Tower Hamlets youth uncover historical impact of boxing

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The funding will allow them to pilot a young people led project that will explore the hugely influential historic social impact of boxing on the local community of East London.

The East End has long been associated with boxing heritage. A group of up to 30 young people and volunteers will explore its fascinating relationship with the entertainment scene, crime, gangs and ethnic identity in the area.

They will focus on five key periods* including the 1880's, the key transition point of bare knuckle fighting, the 1950's, the post war period and era of local gangsters, and the arrival of migrant populations and racial tensions. They will also explore the East End today, an area of constant change and home to a diverse and eclectic migrant population.

The young people will tour boxing heritage sites, conduct archive research at the Bishopsgate Institute, including working with many organisations such as Factory East Youth Project, the Geffrye Museum, the London Film Museum, Point Blank Music College and more. They will carry out interviews with members of the London Ex-Boxers Association and older members of the community at their local hang out: 'The Geezers Club.'

Participants will examine the memorable histories of boxers such as Jack 'Kid' Berg and the tragic, yet heroic story of Michael Watson**. Watson had a near fatal injury in a fight against Chris Eubank. He spent 40 days in a coma, six years in a wheelchair and extraordinarily slowly clawed it all back.

Through the production of ten short films, showcase events, presentations, Q&A sessions and archiving the findings, this project aims to benefit Tower Hamlets young people with valuable practical skills and experience.

Sue Bowers London's Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund said: "Xlternative Productions has a proven track record working with young people. There are enthralling tales of boxing and its relationship with the community throughout this period. This project will provide valuable opportunities for learning, career development, and the potential to encourage self esteem in these young people, many of whom may not have succeeded academically."

Participating in the project Sergen Aytug added: "It's a really good project. I think it should carry on for a long time. We've learnt loads about the history of the area, such as the Kray twins and how they ran East London. The project has made me more confident about local issues.

Elliott Tucker from Xlternative Productions said: "This is an exciting community led project around the social heritage of sport happening in the Olympic Borough of London. What makes this project significant is that it gives a voice to local people, to young and old, and promotes their local history as exciting, dynamic and something that is still living and happening today."

Notes to editors

• ***1880's onwards**: The key transition point from bare knuckle fighting to the establishment of rules, regulations and the use of gloves.

• **1920’s onwards**: The height of boxings’s popularity and the rise of world champions from the east end such as Jack ‘Kid’ Berg, local hero to poor migrant young people at the time.
• **1950’s onwards**: Post war period and culture of local gangsters who frequented boxing gyms and matches.
• **1980’s onwards**: The arrival of Bangladeshi migrant populations in the area, racial tensions , extremist action and the decline of traditional industry. This was the era of Michael Watson.

****Michael Watson, MBE** is a retired British boxer whose career ended prematurely as a result of near-fatal injury sustained in a WBO super-middleweight title fight defeat by Chris Eubank in September 1991. He spent 40 days in a coma and had six brain operations to remove a blood clot. After regaining consciousness, he spent over a year in intensive care and rehabilitation and six more years in a wheelchair. He couldn't hear, speak or walk. He extraordinarily slowly clawed it all back.

HLF awarded Xlternative Productions £24,500

Further information

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