

Summary Report of Mission Through Sport

Gloucestershire, 2018/19



Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Ephesians 3:20-21

Contents:

1. Title Page
2. Introduction
3. The power of sport: Story of one girls journey of faith
4. Playing the long game: Case Study of Nailsworth
5. Schools Models
 - Pulse Games
 - Active RE
6. Active Prayer Spaces
 - Schools Models Conclusions
7. Community Models
 - Wild and Fit
 - Community Sport Sessions
8. Armoury Gym
 - Community Models Conclusions
9. Church Models
 - Sports Leadership
 - Residential
10. Non- Residential Sports Camps
 - Church Models Conclusions
11. Towards Worshipping Communities
 - Sports Ministry Training
 - Sustainability in Sports Ministry
12. Key Learning from this year in Sports Ministry
 - Key Questions moving forwards

Introduction:

In recent decades the Christian faith, and by extension the Church, has become increasingly alien to the majority of people in the UK. We know that if we are to reach beyond our existing Church communities, we need to inhabit a culture and means of community-building that is more familiar to the wider population. The prominent position that sport has within wider society is almost unanimously recognised, providing a proven means of community building in local contexts across the country. Within Gloucestershire local churches of all denominations and the Anglican Church at a Diocesan level is committed to engaging with the language and activity of sport as an opportunity for people to encounter Jesus. There is substantial evidence that the Church nationally is in long term decline, approximately 1% per year reduction in attendance. This statistic is also reflected within Gloucestershire. The message and truth of the gospel remains unchanging but the way we explore this message with people must adapt to the context. For the purpose of this report 'sport' should be understood by its broadest definition including games, play, physical recreation, health, fitness and adventurous activities.

This report will summarise and offer evaluation of the mission through sport that has happened across Gloucestershire during the academic year 2018-19. This activity has taken place in a wide range of locations each offering different opportunities and challenges. The aim has been to establish principles and ways of working that may be broadly replicable across areas, whilst retaining the ability to be adaptable to specific contexts. The long term dream for sports ministry in Gloucestershire is that this activity may provide a platform for new worshipping communities to emerge. Therefore activities are not understood as isolated initiatives but rather as part of a wider strategy that seeks to make and grow disciples for the Glory of God. The place for this to happen is within the context of church family, however this may look different for people who encounter Jesus but find traditional forms of church unfamiliar.

The Power of Sport: Story of one girl's journey of faith

Have you ever been involved in something for a long time, yet not known your place? Well this is the story of a young girl and her journey through life, navigating the various challenges that she encountered. Personal faith is something that has grown and developed in her over time and yet the traditional church she was connected to often felt largely alien to her and difficult to relate with.

Work in North Gloucester, involving partnership with four local churches across two denominations, has enabled a Sports Minister to build contact and develop positive relationships with a large number of children and young people from the local area. This has been through presenting opportunities for engagement using sport. One example of this was a pop-up football session that was took place one rainy Saturday morning in November 2017. The aims were to begin building contact with young people from the estate who previously had no connection with the church and to facilitate an **environment that allowed young people to explore faith and discover**



Jesus. Over time the group grew from just one individual coming along to a solid 10-12 each week. One particularly committed member of the group was a young girl who is now 15 years old. She enjoyed playing football but remained quiet during most of the sessions including the half time team talks where there was a chance to share more intentionally about faith and life. Initially she had been invited to the session by the local vicar who knew her family. However she had never felt fully able to express herself naturally whilst in church and had largely withdrawn from this. **However her love of football was clear to see and gradually over time the embers of faith in her began to ignite as she became increasingly interested in the character and nature of Jesus.**

As the relationship grew she began to serve as a young leader on Sports Holiday Clubs that would happen during school holidays. Working with children alongside local church volunteers and the Sports Minister allowed her faith to develop as she helped to lead various activities with the children who were attending the camp. She was willing to share with the children who attended each day both the struggles and encouragements in her own journey of exploring faith.

In serving regularly as a young leader her faith continued to grow. She attended a five day residential camp during the summer and flourished amongst other teenagers who were all at different points in their own faith journeys. During the camp there was a willingness to explore faith together as part of a program that was aimed at allowing the camp to be exciting, authentic, and relevant for all those who attended.

By the power of the Holy Spirit through ongoing and intentional investment in the relationship as well as specific 'next step' invitations, her faith has grown to the point where she is passionate about sharing openly with her friends. Her character has become a source of authenticity and positivity amongst her peers in situations where young people may still be closed off to the good news. What initially began through a regular kick around in a local park has developed, by God's grace, into an ongoing discipling relationship where she is more connected to the church and excited about going on an adventure with Jesus. She still finds aspects of church and faith confusing and frustrating but understands this is absolutely fine because she doesn't need to have it all worked out completely. This story is by no means finished. **Prayer for the future must be that God will continue to journey with her as she pursues a life marked by the new identity she has received as a daughter of God.** The beginning has been massively encouraging. Let's pray that the next stage would leave us more inspired as God is glorified through the life of this young person.

Playing the Long Game: a Case Study of Nailsworth

PSALMS, in partnership with two local churches, have been working in Nailsworth since 2009. In this time two strategic Sports Ministers have worked closely with the local primary school and churches and to connect with children, young people and their families in the Nailsworth area through sport. **The fruit of this has been children and young people having opportunities to explore and discover faith who would not normally connect with the church.** The work has evolved over time but has included detached project work, provision of youth activities, community sports sessions, after school clubs, school based programmes, non-traditional worship services, holiday clubs, residential opportunities and more. Throughout all of this there has been high value placed upon personal relationships and investment in people.



Since 2015 there has been a conscious effort to focus energies on serving the local primary school. There is no secondary school in Nailsworth which means young people head off in different directions when they reach secondary school age. The result of this means that unless there is already a significant relationship that has formed between the local church and the child and their family before this milestone, it may be difficult to engage with them as they grow older. Therefore the approach has been to deliberately journey with children in each year group of primary school so that this may continue once they head to secondary school.

This approach has been successful. Young people now in year 9 still come to the primary school site (the main facility in Nailsworth capable of hosting physical activity) to play sport, engage in faith and be part of a Christian community. Instead of losing connection with young people as they go on to secondary school there has been the opportunity to remain connected with PSALMS and the local church through a sustained investment in relationships. PSALMS and the local church recognised they would not be able to work in all the secondary schools surrounding Nailsworth. Instead through the language and activity of sport, games and play, long standing relationships have been forged which have given an opportunity for a community of people to grow together. Part of the beauty of these ongoing relationships is that they still find their home in the local primary school which is where contact was made initially. This intentional strategy of remaining based in a familiar setting has seen young people move from being outside the church to being part of a group orientated around discovering Jesus.



Poll with 26 year 6 pupils in July 2019 before they moved on to secondary school

Over the course of the last year (2018-19), **13 young people have remained connected on a weekly basis with groups in Nailsworth despite now going to school outside of Nailsworth.** Nine young people from Nailsworth went away on a five day Christian adventure residential with many others from around Gloucestershire. One young person at the end of the camp commented 'I came here believing God was real but not having much of a faith. I didn't let him into my life really and now I want to and know that will change.' Another young person commented that they 'never really feel loved by anyone other than family. **Listening to everyone's story I can see God loves me.**' The power of residential experience should not be underestimated but neither should the consistent long term commitment to relationships forged during primary school years and maintained during secondary school years. PSALMS in partnership with the local churches remain entirely committed to the area of Nailsworth. It will be exciting to see God continue to move and work in the lives of children, young people and their families as more people discover him and enjoy being part of the community He invites everyone to be a part of.

Schools models:

PULSE Games:

PULSE Games is a high energy school-based program for Key Stage 2 pupils that explores a key value from a Christian perspective within the context games and activity. This is delivered in partnership with local churches lasting for half a day within the school day. The programme has been tried and tested in a variety of contexts over the previous eight years and is



adapted each year to compliment whichever major sporting event is taking place. This year it was the Cricket World Cup so cricket based games were used to explore the value of trust. Across Gloucestershire 1087 pupils took part in PULSE Games events, with 84 volunteers from over 20 churches involved in helping on the day. Additionally there were seven young leaders who helped at multiple events. During the year many of these young leaders have been a part of a sports leadership group as well, aimed at helping to grow them as disciples of Jesus as well as sports leaders. **Four of these young leaders took part in PULSE Games themselves as pupils when they were in primary school**, highlighting the importance of long term investment in specific locations and the fruit that can emerge from this.

For the first time the PULSE Games were available nationally, through Scripture Union, as a resource for churches across the country to use. This marks the completion of a successful journey to develop PULSE Games into a replicable resource that can be implemented across a variety of contexts. 20 packs were downloaded with a further 16 downloads available as part of a larger pack of resources.

“What a brilliant way to cover trust and faith.”

Teacher from the Croft Primary School

- Out of 25 teachers asked **100%** of teachers would like PULSE Games in their school again and would recommend it to other schools.
- **64%** of pupils stated that they would be interested in attending future sporting activities that the church is running.
- **98%** of volunteers felt PULSE Games provided a positive foundation upon which to build future work in the area.

Active RE:

The project aims to enhance and complement the RE already taught in schools, utilising a method which engages with sport, games and physical activity. Teachers within schools where Active RE is delivered have observed an increase in levels of

“Active RE lessons are energetic, inspiring and memorable. The programme carefully interweaves key RE learning with an exciting PE twist. I would recommend this programme to any school wanting to deepen their pupils’ spirituality in an active way!”

Stephen Dean- Head at Highnam Primary School

positive engagement shown by pupils with RE as a subject. Of particular note was **the amount of knowledge the children were able to retain each week, and the way in which content covered and its delivery were fully inclusive** for those with special educational needs (SEN). Active RE has been **delivered in eight primary schools with approximately 620 pupils**. This has been facilitated by a wider range of PSALMS Sports Ministers than previously as well as one local church youth worker. As demand for this grows across Gloucestershire a wider group of people from local churches will be trained to deliver the content in their local areas. Furthermore as schools now contribute towards the overall costs of Active RE this begins to form one part of how a sustainable base for local ministry may be developed.

Active Prayer Spaces:

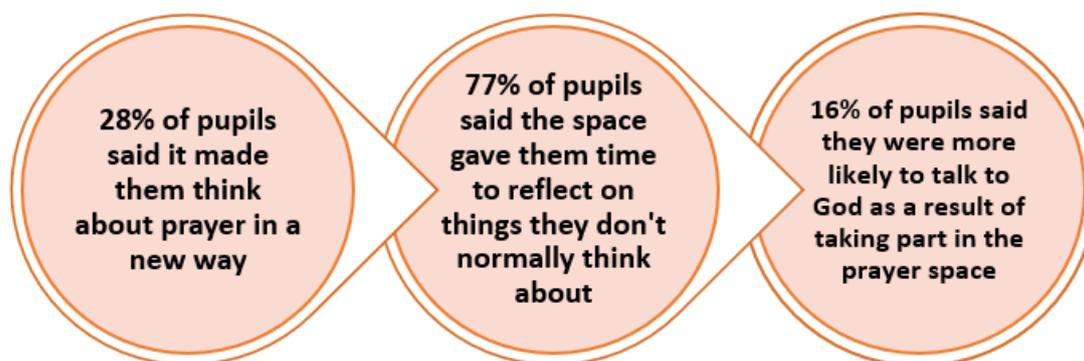
'Active Prayer Space' was trialled this year in one secondary school. Over 400 students from years 8-11 came as part of their RE lessons and were given the opportunity to develop their understanding about what prayer is, who prays, and how we can pray. There was also time to explore the various 'Active Prayer Stations' that had been set up within the room. The 12 stations covered various themes; grief, encouragement, big questions, thankfulness, the world, personal dreams, temptation and being wonderfully made.



particularly enjoyed the opportunity to reflect, shredding their mistakes, writing down big questions they have for God, the sensory nature of the room and doing hands on activities.



Feedback from the school was really positive, to the extent that PSALMS have been asked to provide an 'Active Experience Christmas Week', an 'Active Experience Easter Week' and another 'Active Prayer Space' in the summer term. Across the week ten local church volunteers were involved in facilitating the space with 63% of pupils keen to have the prayer space back again next year.



Most common BIG questions young people were asking...

Why am I alive?

Are you real (God)?

Why do people suffer?

What kind of a Father sacrifices his own Son?

Most common Qu: What happens when we die?

Why do we have so many issues with the environment?

Why is there evil in the world? (Why do people commit murder? etc)

Schools Models: Conclusion

- Relatively simple models can provide positive opportunities for children and young people within a school setting to begin exploring what they believe within the boundaries of the curriculum.
- Follow-up and longer-term strategy are important for allowing relationships formed in a schools context to develop outside of school. This was highlighted by the number of pupils who expressed a desire to explore Christianity at a deeper level.
- Positive engagement in a schools context greatly increases the likelihood that the local church will have an opportunity to build relationships further outside of school. Evidence of this can be seen later in this report.

Community Models:

Wild and Fit:

Earlier this year the Cathedral Nave hosted its very first all age, all ability, mass participation workout. The combination of health and fitness activities, alongside an opportunity to explore faith in the awe inspiring setting of the Cathedral, made it a special event for all who attended. Overwhelmingly **90% of participants who came along stated they would like the Church to run more of these activities in the future.** Encouragingly there was a pretty much even split of people who attended between those who would normally engage with church based activities and those who would not. 72% of participants were surprised that the Church were hosting this type of event. There were approximately 7000 views of the post event highlights video on social media. This feedback suggests that the overall aims of the event to engage with people who would not normally connect with traditional church activities and raise the profile of mission through sport across Gloucestershire were achieved.



Community Sport Sessions:

Faith based sports activities that take place on a regular basis within a community setting are probably the easiest form of mission through sport for local churches to engage with initially. Across Gloucestershire there were nine regular sessions happening each week working with children and young people in schools years 3 all the way up to year 13. Faith was explored intentionally in a variety of ways during these sessions. The most common way was through discussion during a half time team talk and prayer. The groups were also encouraged to help **shape the culture and values of the activity themselves** rather than simply being told the rules and expectations. Of the people asked during these sessions approximately 50% were keen to explore faith at a deeper level. In these instances there were clear next step invitations into various discipleships groups, leadership opportunities and residentials.

Armoury Gym:

The Armoury is both a community gym and a wellbeing community. It is about physical health but also seeks to create a culture which nurtures the mental, emotional and spiritual health of gym users. It does this by encouraging interaction between members and by intentionally creating time and space for conversation and community to build. The Armoury has been open since March 2019 and in that time there have been some amazing stories from the people who have come to be a part of the growing community there.



to build. The Armoury has been open since March 2019 and in that time there have been some amazing stories from the people who have come to be a part of the growing community there. **Arguably the most exciting statistic is that 12 Armoury members have attended an Alpha Course at the local church.** These are people who would not normally have engaged with the local church if not for the initial relationship being built through the Armoury fitness community.

Generally people who do not attend gyms state that a large part of their disengagement is based upon feeling intimidated and out of their depth. Often the perceived atmosphere within gyms is that they are unfriendly and scary places to be if you don't know what you are doing. Interestingly the Armoury membership is comprised of 48% male and 52% female. The industry average is approx. a 70-30 split in favour of males. Additionally **80% of members have never been to the gym before becoming members at the Armoury.** By focusing on the community aspect of the gym the Armoury has been able to engage with a group of people who would not normally engage with the health and fitness industry. This highlights the success in creating a “welcoming and friendly” environment.

The Armoury has also partnered with local churches to help grow the missional aspect of the gym. There has been a partnership with a local church ministry called King's Table to help provide free fitness classes for vulnerable adults within Cheltenham. Recently there has also been an opportunity to work with refugees and asylum seekers from around Cheltenham by providing free access and a specific gym class on a weekly basis.

Community Models: Conclusion

- The opportunity to develop a deeper level of relationship with children, young people and their families seems to be largely dependent on being able to establish a consistent point of contact.
- Within a community setting there is the opportunity to take the relationship further and begin investing in the lives of the individuals who come along. The idea of meeting people where they are at is fundamental within this.
- The best example of where relationships developed and community started to grow most effectively was in situations where there was mutual ownership of the activity.
- An average of 134 young people (secondary school aged) attend various sports based activities during the week across Gloucestershire. 43% of these young people have been involved regularly with the local church (often in partnership with PSALMS) through sports based activities since primary school. This figure is lowest (9%) in Stonehouse where work has only been established at a deeper level in the last 18 months. This figure is highest in Themeshead (70%) where the secondary schools that young people attend are more dispersed than anywhere else which has mission through sport as a key priority. This is largely due to the rural nature of the area and has led to a large focus on connection into primary school; similar to the approach in Nailsworth as detailed earlier in the report.

Church Models:

Sports Leadership:

Investing in young people as leaders is absolutely vital to long term ministry as young people discover more and more over time what it can mean to be a part of God's family. To provide opportunities where young people may learn to lead in different contexts allows the opportunity to put faith into action as well as longer term discipleship to take shape. **A year-long sports based leadership academy ran for 11 young people aged 15- 16 years old.**

The aim was to allow young people to grow in confidence as effective leaders for Christ. The group met monthly to practically explore different leadership characteristics taken from the life of Jesus and to share a meal cooked by local church members. Outside of the monthly gatherings young people each spent time with a mentor on a



monthly basis, kept a log book to aid reflection on their leadership experiences and served as young leaders at various clubs and activities throughout the year.

50% of young people on the leadership academy served weekly as a young leader at a faith based activity

70%

- Graduates who expressed that they had grown in understanding of the bible over the year

80%

- Reported they had grown in understanding about how they may use their own gifts and skills in the future

70%

- Now involved in serving and leading in faith based activity and events after finishing the academy

Interestingly around half the group would not have described themselves as particularly 'sporty' individuals. However the language and activity of sport, understood in its widest definition, proved itself to be a helpful vehicle to explore leadership from a Christian perspective. To develop this further the curriculum content should be refined so that it may become a resource that can be used to replicate the leadership academy in a variety of contexts.

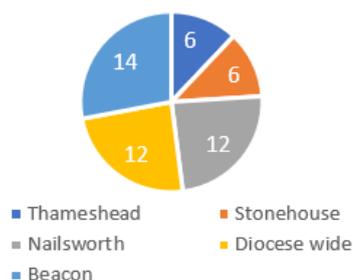
Residentials:

Two activity based residentials ran last year for children and young people across Gloucestershire. The camps combined a mixture of adventurous activities, sports, games, art, music and drama. Most significantly the camps were facilitated in such a way that meant those who attended it were provided a great opportunity to go deeper in their faith journey. This was the case whatever their specific starting point may have been. The role that the residential experience can have in an individual's journey of faith can't be overestimated and this was highlighted again this year.

'I've never really felt loved by anyone other than my family, and listening to everyone else's story I can see God loves me'

Girl (14) during youth residential

Areas where young people came from



The weekend residential for primary school aged children had 34 attend where they looked at the theme of 'God as our friend'. 67% of children who attended suggested that the weekend had given them a chance to help them think about this more. The five day summer camp for secondary young people aged 11-18 saw 49 attend. Young people aged 15 or above (17 total) came as young leaders and were given extra responsibility during the camp. **By the end of the camp 37 young people stated that the camp had helped them move forwards in exploring faith, whilst seven decided to commit their lives to Jesus for the first time.**

Follow up with all these young people after the camp is vitally important as is long term growth as a disciple of Jesus. However seven people saying yes to Jesus is hugely exciting and evidence of the successful impact of long term investment in areas. Over 90% of young people who attended the residential were involved with local expressions of sports ministry at least on a monthly basis. Additionally 12 young people (increase from 1 previous year) came who were connected to regular sports ministry across Gloucestershire from areas where two years ago there was no youth outreach of any kind.

Non- Residential Sports Camps:

Multi-day activity programs run during school holidays and include a range of sports, games and activities for the children who come along. The program is facilitated in such a way that a key theme for the day is woven through everything that takes place. This theme is explored from a Christian perspective as children get an opportunity to go deeper with exploring faith than they have previously in a schools context. They are run in partnership with local churches building upon ongoing schools work and complimenting already established work in an area.

Camp	Location	No of children	No of Vols	Young Leaders	% Increase from 17/18
Oct + Aug, West Cheltenham	Community Centre	28 + 30	1 + 2	1 + 1	176%
Oct + Feb, Nailsworth (sports based holiday club)	School	36 + 35	14 + 12	6 + 7	69%
Feb + May, Innsworth	Community Centre	28 + 21	9 + 9	3 + 3	New
Apr, Newent	School Pavilion	9	4	0	-36%
Apr, Beacon	School	16	5	3	New
May + Aug, Stonehouse (Aug sports based holiday club)	School	18 + 40	4 + 12	2 + 2	New
Aug, Coopers edge	Community Centre + School	11	6	0	New
Total (some children attended both camps in some areas)		272	78	28 (21 different)	220%

- 86% of children would like to attend future camps (83% in 2017/18).
- **62% interested in attending church off the back of the camps** (56% in 2017/18).
- 9/10 average score for overall enjoyment rating of the camp given by children who attended.
- 8/10 average score for how the camp helped children who attended to explore issues around faith.

Church Models: Conclusion

- The impact that long term investment in individuals can have should not be underestimated. **66% of a leadership academy (8/12) that ran from 09/2016 until 12/2017 are still involved with church and can be described as having an active faith.**
- Within these church based models of sports ministry there should be the opportunity to explore faith at the deepest level asking the question 'What does this mean for me?'
- Space for children and young people to encounter Jesus for themselves is crucial if they are to move beyond knowing about God towards having an active relationship with Him.

Journey towards worshipping communities

It is recognised that there is a difference between a genuinely new expression of church compared to an activity that an existing church facilitates. Admittedly the hallmarks of exactly what it means to be 'church' are debatable. In some instances the sports ministry activities that happen each week have been described by people coming along as 'my church time'. Whilst this is hugely encouraging there is also the recognition that in these examples there should be the desire to see a more mature expression of what it means to be church develop over time. This only happens through the work of God's Spirit in due time but there should also be an intentionality as we continue to move forwards in this direction. Within Gloucester Diocese there is commitment to developing fresh expressions of church which grow out of sports ministry activity. The framework for this that is currently being developed is based upon the Seven Sacred Spaces model for understanding church.

Sports Ministry Training:

Two individuals completed sports ministry based internships over the course of the year. Training included a mixture of theory and practical qualifications as well as on the ground experience. Both reported that the year had given them significant opportunity to grow and develop both personally and practically as a Sports Minister. Additionally a strong culture of continued growth, development and reflection was developed for those involved with sports ministry across Gloucestershire enabling practical application of what has been learnt in other areas.

Throughout the year, volunteer training has focused around preparation ahead of specific events, as well as ongoing work with regular volunteer teams. Additionally 12 people from across Gloucestershire came to a more general sports ministry training day that included a morning in schools for a PULSE Games event.



Sustainability in Sports Ministry:

One of the main aims last year was to develop our understanding around what sustainability means in relationship to ministry. This is with regards to both financial sustainability as well as sustainability of activity. In financial terms the sustainability has been based around an approach that seeks to generate income from a range of sources. This includes targeted grants for specific projects and individual donations towards the work. Additionally reimbursement of general expenses have been charged to schools where Active RE is delivered as well as to churches who benefit from sessional activity facilitated in their area. There has also been the aim to recover expenses incurred (excluding facility hire and staffing) when running non-residential sports camps, residentials and community sport sessions from participants who may pay a small amount towards the costs. In all cases it is crucial that nobody is excluded from attending due to costs. However by charging a nominal amount to attend activities in many cases has helped create a stronger sense of 'buy-in' for the people coming.

Observations from this year have indicated that general sustainability of ministry is largely based around the resourcing and equipping of people. This includes paid staff, volunteers and young leaders. All ministry requires people to facilitate it and for this to have impact over a sustained period of time significant consideration should be given to how those involved can be both supported and held accountable for the ongoing work. From a paid staff perspective, succession planning and diligent handover processes have enabled work in areas to continue after key personnel have left. Volunteers form a crucial link to local churches and enable deeper relationships to develop over time. Development of young leaders is a crucial aspect of ongoing discipleship as well as creating a great sense of group ownership for the activity.

The strongest model of enabling sustainability of ministry from all angles has been through formal partnership with local churches in specific geographical contexts. Financial sustainability has been achieved where local churches group together to form an ecumenical partnership in order to fund a sports minister who works practically with local churches in facilitating sports mission in the specific geographical context. This work is overseen by a Local Management Group which is comprised of individuals from each of the churches involved in the partnership. This group is responsible for overseeing work in the area which includes the raising of funds for a part-time Sports Minister who is managed and supported centrally by PSALMS. This model has also helped to gather volunteer teams and mobilise prayer support for the work, both of which are crucial for long term sustainability in an area.

Key Learning from this Year:

- Long term investment in specific areas is crucial to allow a deeper level of impact to take place over time. Investment relies on a clear vision and strategy that demonstrates how the ministry will be sustainable in the long term.
- For faith to grow there must be an opportunity for individuals to go beyond learning about God and move towards opportunities to encounter God for themselves.
- To replicate ministry effectively across areas there should be appropriate processes and systems in place to allow for greater efficiency with regards to managing activity.
- Many of the children and young people who are involved with sports ministry based activities are keen to explore faith at a deeper level and become involved with church. In many instances traditional forms of church are unappealing for them. The challenge then comes in allowing something to grow that is authentically church but feels comfortable for people to be a part of.
- Ongoing discipleship is crucial for people in becoming confident in their own faith.

Key Questions moving forwards:

- What are the key markers of a young person's journey in discovering and then growing in faith?
- Which elements of leadership development are most impactful for young people in relationship to faith development?
- What might a fresh expression of church arising from sports ministry look like? How can this be allowed to grow?
- How can you best measure the effectiveness of sports ministry?
- Is there an approach to beginning sports ministry that can be replicated across geographical areas and varying demographics of people?
- What mechanisms are needed to facilitate a sustainable approach to sports ministry over the long term across a wider area, enabling greater transformation not just of villages and towns but of whole Dioceses and regions?