



OUR

GAME PLAN

2024-2026

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# FOREWORD FROM OUR CO-FOUNDERS

We are proud to introduce our new strategy. This has been created in consultation with our team and external stakeholders, making it the most collaborative one yet. It is also exciting to be launching it during our 10th anniversary year.

**For the next three years we have set five strategic priorities to guide our work. Delivering on these priorities means we will have:**

- Developed and scaled up a world-class model for young people, nationally and globally.
- Transformed the lives of tens of thousands of young people.
- Helped shape the way Bristol and its institutions work in some communities.
- Advocated for a change in outdated policies that harm those we work with.
- Ensured Empire is fit for today's fight and those in the future.

Our vision is driven by need. Three young people we worked with during our last strategy period have been killed by knife crime. This is not good enough. Violence is complex and often driven by disadvantage and inequality. Bristol (and the UK) must do better if we want to see real change.

We must offer young people a chance to engage with and feel part of our cities. This will not be achieved by perpetuating the status quo or relying on institutions alone to make changes. Organisations like us, working in the heart of communities, must play a bigger part, challenge policy makers and get our voices heard.

We know our communities better than most, so let's help shape them.

We have grown significantly in the last few years. This growth has occurred through collaboration and looking far and wide for best practice. Through our participation in the US-based Brookings Institute and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 Working Group, Empire Fighting Chance has become part of a global network.

This has led to visits and partnerships with organisations such as Peace in our Cities, Medellín Resiliente in Colombia and REACH for Safer Communities in Edmonton in Canada. We have collaborated with world leaders in their field, which has made a substantive difference to our work and shaped our plans for the future.

All that we do is based on our work on the ground with young people. We must ensure that what we do in Bristol and across Wales is the best it can be, always. Every young person will be given a chance to fulfil their own unique potential.

At Empire Fighting Chance we know we transform and save lives on a daily basis. We need the continued support of funders, companies and individuals to continue to do this.

Young people's lives depend on us all working together.

Martin Bisp - CEO

Jamie Sanigar - COO



# WHO WE ARE

## Our mission

We use the power of boxing to fight the destructive impact of inequality on young lives. We have developed a powerful way of working that combines boxing and psychology to give young people a fighting chance to realise their full potential and live safe, healthy, happy lives.

## WHAT WE DO

**We achieve our mission in three ways:**

- **Deliver:** we design and deliver programmes for young people that combine non-contact boxing with psychologically informed support.
- **Train:** we share our work with others so that they can deliver it in their local communities.
- **Fight:** we take what we learn from our work to inspire systemic changes that improve young lives.

## OUR BELIEFS

**We live by a set of beliefs that represent the guiding principles for how we approach everything and interact with everyone. Our eight beliefs are:**

- We believe we're in a fight against injustice.
- We believe safety and trust make the difference.
- We believe everyone has their own strength and potential.
- We believe in prioritising young people's interests above all else.
- We believe in 'community' and doing right by each other.
- We believe in the hustle: doing whatever it takes to win our fight.
- We believe we should never stop trying to strengthen our work.
- We believe there has to be more working-class leadership at the table.

## The impact we work towards

Our work is designed to give young people resources to transform their lives. These include self-regulation to manage emotions and behaviour, a support network and a positive outlook for the future. Young people use these to improve their mental health, reduce destructive behaviour, engage with education and progress into employment. To achieve a wider impact, we inspire changes in Bristol and beyond that improve young people's lives.

# THE EMPIRE WAY

There are six special ingredients that are fundamental to our work being effective. Together, these combine to form a proven and scalable model for transforming young lives.



## IN AND OF THE COMMUNITY

- Born and bred in the community
- Physical presence in the community
- Leadership and staff representative of the community

## AUTHENTIC AND CREDIBLE BOXING

- High-quality boxing training to be attractive to young people
- Mental and physical health benefits of boxing
- Use of boxing to build trust and share psychology

## PSYCHOLOGICALLY INFORMED

- Relationship of trust with a young person
- Physically and emotionally safe space
- Use of relevant and evidence-based psychology

## IN THEIR CORNER

- Unconditional support for young people
- Positive image of young people
- Platforms for youth leadership within and beyond Empire

## CONNECTIONS AND INTELLIGENCE

- Wide range of routes into and out of Empire
- Intelligence from our work and streets to drive continuous improvement
- Strong relationships with families of young people

## ENTREPRENEURIAL AND ADAPTABLE

- Calculated risks to overcome complex issues
- Sources of income that give us flexibility to do work we believe in
- Responsive to meet the changing needs of young people



# OUR FIVE PRIORITIES

We have identified five priorities to guide Empire Fighting Chance over the next three years. For each priority, we have devised a series of key actions that we will take.

## PRIORITY 1:

# ESTABLISH A GLOBAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE IN BRISTOL

Everything we do will start with our work in Easton. From our boxing gym in the heart of our community, we'll continue to innovate, learn by doing, compile evidence of what works, and share all of this with others who are fighting the same fight. We aim to develop approaches that are recognised around the world for their power to make significant and lasting improvements to young people's lives.

### We will:

- **Make continuous improvements, rooted in the Empire Way:** We'll work relentlessly to make big and small changes to our work to increase our impact on young people. We'll do that while constantly staying true to who we are and what we know works.
- **Become more data driven:** We'll push boundaries to strengthen the intelligence we gather from the streets, young people, our delivery, experts and academics. We will use that to learn, drive improvement and prove that what we do works.
- **Develop all our current programmes to their full potential:** We'll work towards getting all four of our programmes operating at the right scale, with maximum impact, and to a standard where we're confident about sharing them with other organisations.
- **Reach optimal capacity:** We'll increase the number of young people we support in Bristol, to a level that we believe is optimum for our culture, quality of work, place in the community and financial sustainability.
- **Transform our boxing gym:** We'll develop our gym to provide young people and the Empire team with the environment they need to do great work and to enable us to properly showcase and share our work with partners from around the world.



## PRIORITY 2:

# STEP UP FOR OUR COMMUNITY

We will take on greater responsibility in our local community and other working class communities across Bristol. We'll invest in and collaborate and share with these communities to collectively move forward. By doing so, we'll help to create places where their young people have a better chance of realising their full potential.

### We will:

- **Become more connected:** We will contribute more to local strategies and partnerships, and we'll create a more comprehensive range of referral relationships to help young people access broader, more joined-up support.
- **Share our knowledge with others in young people's lives:** We'll develop a range of ways to share our expertise with parents and carers, schools and others who are important in young people lives, to make us all more effective.
- **Share our space with others who can help:** We'll create space within our new building for other local organisations that can provide additional support to the young people we work with and their families.
- **Sharpen our focus on those who need us most:** We'll increase the work we do to engage with and support young people who are outside mainstream services and without advocates in their corner, especially those affected by crime and violence.
- **Increase opportunities for talent in our communities:** We'll continue to prioritise jobs at Empire for people from Bristol's working-class communities and expand our network of employers who can offer young people opportunities. We will also promote our belief in the importance of increasing working-class leadership in our sector to our partners across the city.



# 2

## PRIORITY 3:

# SHARE OUR WORK NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

We will step up our efforts to reach more young people. We'll do that by growing a movement of organisations using our work in their communities, rather than growing Empire itself. We'll expand our network of trained partners who are delivering our approach in England and Wales and consider working in Northern Ireland and Scotland. And we'll use the growing interest in our work from across the world to explore how best to share our work with partners in other countries.

### We will:

- **Develop our network of trained boxing clubs:** We'll continue to grow the number of boxing clubs we have trained, strengthen our package of support, differentiate our offer to clubs of different shapes and sizes, and deepen relationships with those clubs that we think we can make the most impact with.
- **Strengthen our approach in South Wales:** We'll improve how we work in South Wales to increase our impact in the region. We will collaborate more extensively, including with local boxing clubs. We'll make our work in South Wales self-sustaining so that we can continue to make a difference to young people's lives in the future.
- **Explore new ways to reach young people:** We'll explore the potential to scale up our work through different models and organisations. We will continue to pilot our model in North Wales, which includes working alongside Wrexham Youth Justice to deliver to young people as an alternative to a custodial sentence.
- **Share more Empire programmes:** When Box Juniors, Box Therapy and Box Careers are running to their full potential, we will document and share them with our network of trained clubs and other organisations that can use them to support young people in their communities.
- **Pilot working internationally:** We'll continue to work with global supporters to explore how best we can share our model overseas. We will develop an approach that works for partners overseas as well as for our work in the UK. And we'll pilot that approach in a small number of countries.

# 3

## PRIORITY 4:

# STAND UP FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE

We will find our voice and become a more outspoken organisation. We will seek out opportunities to stand up for our Beliefs, and aim to influence audiences in Bristol, the UK and internationally on issues that affect young people and our ability to support them.

### We will:

- **Grow our influence:** We'll significantly increase our profile at national and global level and strengthen our credibility by becoming a leading voice on youth violence and other issues experienced by young people from working-class communities. We'll use our increased influence to achieve changes that benefit young people and our community and to scale up our model and promote our partners.
- **Stand up for young people:** We'll be in young people's corner to fight the injustice that they face. We will consistently portray young people as individuals with strength and potential. And we'll provide platforms for them to share their stories and ideas to influence the world around them.
- **Stand up for our community:** We'll raise awareness of the issues that affect young people in working-class communities in Bristol and beyond, and we will call for the changes that we think are needed to improve their lives.
- **Stand up for our model:** We'll advocate for our approach to be used across more locations in the UK and globally. We will promote why it's relevant for young people from working-class communities, and we'll call out the issues that limit our work and that of others.
- **Stand with our partners:** We'll promote the organisations that are delivering our work, and we'll advocate for the potential of boxing clubs and other grassroots organisations led by working-class community leaders to deliver social change.



## PRIORITY 5:

### GET FIT FOR THE FIGHT

# 5

We will strengthen our organisation on several fronts so that we're equipped to do the best job we can for young people in realising this strategy. Because the change we want won't happen overnight, we will build an organisation for the long haul. We'll make these changes with a constant commitment to retaining what makes us Empire Fighting Chance.

#### We will:

- **Increase young people's power:** We'll provide more opportunities for young people to shape and lead our work. We will develop a richer picture of young people's experience at Empire and use this to make improvements to our work. And we'll employ more of our young alumni and create a youth leadership programme for young people to take our knowledge into their streets, schools and homes.
- **Grow income sustainably:** We'll grow our income in a way that we can maintain in the longer term. We will diversify our income by securing grants from multiple sources, increasing the income that we earn from schools, growing our income from individuals, companies and events and exploring new income-generating ventures.
- **Invest in the Empire Team:** We'll increase training for our people on issues that specifically affect the young people we work with. We will back high performers and invest in areas that are vital for our future, including advocacy, data analysis, collaboration and working internationally. We'll ensure that we continue to have a young, diverse delivery team with lived experience of the issues young people face. And we'll continue to take care of our team by ensuring that Empire is a place where people can develop and feel supported and recognised.
- **Sharing leadership:** We'll develop leadership roles and responsibilities across Empire, help people to thrive in those roles, and share strategic and operational leadership with a stronger Senior Management Team.

## AFTERWORD FROM OUR CHAIR

The Board of Trustees is proud of and excited by this strategy and the direction of travel it sets out. Empire has come a (very) long way in the decade since it was founded. It has, for sure, grown in size, stature, profile and influence. But the more important growth has been in our impact and a maturing sense of our mission.

Most charities in Empire's position would now seek to grow and scale up their services in ways that mean the organisation gets bigger, and with it more complicated to run and expensive to resource. This strategy describes something different and much more exciting - a way of increasing our impact that focuses on the nature and quality of our work and not just the volume of it.

After a decade of refining our direct work with young people, and building our credibility in this field with local communities and partners, our concern and attention now turn to the root causes of violence, mental ill health and social and economic exclusion among young people. Developing preventative approaches that reduce the need for services, including those

offered by Empire, means going beyond the treatment of symptoms - e.g. challenging behaviour, depression, unemployment - and towards the inequities and injustices that disproportionately create these in the lives of the young people we work with.

It's been said that quality is the best business plan, and Empire's quality lives in the interactions and relationships between staff, volunteers and young people; and in the culture of continuous improvement that Martin and Jamie have helped nurture down the years. It's our quality that has got us this far, and it's our quality that means we are a credible voice on the issues, a trusted member of the community locally, and an effective partner to statutory services.

Empire stands apart - and always has - because it thinks and acts differently. This strategy continues that tradition. But to get it off the page and make it real, we are going to need the continued integrity, energy and commitment of our staff, as well as the support and challenge of our partners.

**Simon Newitt - Chair of Trustees**



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