

Street Weapon's Commission
Alex Richardson and Andrew Gilbert

Chair

Well good afternoon. Alex Richardson and Andrew Gilbert. Both of you concerned with the Gladiator programme. Alex Richardson well known to many I'm sure in the past as a very substantial weight lifter at an international level now doing great things with the Gladiator programme and you're involved as the marketing manager of the same programme.

Alex Richardson

I'm Alex Richardson. Andrew is the marketing manager.

Chair

We're the wrong way round I'm sorry we'll have to start all this over again.

DIRECTION

Chair

Well good afternoon. Alex Richardson and Andrew Gilbert. Andrew Gilbert the marketing manager of the Gladiator programme. And Alex Richardson the founder of the same programme and well known to many on television I suppose from your past history as a very successful weightlifter. Scottish national coach. Commonwealth Games and huge success record there.

Very grateful to you for coming. Can you fill us in very quickly on the Gladiator programme and what it does to distinguish itself from other perhaps not altogether dissimilar programmes that are in the field here in Glasgow?

Alex Richardson

Obviously in the East End of Glasgow we've got two big things. Two main problems is one, we've got the highest murder rate in western Europe and

two, we have the lowest life expectancy in western Europe with direct links between poverty and obviously child obesity. So basically our programme is about creating physical activity and play and progressing that physical activity through into sport and into later years whilst at the same time using that activity to shield children from drugs, territoriality and crime, thus addressing those two big objectives.

Chair

OK so take us through in nuts and bolts way. You've got somebody who is in trouble or perhaps looking as if they could be in trouble and you interpose at what age group?

Alex Richardson

No the approach that we take is prevention. Get them before they get involved in the first place.

Chair

Which is what I was trying to say, forgive me, but you're interposing at what sort of age group as a rule?

Alex Richardson

We have kids starting on our play programme as early as five years of age.

Chair

As early as that.

Alex Richardson

And the whole key to it is progressive and sustainable activities. You wouldn't take a kid on a play programme and then when they outgrow the play programme leave him back on the street. You would progress to something

else in an older age group and hence we would progress through onto sport.

Chair

So once they're in you take them through.

Alex Richardson

We try to shield them through the difficult years and eventually some 40 odd of those kids over the years have found full time employment with the organisation. If we can't find them a job with us we'll use the personal development peer learning that they've had through the programme to try and get them a job somewhere else.

Chair

I mustn't hog this because my colleagues will want to come in but can I just take you back to the five year old or thereabouts and you're getting them before they are in serious trouble or before they're in trouble at all how do you identify them? Why do you identify them at that point?

Alex Richardson

No we draw them in like a magnet through fun. Fun.

Chair

You're drawing them to you?

Alex Richardson

Yeah. Fun activities. We will go to isolated areas ...

DIRECTION ... BACKGROUND NOISE

Chair

and you mentioned a moment ago the five year olds or thereabouts coming to you how do you actually engage them? They come to you because you've advertised the Gladiator programme are doing and they want to come in is that it?

Alex Richardson

Not so much advertise. A lot of kids in outreach areas are socially and economically banned from participating in activities. So what we do is we take a fun filled programme to the individual area. If the child comes from an unemployed family they may well not be able to afford the transport. And they certainly can't walk it because of the territorial boundaries so we go to them. Right into the heart of their outreach community. And we will probably find in most communities there is very few positive activities for children so it's not hard rocket science to draw the kids in in the early years. Once you've got them you work on a road of progression.

Chair

The programme on their territory. You mentioned territorial boundaries. I mean we've heard a lot about the territories that gangs control. Are you getting them to move across out of their own territory somewhere else that they would see as neutral.

Alex Richardson

Yeah what we do is the initial contact with the kids is on their own territories. As they get older and progress into the sports we bus them to our neutral sports space which is important. The location is in a neutral or deemed to be a neutral turf. We will bus them there. Once you bring kids from different areas you have that integration process beginning so you start to break down barriers. Forming one on one relationships. If I live in a certain area and you walk through the street with me you will be OK and vice versa. If

I walk through your area with you. The quickest way to break down territorial boundaries is to take your time. Create one on one relationships. You simply wouldn't bring 50 people from here and here unless you wanted another gang fight.

Chair

Yeah I understand.

Commissioner

Can I ask you your definition of what a fun filled programme is?

Alex Richardson

Velcro Olympics. Diddy man football. Gladigator our mascot with song and dance. INAUDIBLE ... champion 63 different sports. If you can beat you, you can kick him, and the kids just think he's fantastic. He's a fictionalised role model who leads the kids in later years into sport. They either meet real life role models or in a lot of our kids cases become the role models themselves such as my current double Olympic special needs champion Samantha Murray.

Commissioner

Can I ask about funding? I mean in the paperwork we've received from you or about you you're pretty dismissive of aloof professionals. They don't know what they're talking about. And ... so it's lucky that you get 75% of your money not from public funds because probably otherwise you wouldn't get any. I think what you say in the paperwork is very, very important, very powerful and what you've just described is powerful. Who funds you? Where do you get it from? How do you manage to keep this sustained programme going?

Alex Richardson

I mean the comic inception is most groups depend on obviously grant funding and total grant funding. We took the decision about ten years ago this wasn't for us anymore because we were being forced to work with strategies by theorists from the top down. Rather than our strategies which was based on reality from the bottom up. And the only way we were going to fund that and make the impact at the bottom level was to generate our own income. Now we've various service agreements. NHS, oral health, culture and sport. We deliver to 2000 schools and nurseries throughout the entire Clyde Valley. And all the profits that comes back comes into the Greater Easterhouse area. And we continue the progressive activities into the community. Quite shortly we're hoping for another service agreement which will allow us to reproduce night time INAUDIBLE ... Glasgow wide so that that progression that we've created here in this area happens city wide. But in terms of social economics you have to know how economics and territorial boundaries work together. If you take this circle here and you decide you're going to build a three million pound plush centre right in the middle of a gang area the economy for that building is purely within that area because nobody from the surrounding areas will come in. and it's as simple as this. The boundary strangles the economy of the building. The building closes. Kids now walk about the streets bored and join gangs. Who defends their boundaries. The gangs do. And it whizzes on and it continues and it continues. What Gladiators do is we bring our own. We earn our own income and we create the free activities in these economically starved areas. So if the areas can't have economies to sustain the activities we'll bring them in. But what we will do is we will get the kids off the street. People say you know well you know we're turning close on a million a year on you and there's like 50 thousand pounds that we still get of public funds which we're determined to exit out of. But at the end of the day some people will say we're given 50 thousand pounds. What I would say is the

government invests in our charity 50 thousand pounds. But what does the government get back? 40 young people in a high unemployed area now contribute 150 thousand a year in tax and national insurance to the government. And if those 40 young people were unemployed it would cost the government a further 400 thousand pounds in benefits. So yes we're a charity. But at the end of the day we don't like it when people say well we're giving you this and this is the way you must do it. Put the square peg in the round hole. We're born here. We've grew up here. We're academics in the problems of our own communities. We know how to do it.

Commissioner

Are you saying Alex then that public resources by and large are completely wasted when directed at the kind of issues that you're trying to address in a different way and we're considering here?

Alex Richardson

It depends. You see this is the other thing. I mean people say give us more money, give us more money, it's not a case of the money it's how you direct that money. It's how you make that effective. Now you want to go and spend 10 thousand pound in a one day one off programme that says to the department official or the politician look at me, I care, we've put this on for you. 10 thousand pound for a one day. Now for that 10 thousand pound I could have run a hall in a deprived area one night a week for a year. Now you say well it's only one night but that one night is something to build on for personal development for young people. I mean I can say to kids look if I get reports back that you've been in trouble all week you'll be barred next week from the hall. We never bar for life because there's always got to be a way back. But the point is a one off activity, it's finished, there's nothing else comes after it. Why should the kids stay in the street INAUDIBLE? What is there to look forward to and more importantly if there's no long term

progressive activities how do you personally develop and INAUDIBLE them. Opportunities in life it goes without saying that it's human nature the best in life rise to the top. I know. I was the sixth best weightlifter in the world and I'm the best social economist in the world. The best rise to the top in any walk of life. now if all your opportunities in the early years of life in your community are negative anti social opportunities you may rise to become the next crime lord.

Chair

Gus is trying to get in on this.

Alex Richardson

If your opportunities are positive ones then you INAUDIBLE in the early years you may become the next Gordon Brown or should I say after yesterday the next David Cameron.

Gus

Which brings me to what I think is a key question here. You talk about the work you do with the young people and from a pretty early age. The age of five onwards. What interface with the parents do you have in all of this because I could imagine some of those young people going back into communities and into home circumstances that rather displace what you're trying to achieve with them. How hard do you work with parents?

Alex Richardson

For instance all our voluntary board of directors are all parents whose kids grew up in the programme over the years and they're putting back in because they appreciate you know the success first individually with their own kids and then in the later years taking a pride when seeing other kids coming through. We have quite a lot of volunteers comes from the parents. But I have

to say in real terms on the scale of the children we're working with if you get one in ten parents or one in 20 parents that's an achievement. You have to remember here you know you could have a family with five kids, a single parent family. If I'm the oldest of the five kids I will most likely be the most illiterate one. And I'll tell you why because I'm the one that got kept off school when my mother couldn't cope with the other four siblings at home. Now ... there's a difference between being stupid and being ignorant. You know and that's the thing. Now we've got a lot of kids who are pro youth, pro youth footballers or they're British schoolboy or schoolgirl champions, what have you. Very few will go on to become the elite athlete but at the same time it's important for their personal development. So we've a sports back INAUDIBLE and maybe we put them on some sports courses that will get them in the back door to study leisure management, sports development and move them on from there. You know so in terms of when we progress and peer learn these kids everybody will find a level. We cannot all be top sports people. That's a fact. But they'll find a level and nice things happen. If you look at a family there's always a strong character there, even in families that split up. It might even be an aunt or an uncle. Somebody keeps the kid on the straight and narrow. Communities are like that. Gladiators has a progressive line. We're there day in day out. Troubles day in day out. Trouble week in week out. Our activities are there day in day, week in week out, they're progressive and we try to keep as many kids on the straight and narrow.

Chair

Andrew Gilbert how do you fit into this? Marketing manager is your title but is that pure marketing or do you shade over into all the other activities of the club?

Andrew Gilbert

Basically I cross over. One thing the Gladiators we believe in cross INAUDIBLE diversifies. So if a lot of my time is marketing manager I also go out and work hands on on our day to day programme. Whether it be delivering to schools, nurseries, night time at the sports base and actually coaching football teams. So you know.

Chair

Can I ask you what your background was before you came to Gladiators?

Andrew Gilbert

Yeah I actually played football, youth football, amateur football, played for you know a few clubs and whatever else. Then moved into the retail background after a bad injury with the football. And progressed through from retail management a few different companies. Tesco. Small Glasgow based company as well. and also into Prestwick Airport from there. So h I have a bit of a business background as well as well as a sporting background. And basically pretty much what Alex has been touching on. It's where the Gladiators are trying to go. They're trying to mix sport with business obviously.

Chair

I mean the sell from Alex is very powerful. You're interfacing a bit of the time with business and you follow some kind of business background as well do you find businesses recognise the value of this or does it need a bigger marketing and advertising and supported thrust?

Andrew Gilbert

I believe the business community at times can look down on the community sector, voluntary sector. I believe at times they can almost look at us we're pretty much. I'm sure you've heard today quite a lot of groups coming in the

handouts saying give us, give us, give us. They tend not to look at that. But at Gladiators I believe that we're innovative. I believe we're pretty much unique in terms of the charity sector. We believe in bringing in our own money and making the choices ourselves who that money will go out to. Obviously our choice is to reinvest it into the children, the communities where we work.

Chair

And I know Gus wants to come back in and I think probably Mark has got a question as well.

Gus

Question for Alex really. We've been talking about central this whole business of territorialism is to the issue of knives and gangs and so on. I've always been fascinated by the fact that local authorities twinned with communities and the far most regions of the world, Europe and outside of Europe ... and can't manage to effect twinning arrangements between neighbourhoods in the same area divided by one main road. What can Gladiators do in terms of strategies for breaking down that kind of territorialism and getting communities and neighbourhoods to work more closely with one another? Understanding what unites them rather than what divides them.

Alex Richardson

1998 we won the British League Title. We had something like 14 top athletes, quality athletes, and each one came from a gang territory of Great Easterhouse. Each one. And they all worked together as part of the team to achieve something amazing. And you know what we're doing we're going to all the individual territories where the kids are cocooned. As they get older INAUDIBLE we bring them to neutral territories. We're breaking down

the barriers. When we start to take them on the road to their chosen sport we breakdown perspectives. They see there's more to life than their little turf. And you know the ... once you've broke through those barriers nice things happen. Small opportunities but positive ones. You know they could put them out there because they've chosen that path there. They've set their self free. I was in my first gang fight when I was four years of age. Didn't know I was. Not great fun. I'm a kid. I didn't know it was a gang fight. And my community, my small community was my world. It was huge. By the time I was 16 I was a prisoner. I couldn't leave that area you know because of the gang reputation, and what have you. And you know if you're restricted to that small area as a prisoner your life opportunities are curtailed. Your interaction with other people is curtailed. You know you will not develop and your opportunities certainly employment and everything else in life that won't come INAUDIBLE ... we've kids of 14 years of age from INAUDIBLE. We took them into the town. They'd never seen the town centre. They were 14. They were only living three or four miles away. But they were too terrified to go on a bus themselves in case they're attacked by rivals. You know. So clearly you know in terms of breaking down the barriers what you see as a road we look for what we call natural barriers. If I look at between Kilda Moray and Blair Tomack for example you have the football pitches there. That was just a natural barrier. That opened the gap up. Fine that'll be a barrier there. It could be a motorway bridge dividing two communities. You know you have to recognise. I got told in 1992 how dare I write a territorial map of Easterhouse. How dare I give public credence to these people, to these gangs. What I was really saying was ... if you don't privately recognise these boundaries how do you plan to locate future facilities and activities. And I'll give you an example. If you've got three ganglands there, three different territories, you put a facility there. Nobody from there or there will go. But if there's a neutral territory there and you put your facility there it's walking distance to all and they don't feel they're

imposing on each other. So that local knowledge with town planners and by locating things better and closing some of these natural barriers, natural boundaries, this is the way it should be in the future. And make life easier for voluntary groups to break down barriers.

Chair

We're beginning to run out of time but I know Mark has been trying to get in for what must be the last question Mark please.

Mark

Have you made any efforts to replicate yourself throughout the city or Scotland?

Alex Richardson

We have had requests most recently for franchise in Birmingham, Wigan, Preston and Belfast. The only reason we're holding off just now is for two reasons. We're hopeful that funding is going to come through in the next couple of month to build Scotland's largest indoor play frame in the middle of the retail park. Glasgow Fort. We would hope that a million pound a year clear profit will come in off that to the charity and we will multiply ten 20 fold the work that we're doing, increase the net and get even more kids prevented from going down that road. Once we achieve that we would then be saying to these other cities we'll create a NVQ customised award so that you fully understand every policy procedure and every strategy for Gladiators and then and only then will we entertain going down that franchise road because we also, we're a business as well, but we have a brand name to protect. That brand just now is in 2000 schools, nurseries and after schools as well. You know so at the end of the day our motto is fail to prepare, prepare to fail. We envisage that we will be expanding in the next five six years greatly. We believe that we have been dealing with problems here for 40

years in Greater Easterhouse that the rest of Britain caught up with about 20 years ago. You know I stood in the INAUDIBLE queue in 1968 when the Army was here with Frankie Vaughan. We've been there. We've done it. We've had the problem longer. We don't claim to have all the answers but we've had longer to try and come up with strategies to address them. And we feel which took Gladiators 23 years today needn't cost an arm and a leg. It could be easily reproduced in other cities up and down Britain with the proper investment. And if it ever did get reproduced you would see thousands of young youths off the streets, British wide, and into work. You'd have thousands of kids actively participating in physical activity saving the government millions on child obesity in future years. And you'd have a lot more kids coming through at top level in sport. So its win, win, win but again it's the powers that be listen, listen, listen.

Chair

Alex Richardson and Andrew Gilbert if we could bottle the enthusiasm that you're displaying I think we could sell it and make a fortune. Thank you for coming. You're clearly very committed to what you're doing and the results are impressive. But on behalf of all of us, myself and my colleagues, thank you for coming today and sharing your experience with us.

Alex Richardson

Thanks for giving us the opportunity to talk to you guys. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

DIRECTION

CUT

