



A PIONEER CITY WALKS THE TALK

SINCE 2005, THE BRITISH CITY OF LIVERPOOL HAS BROUGHT TOGETHER ITS SPORT AND HEALTH-RELATED INITIATIVES UNDER A SINGLE PROGRAMME ENTITLED “LIVERPOOL ACTIVE CITY”, PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, HEALTHY LIFESTYLES AND ACTIVE TRANSPORT. TODAY, THE CITY IS SHARING ITS EXPERIENCE AS PART OF THE GLOBAL ACTIVE CITY PROJECT, SUPPORTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC) SINCE 2014

ILLUSTRATED BY CELINA LUCEY

“Sedentary lifestyle and poor nutrition are known to be among the main drivers of an ever-increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in all our societies today. Regular physical activity and sport can help prevent the appearance and impact of such chronic diseases and result in improved physical and mental wellbeing. The Global Active City project, supported by the IOC, looks at empowering city leaders and practitioners with a concrete framework to enhance their citizens’ accessibility to regular physical activity and to enable them to adopt healthier lifestyle choices.”

Richard Budgett, IOC Medical and Scientific Director

At the turn of the century, several trends emerged that alarmed the authorities in the City of Liverpool. Located in the metropolitan county of Merseyside in the north-west of England, the city had suffered the full-blown impacts of the industrial decline of the 1970s and was struggling to cope with a tense socioeconomic climate (high unemployment and increased levels of antisocial behaviour).

For example, fewer than one person in five exercised for at least 30 minutes three times a week; what is more, levels of physical activity between neighbourhoods varied greatly. Meanwhile, obesity-related conditions led to more than 130,000 employee sick days in companies and offices, while obesity was estimated to cost the local health service GBP 329 million in 2015. As a consequence, the city had one of the highest mortality rates in the country, while life expectancy was among the lowest.

Yet, within the city, several initiatives had been launched as part of efforts to counter these trends and Liverpool was also a member of the World Health Organisation’s Healthy Cities Network. However, some of these measures were implemented in isolation or failed to reach those most in need.

Liverpool, known all over the world for its two Premier League football clubs (Everton and Liverpool) and as the hometown of The Beatles, decided to take action to reverse these trends.

The City Council began by appointing John Marsden as Head of Liverpool Active City with a mandate to

coordinate all existing sport and health initiatives under a single umbrella for all inhabitants of the city to encourage increased participation in sport and to improve health.

Officially launched in May 2005 by the city’s Sports & Outdoor Recreation Services and the Public Health Department, the Liverpool Active City strategy and programme had four main objectives: improve the reputation and perception of Liverpool as an active city; promote coordination of existing services; provide access to sport for all; and ensure that support for physical activity be factored into urban planning.

In order to coordinate the efforts of all stakeholders, the Liverpool Sport & Physical Activity Alliance was established in 2006 with the mandate to develop and deliver the programme. Following the success of several local projects, in 2014 the city launched its new strategy for 2014-2021 to build on successes and strengthen these objectives. Now Liverpool’s new target is to become the most active city in England by 2021.

The programme is bearing fruit and whereas once the city’s ambition was not to attract high-profile international sporting events, thinking has evolved. For example, Liverpool will organise the 2019 Netball World Cup and is also bidding to host the Commonwealth Games either in 2022 or 2026. These are examples of how inspiring the grassroots demographic to participate in sports can create enthusiasm to get involved and become a spectator, a volunteer or an organiser. ➤

Left
Liverpool is one of the first cities to have developed, formalised and implemented a strategy for promoting healthy and active lifestyles

Participation benefits of the Liverpool model since 2005*

50%

of adults complete at least one 30-minute weekly physical activity, an increase of **19%**

56,000

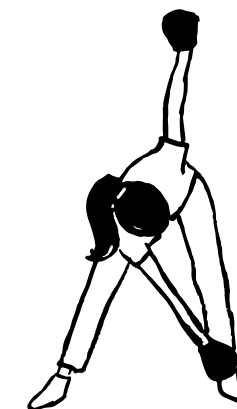
people now use the 12 Lifestyle Centres (located in the most deprived communities in the city), an increase of **43%**

91%

of children now participate in regular sport and physical activity in schools, an increase of **35%**

89%

of children are able to swim at least 25 metres by the age of 11, an increase of **49%**



* LIVERPOOL, JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY, SPORTS & OUTDOOR RECREATION DEPARTMENT OF LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL, SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LIVERPOOL LTD ORGANISATION



Olympic Review met with John Marsden, the driving force behind Liverpool Active City. A passionate advocate for this ambitious programme, he describes his experience and shares advice with cities hoping to emulate the success of Liverpool using the Active City model. The former Senior Sport Manager at Liverpool City Council, he went on to work full-time for the Liverpool Active City programme and since 2008 has been Head of Public Health Delivery. Today, the City of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) have seconded him to the Global Active City project.

Q. What was the triggering factor for Liverpool to create and implement the Liverpool Active City programme?

A. In 2005, I met with the Council Leader and, armed with data from research originally carried out by LJMU about health and sports participation, was able to paint a realistic picture of the situation in the city. The Council Leader was especially concerned by the statistics that showed low levels of sports activity by adults, and particularly by those indicating low sports participation by children. The time had come to launch a concerted action which could both improve the general state of health among the population and at the same time help to eradicate antisocial behaviour by strengthening social cohesion. Our vision was clear and simple: increase participation in physical and sporting activities.

Q. How did you manage to bring all stakeholders together to create an alliance?

A. We started by listening to all parties to understand their needs and priorities. We sought to demonstrate the benefits of working together in a network to avoid duplication of efforts

and resources. Some organisations said “yes” immediately, others said “maybe”, while others said “no”. However, after we were able to demonstrate some early successes from our approach, “no” became “maybe” and “maybe” gradually became “yes”. Meanwhile, the creation of the Liverpool Sport & Physical Activity Alliance in 2006 was a turning point. All the project stakeholders (City Council, sport, health, academic institutions and recreational authorities) came together in an alliance united by a common vision. This is our steering committee and decision-making body. Not only does it set strategic directions, but it also analyses the data from the field.

Q. What in your opinion is the best way to encourage greater physical activity?

A. You have to start by removing the barriers to activity (costs, timing, facilities, childcare, etc.). Then there are the psychological barriers to overcome. Entering a fitness club for the first time can be a daunting experience. This is the reason we have created personalised programmes, group activities and affordable rates within a dozen Lifestyle Centres throughout

Above

Between 2005 and 2014, participation in sport by people living in Liverpool aged 16 and older increased by 6.8 per cent



**‘OUR VISION WAS CLEAR AND SIMPLE: INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL AND SPORTING ACTIVITIES’
JOHN MARSDEN**

the city. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, sporting activity has to be fun for participants. This is crucial if we want people to continue practising sport in the long term. We also try to communicate using the best channels and our network of activators in different neighbourhoods. Today, almost 20 role models – not football stars but individuals who have discovered the benefits of sport – motivate their peers to follow their example.

Q. How did your programme become a beacon for the Global Active City project?

A. One day, I received a call from Wolfgang Baumann, the Secretary General of The Association For International Sport for All (TAFISA). At first, I thought it was a friend playing a prank on me; however, it quickly became apparent that it was genuine. This was followed up by an email and a visit to Liverpool and very quickly led to fruitful collaboration and the design of the Triple AC (Active Cities, Active Communities, Active Citizens). Subsequently I met with Evaleo to assess what we had implemented. Thanks to IOC help and support, the three entities worked together to develop an ISO-compatible framework for Global Active City.

Q. What advice would you give to a city wishing to follow in your footsteps?

A. It is crucial to have a clear vision and strategy and to stick to them at all times. But that alone is not enough.

Cities need to be able to rely on a network of partners that are committed to the same objectives. Not only does this require the establishment of a decision-making body, but it also requires an implementing body that can report back on results from the field. Inhabitants all need to enjoy sport. This is the only way that they will continue. All cities encounter challenges at one time or another, but the key is to persevere and keep in mind the vision.

Q. What is your role in the Global Active City project?

A. My role is, above all, to listen to the cities’ needs, analyse their situations and priorities, but also to seek to understand the structures in place and behaviour in the pilot cities or cities that are interested in the project. With the support of a whole team of experts, we try to bring to them the tools necessary to become active cities. Concretely, we undertake a diagnosis and then produce recommendations. Over the next few months we then provide cities with training to help them to implement their projects. The model is very flexible and can be adapted to any city regardless of the context and situation.

Q. What are the next steps?

A. The ISO-compatible standards, as well as user guidelines intended to provide cities with information about the requirements necessary to achieve certification, will be published in autumn 2017 by the Global Active City team. We are also planning to organise advocacy sessions to promote the concept more widely and encourage cities to develop a vision and strategy, and above all to implement it so that it doesn’t just end up as a pretty document gathering dust on a shelf.

For more information, contact jmarsden@active-cities.org or info@active-cities.org

PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES



Learn to Swim

In 2006, 40 per cent of primary school leavers in Liverpool were unable to swim at least 25 metres. In order to improve this situation, that same year, the Local Education Authority created two positions to ensure a centralised school swimming programme. Today, 89 per cent of children in Liverpool leave primary school able to swim 25 metres or more.



Active Play

Active Play began in 2010 in reaction to information from schools revealing low levels of physical activity and fitness, alongside high levels of sedentary behaviour and obesity in school children. Liverpool Active City and Liverpool John Moores University devised a six-week educational programme intended to increase children’s physical activity levels.



Active Blues

Active Blues is a community-focused project that enables inactive men aged 35-50 to become physically active at least once a week through sport. Led by Everton Football Club, it reaches men in some of the most deprived wards in England. It has engaged over 1,000 inactive men with 200 regularly participating in physical activity each week.



Us Girls

Us Girls provides girls and women (aged 16-25) in some of England’s most disadvantaged areas with fitness and sports opportunities in their local communities. In addition, in Liverpool, a programme offers female pupils exhibiting social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties individual educational packages tailored to their specific needs.