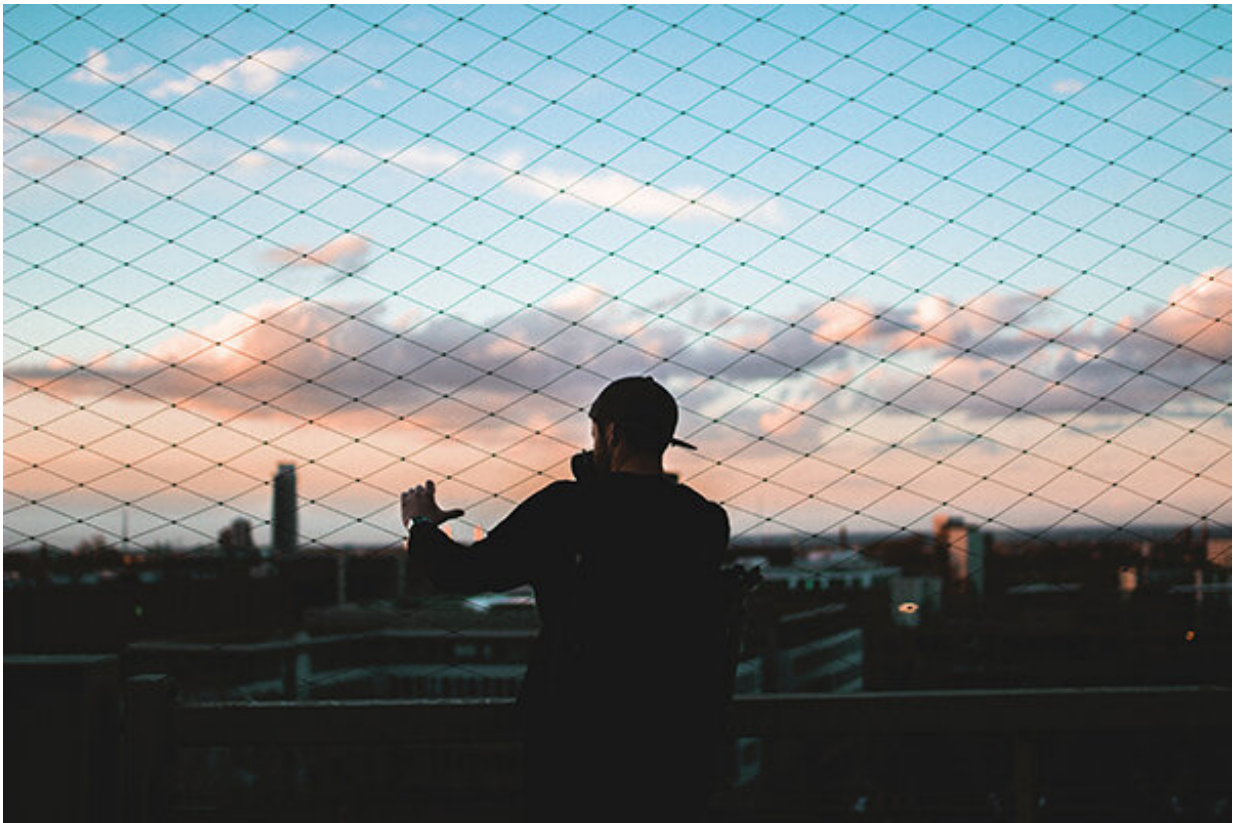


# Will sports help young offenders turn their lives around?

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Pilot research aims to find out if sport can help young offenders. Credit: [Tom Sodoge](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Young offenders locked in a secure unit are to be offered sports including orienteering and bushcraft as part of a research project to see

if challenging, fun activity can help turn lives around.

Sports and physical activity are at the heart of the project aimed at helping rehabilitate [young people](#) held at Medway Secure Training Centre in Kent.

The establishment, which holds around 70 young people aged 13-18 either remanded in custody awaiting sentence or convicted of offenses, has teamed up with local adventure education provider Great Leaps and the University of Portsmouth on the [pilot project](#).

Up to 32 of the [young offenders](#) will be take part in a 16-week program of activities, including archery, caving, orienteering and bushcraft, and the University's research team will assess the project's success in achieving a number of different positive outcomes.

Dan Luker, Head of Regime at Medway STC, said: "The project is about education, leadership and coaching; the activities are in effect a 'hook.'"

"What we're looking for is whether, through these activities, young people are able to make positive decisions, can become more self-sufficient, can communicate better, reduce their level of aggression and if they become more compliant with the behavior management system.

"From the Centre's point of view it is about building better relationships amongst young people to engineer a broader community spirit, as well as better relationships between staff and young people."

Jamie McConville, Founder and Managing Director of Great Leaps, added: "None of the young people have had these kinds of opportunities before. With funding in place it's an ideal chance to look at how we can help them change direction in their lives by challenging them, praising, showing empathy and having fun."

McConville has experience of the criminal justice system in his youth, before finding his calling as a leader, instructor and coach through the Royal Engineers, a homeless charity in London and the teaching profession.

"For us it's about motivating the youngsters and helping them identify skillsets that they might not even know they have in terms of taking charge of an activity, listening to and communicating with adults appropriately and transferring those skills back to their secure setting and post-release," he added.

The program follows on from the Sport England-funded Sports Club project launched by the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice in Medway and nearby HMP Cookham Wood. Weekly sessions, delivered by Fight For Peace and Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT), consisted of coaching in boxing and football, personal development and mentoring. They had what one coach called an "inspiring" effect on young people.

As with the Sports Club project, the program being delivered by Great Leaps is being evaluated by Dr. Juliette Stebbings, supported by Dr. Hannah Baumer, Research Associate, and Dr. Nick Pamment, Principal Lecturer, all at the University of Portsmouth.

Dr. Baumer said: "We will be assessing the young people's level of motivation for sport and exercise, wellbeing, resilience and personal development.

"We are hopeful we will see changes in their behaviors when they are given opportunities for leadership and responsibility, and we are keen to see how they respond to being outdoors in this kind of environment.

"We are also keen to see how the planned activities facilitate relationships between the young people. Uniquely, this project will not

only assess how young people interact with each other and with custodial staff, but also with education staff, and how they take their experiences and new skills back into the classroom."

Dr. Stebbings added: "This will be an important step forwards not only for the research literature in this field of study, but also to better understand how prison establishments and community organizations can partner together to support young people in the criminal justice system through sport and outdoor activity."

James Mapstone, Chief Executive of the Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice, said: "We're delighted to see this project build on the framework and learning we established with the Sports Club project in Medway STC.

"This new project will add more robust evidence for how to use sport and [physical activity](#) in secure settings most effectively—and strengthen our case for sport in criminal justice even further."

Academic assessment of the project will conclude in December and a final report will be available in the New Year.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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