

The NSPCC's Child Protection In Sport Unit's response to  
the Irish Sports Council developing 3 year Strategy for  
Sport



## **Introduction**

The NSPCC is the UK's leading independent child protection charity providing a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education aimed at ending cruelty to children. The NSPCC provides services across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. It has also developed positive working relationships in campaigning with the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and Children 1<sup>st</sup> in Scotland.

The NSPCC in Northern Ireland have over 20 services across the province to protect and support children and young people and their families or carers. These services include treatment for those who have experienced abuse, counselling in schools, family support projects, supporting young witnesses in court and safeguarding schemes for organisations dealing with children.

The NSPCC's purpose is to end cruelty to children. Our vision is of a society where all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential. Such a challenging aspiration requires a major shift in society. While recognising the need to provide vision and leadership, the NSPCC cannot end cruelty to children on its own and we seek to work in partnership with other agencies and individuals.

We seek to achieve cultural, social and political change – influencing legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education.

## **North / South Safeguarding Cooperation**

The NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) was established in 2001 in response to a growing awareness of the number of sports who had to respond to cases of child abuse. The unit in Northern Ireland was developed to support the implementation of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport. The NSPCC CPSU recognises the important and influential role that sport plays in the lives of children and young people and the opportunity it has to make a positive difference to children's experience of growing up in our society.

The NSPCC CPSU believes that:

- Children and young people participating within sport have the right to do so safe from harm;
- Parents and carers should have confidence in the individuals, clubs and bodies that provide sporting opportunities;
- Coaches, volunteers, clubs and sports bodies should have the necessary knowledge and resources to safeguard the welfare of children and young people involved in sport;
- Sport should be able to play its part in contributing to safeguarding children and young people.

As within wider society the acceptance of child abuse as an issue for sport has been a slow process. The reality is that child abuse does happen in sport, as in any other element of society, and to fail to address it leaves victims, clubs, sports and others isolated, vulnerable and in the long term damaged by the experience of abuse. Through the work undertaken by the NSPCC CPSU within Northern Ireland and the ISC Code of Ethics staff progress has been made in raising awareness across sports bodies. We believe that any 3 year strategy must continue to reflect the ISC's commitment to safeguarding young people in sports settings throughout Ireland. This strategy will have an important impact on the Ulster Branches of all Ireland sports therefore it is important that the strategy reflects an understanding of the legislative changes that will be required for coaches under new vetting and barring legislation in the UK.

Sport is an everyday activity for many children and makes a significant contribution to their well-being, offering opportunities for personal development, fun and friendship. Whether involved in sport at a local level, competing at an all Ireland event or international championships, the NSPCC believes that all children and young people have a right to have fun, be safe and be protected from harm.

### **General Comments**

We believe that any strategy document should have explicit reference to the significant role and responsibility sport has to play in safeguarding children and young people both within sport and within the wider community. We believe the Strategy should offer the opportunity to link sport to the wider government safeguarding agenda for children and young people.

Most strategies for sport make reference to increasing participation and the number of coaches required to achieve this. This needs to be done while considering the specific safeguarding requirements for increasing participation for young people. By providing a strong reference to establishing "quality" sporting opportunities for young people and required standards of practice of clubs and coaches.

The opportunities for coaches to promote positive values around participation, inclusion, healthy lifestyles, citizenship though role modelling must be a core element to developing the coaching workforce.

In particular we would want to see the strategy requiring the development of minimum operating standards for NGB's and coaches including:

- Safe recruitment practices;
- Effective management of coaches;
- Agreed codes of practice;
- Safeguarding awareness knowledge and skills; and
- Training in working with young people.

A number of these issues would be addressed if the strategy made reference to the development of a Club accreditation system for Ireland that was meaningful, appropriately resourced and implemented. The NSPCC believe that a Clubmark scheme that is appropriately resourced and promoted with links to education would be an effective structure to ensure good quality sporting structures at a local level. The ISC should recognise and reward existing good practice and those who are striving towards it by committing resources to a club accreditation system for clubs with junior members.

### **Participation and High Performance**

It is not clear what priority the ISC will give to defining success. Will this be judged in performance and medals over increased participation and learning the fundamentals of sport? Success for many young people needs to be measured on their own personal goals. Therefore we believe that the desire for world class performance, whilst important, should never overshadow the priority given to increasing quality opportunities for participation.

The NSPCC would like to see a clear recognition in the Strategy to coaching and volunteering. Participation measured simply in terms of “athletes” is not an accurate picture of the sports and physical recreation sector. Coaches and volunteers are key to the successful achievement of many aspects of the strategy. We would like to see reference and commitment to the development of coaching and volunteering in this Strategy.

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