus partner commented that most of their young people faced the same challenges they experienced before the virus, but now those issues were amplified as participants couldn't access the sport and support activities provided by SfD. They went on to say that for many participants, staying home meant being in a no-safe space. This shows the most vulnerable participants are becoming even more vulnerable.

The closure of these safe spaces for some participants of SfD programmes means that young people are at risk of being involved in a crime or reconnecting with gangs as they lose support. Sport is a natural and effective medium through which to teach self-control, self-discipline, respect and cultural understanding. SfD programmes in London like Fight for Peace and Carney's Community intentionally use sport to engage young people at risk to decrease violent and criminal behaviour. Both of these organisations have been impacted by restrictions imposed by Covid-19. With centre and academy closures, their participants have lost a safe place to gather. Many of the more vulnerable participants do not experience safety in their homes or communities, which has also meant that many are no longer exercising and are at greater risk of engaging in gang activity.

There is a growing body of evidence to show the benefit that regular physical exercise naturally has on physical and mental health. These developments are crucial to reducing stigma and building resilience in the face of difficulties. SfD programmes use sport to draw together young people who would not attend a formal briefing or a more conventional educational setting, to create forums where key messages can be delivered and reinforced through the platform of trust built up being participants, coaches/mentors and teammates. SfD organisations in the UK like Active Communities Network, the Wave Project and Laureus' own Model City London (MCL) Initiative¹, have indicated that the interruption to their SfD programming has seen an increase in isolation and loneliness as well as interruptions to formal and informal education courses. As their participants lose contact with mentors/coaches and the psychosocial support offered by their programmes, they are seeing an increased risk of depression, even suicide, and a return to drugs and alcohol. In the UK, more than 80% of children with mental health challenges showed a worsening of their wellbeing as a result of the restrictions imposed.

Finally, SfD programmes addressing gender-based violence have expressed concern for their participants due to the closure of their safe spaces and supportive programming. There has been an increase in domestic violence hotline calls in the UK of 25%, with women and children at a greater risk of abuse within their own homes. Normally, if we speak about kids and young people, abuse is most often reported by people in their support networks, such as friends, neighbours, teachers, coaches, etc. Much reporting is enabled through conversations with friends, colleagues and teammates. During confinement, these networks are dramatically reduced and therefore much violence and abuse will likely go undetected.

¹ Model City London is Laureus' place-based approach to collective impact, bringing coalitions of community-based together to coalesce around joint social outcomes. Coalitions are currently active in Barking, Haringey and Hounslow with the support of the GLA and Nike.

Impact on SfD organisations

For SfD organisations, covid-19 means financial challenges, resource shortages and delivery implications. Laureus see challenges in maintaining engagement with participants as well as a lot of positive creativity from delivery partners in adapting methodologies to new realities.

One key impact of Covid-19 on these organisations has been financial. Laureus partners note that fundraising events have been cancelled, social enterprises and membership fees have been affected, and delivery has changed or paused resulting in a loss of income or restrictions on spending. Many of these organisations have expressed some fear for what this means for the future as they are required to start using their already limited reserves. In many cases, this has also meant losing staff to either redundancies or furlough schemes, affecting their ability to continue to operate even adapted provision at this time.

For the reasons articulated above, one big impact on SfD organisations is losing track of participants. Organisations involved in Laureus' MCL initiative have experienced drops in engagement and challenges in communicating with participants who have no access to media or technology. Other SfD organisation have noted a drop in the engagement of female participants in comparison to their male counterparts. They have speculated that this could be due to self-esteem (reluctance to exercise whilst using video/zoom), home pressures, and/or a loss of the social side of sport that may have initially driven them to participate.

Despite these challenges, the positive creativity and flexibility of many SfD organisations has undoubtedly shown the strength and commitment of the sector. Laureus have mapped how our partners around the world, including the UK, have been affected by the pandemic and currently see the following;

- Adapted tools for children, young people, parents and coaches to use at home, to ensure they continue to remain physically active and don't suffer too many setbacks in the development that started on sports fields and courts;
- The delivery of online sessions and online engagement with groups or individuals;
- Ventures into new areas such as e-sports to test potential for remaining connected with participants and delivering tried curriculums;
- Rescheduling of activities for later in the year with the hope of normal delivery, preparations for reengaging with children and young people;
- A renewed focus on internal processes, such as developing strategies and building capacities in their team, preparing for the "new normality" and delivery with social distancing.

Laureus responses to immediate challenges

Laureus Sport for Good have been required to respond quickly to support our grantees and the wider SfD sector. The response can be outlined as follows;

- **Assessing** how the pandemic is affecting our partners, programmes and participants. Our first step was to reach out to our partners and hear from them the challenges they are facing, how they were planning to address them, and how might Laureus provide support. Laureus Programmes and Grants Managers communicate regularly with grantees, updating information as the situation evolves.
- **Connecting** organisations across the world to share experiences, tools and mechanisms for coping with challenges. Having access to the global sector, Laureus see many SfD organisations reacting in similar ways, pausing activities, finding ways

to retain staff and volunteers, adapting methodologies, etc. Many also shared the same concerns about what would happen to the vulnerable children and young people who participated in our programmes. To encourage cooperation and minimize isolation, Laureus responded twofold;

- Hosting regular 'Online Sharing Communities'. These were facilitated virtual forums offered across time zone groups (Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), Asia, and Americas), which enabled any SfD organisation to share their concerns and coping strategies.
 - Sharing free tools and resources. Laureus created a page on our website to facilitate access to useful tools and resources developed by our partners and extended networks. This included information on online safeguarding, wellbeing on working from home, funding opportunities, and adaptive methodologies.
- **Providing tailored support** to our grantees depending on their reality. This has meant adjusting grant budgets, work plans, target participation numbers and monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks. Laureus take decisions in a bespoke manner whilst maintaining the spirit of the programmes and ensuring compliance and adherence to Laureus recommendations.
 - **Launching a Response Fund** in collaboration with other major actors in SfD in a bid to unite the global sporting community's efforts to protect vulnerable children and young people in the aftermath of Covid-19. The aim of the Fund is to ensure that SfD programmes can continue in times of crisis and that vital new channels to young people can be created to ensure that they get the support they need both now and when we begin to emerge from this pandemic.

Overall Laureus' response has been met with positive feedback from our partners, other SfD organisations and our extended network.

DCMS and other government responses

Input from the SfD community in the UK on whether the response from government departments and other arms-length bodies has been effective has been mostly positive.

The government's furlough scheme has been extremely useful in ensuring that organisations can remain open despite limiting the effectiveness of organisations in the interim. In many instances this scheme has enabled SfD organisations to keep skilled employees and avoid disastrous financial challenges. However, one unfortunate provision within the furlough scheme states that furloughed staff can volunteer but not at their place of work. In the SfD sector, like other charitable organisations, this is a challenging concept for devoted staff whose organisations are set up to receive volunteers to maintain engagement.

The DCMS website and guidelines produced by DCMS such as '*Coronavirus (Covid-19): guidance on the phased return of sport and recreation*' has been useful in providing some clarity to the sports and recreation sector, enabling SfD organisations to prepare for when physical activity can resume. The financial pledge of £750m for voluntary and social enterprise organisations to respond to Covid will also go some way in enabling organisations to continue delivery when that time comes.

Feedback from some organisations in the Laureus portfolio also mentioned that Covid-19 highlighted the socio-economic divide within the sport and recreation sector. Many of the first sports to return according to government guidelines are not necessarily accessible to those

from low-income or no-income backgrounds (e.g. tennis, golf). Not only is the rent of facilities not affordable, in many cases, outdoor facilities were not available in those community spaces or lockdown prevented movement to the areas where they existed. In some cases, local councils were slow to respond to government guidelines which further widened the gap. For example, in some communities outdoor basketball courts were reopened but hoops were not reinstalled.

The overwhelming response from our MCL organisations in Haringey, Hounslow and Barking, was that local authorities and voluntary sector organisations have responded the most effectively. Local organisations and individuals were better engaging in initiatives organized by local groups and government bodies with whom they were more familiar and who were more familiar with their communities and needs. Collation of information on funding, training and resources was deemed most helpful, particularly when updated and circulated regularly.

Laureus have also found Sport England's response to the pandemic very effective. Like DCMS, the immediate creation of a space on their website to outline key messages was useful. The speedy decision to allow a three-month leeway in all grants provided much needed security within which Sfd organisations could catalogue and mitigate their own challenges. Finally, the recent announcement of a specific Innovation Fund committed to finding solutions to future challenges is encouraging and well met.

Long-term impact

In speculating on the future of Sfd post-Covid-19, Laureus see that Sfd can be part of the solution. It is important that SFD organisations are there to support and help children and young people through the transition into the new reality. Covid-19 has not changed the underlying reality, but it has exacerbated many issues making them even bigger for when we emerge from confinement.

The medium-term challenges for Sfd organisation will see fewer staff and higher costs associated with financial losses and running modified delivery. This comes with a need to train staff to accommodate changes (specifically in online safeguarding, new provision and social distancing regulations). MCL Coalition members in Barking and Haringey fear they might be asked to do more outside their expertise to support those most affected or because there may be fewer community grassroots organisations on the other side.

Despite these challenges, there are many opportunities for the sector in the long-term. Laureus see an increased understanding and awareness of organisational capacities in our grantees and a reprioritising of these areas going forward, specifically in relation to reserves policies and sustainability planning. Another cross-cutting theme is online/digital safeguarding. Pre-Covid there has been a lack of online protection but changed delivery means increased risk of exposure. The principles of protecting kids and young people are the same, but the risks in the virtual space are different from those they normally manage, so policies are being amended.

There is also lots of creativity and learnings that can be brought forward. Laureus see how Sfd organisations have reacted in their mission to maintain engagement with participants which can be adopted in future delivery. Examples from Laureus partners include;

- **The Change Foundation, UK:** Partnering with a gaming partner who donated 50 PlayStations. They are now testing E-sports to engage with participants in home isolation and potentially a new audience.

- **Fight for Peace, UK:** Providing online courses for employability, keeping in close contact with students on job training courses via phone and WhatsApp, delivering online boxing sessions at least 3 times per week.
- **School of Hard Knocks, UK:** have developed and adapted a curriculum to be used at home
- **The Wave Project, UK:** developed an activity pack to keep young people engaged with support to parents for home delivery.

The categorization of exercise as essential means that there is an opportunity for the entire sport sector in the UK to capitalise on the government's acknowledgement of the importance of physical activity. SfD programmes like the ones Laureus support have long known the benefits of sport in transforming lives and hope to share knowledge as we emerge from the pandemic.

Support required to combat future challenges

Support for the SfD sector will be critical to enable organisations to continue supporting children and young people, now living with increased vulnerabilities, as well as their families and communities.

Support required will be;

1. Funding:

New funding will be essential for SfD organisations to enable them to survive the immediate challenges and prepare for when restrictions are lifted. It is important that this funding includes core funding provisions, and that existing funds allow for adaptive measures and budget flexibility.

2. Resources, Data and Evidence:

The provision of advisory and technical support to complement financial support is also crucial. This should be to help develop new ways of engaging, while at the core still basing interventions on sport and its potential, as well as in organisational capacity development, specifically in governance, enacting reserves policies and online safeguarding.

There is also a need to understand the new reality of the sector. Where are the hard to reach people? What are community priorities? What have other organisations in our sector around the world done to combat covid-19 related challenges that we might learn from?

3. Spaces to come together:

Covid-19 is a sector wide and global challenge. Certain parts of the world are already evidencing the effectiveness of adaptive methodologies and innovative solutions. Facilitating peer learning, such as the online global, regional and national forums delivered by Laureus, is a valuable space for organisations to learn from others and feel less isolated in addressing their challenges.

With the support of DCMS and other government departments, organisations such as Laureus can play a critical role in providing and coordinating these different lines of support to the sector in the UK and globally. Laureus have an ability to coordinate the sharing of knowledge and best practice from around the world. Through our network, we can identify the sector's needs and challenges, recognize the opportunities, and use our convening power and platforms to support and endorse these.

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