

Example of a grant awarded from Funds set up with Essex Community Foundation (ECF) and that received matched funding from the Proceeds of Crime Scheme also managed by ECF:

Changing Lives is a charity with locations in Colchester and Harlow, that uses physical activity to improve the lives of young people, particularly migrants and refugees, and prevent them becoming involved in crime.

They ran a programme of sports coaching workshops in Harlow and Colchester, which reached over 1,000 young people. The **Mersea Homes Charitable Fund** helped to ensure that these classes were able to go ahead. The session leaders were able to give back to their community by helping the young people who attended to start on self-improvement journeys the same way they had.



The two areas where the group operates are in places of deprivation, where young people are vulnerable to the influence of criminals.

There can be significant social and emotional barriers to reintegrating into the community and this can make them especially vulnerable. It is important not just for these young people to have good role models, but to have space in which to put their motivation into action.

Changing Lives has had such a positive impact that they have been featured on the news (ITV and BBC) and recognised by the National Diversity Awards. In a single year, they have supported approximately nine thousand total participants, 1209 of whom were refugees. Early intervention, and access to enrichment and upskilling classes, as well as multiple holiday sporting clubs means that individuals are supported to reach their full potential in a safer community.

Since Changing Lives formed its football club two years ago, they have been overwhelmed by the number of young people wanting to join. The football club provides them with a chance to socialise, have fun and exercise while forming long-lasting bonds through the medium of sport, all for free.

The team now compete against others in weekly games. Being part of the team and getting involved is motivating them to succeed in life and to choose self-improvement over involvement with gang activity. Changing Lives continues to expand to meet the need at both sites in Harlow



and Colchester, so that they can bring more vulnerable young people into their sporting family.

David Simmons, the club manager, said of their work, *"It shines such a positive light on refugees and migrants who go through so much"*.