



Scripture Union

SPORTS

HOW TO DO MISSION THROUGH SPORT IN PUBLIC PLACES

Giving churches and groups of Christians the confidence to connect with young people and children, sharing hope and joy, through sports, in public places where faith and sport can naturally collide.





Scripture Union

SPORTS

Scripture Union's heart is to see local Christians connect and share faith with children and young people in their community through sport. This 'how to' guide provides information to give individuals and churches the confidence to build new communities in public spaces through sport and share their faith in an appropriate way. Where Scripture Union has worked with churches who have connected with children and young people in a school, church *and* community, highly effective mission has taken place.

WHAT IS SPORTS MISSION?

TYPES OF SPORTS MISSION

Sports mission describes pursuing and sharing God's kingdom in, through and around sport. This happens in various ways, and there are three main types of sports mission:

Mission through sport

Intentional Christian-led activity that provides opportunities for people to begin to explore faith and meet Christians in an informal setting, through the natural, enjoyable environments that sport can facilitate.

Mission in sport

Mission involving Christians who are part of the formal world of sports clubs. For example, this could be as players, coaches or on the club committee. These people are seeking to live and share the gospel with fellow sporting companions who don't follow Jesus, by the way they play and relationships formed within the sports club.

Mission around sport

Sporting events that are used as platforms

to stage events like socials, festivals and big screenings by which to share the transforming love of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Union has learnt that, when looking to engage with young people and children who are currently outside of the church, 'mission through sport' provides an amazing opportunity for churches to intentionally engage with their local communities. It has been an incredible way to connect and share faith with all children and young people, and in particular those who do not have the infrastructure to take them to sports clubs.

WHERE CAN MISSION THROUGH SPORT TAKE PLACE?

Mission through sport can occur in three main areas:

Church

Sporting activities such as sports services (eg Sweaty Church), non-residential sport camps, sports holiday clubs (eg Higher Games).

Schools

Sporting sessions conducted in and with schools (eg assemblies, lunch and afterschool clubs, cross curriculum or extra sessions and sports teams). This can be extra curriculum or part of the education curriculum of either PE or RE, or the two together.

Communities

Sporting activity that is performed in public spaces, such as multi-use games areas (MUGA), astros, recreational parks, village greens etc. The focus of this guide is how to practically set up mission through sport in this community setting.

WHAT ARE PUBLIC SPACES?

A public space is neutral ground, where people can gather and interact. Public



Scripture Union

SPORTS

spaces can also be shared or 'third spaces' (an in-between neutral space that is neither home or church).

Ray Oldenburg, in his book *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*, Paragon House, 1989, found shared spaces contain notions of a neutral ground, leveller of status, somewhere that is readily accessible, promotes a playful mood (lacking tension and hostility) and can feel like a home away from home.



EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC SPACES

There are many examples of them. Some that relate to mission through sport include:

- park
- MUGA (multi use games area)
- village green
- beach
- street

Although activities that are based in church buildings and those delivered while serving local schools are important, they are not in a shared space.

WHY USE THEM?

Ministry in churches and schools is common, but much less is done to reach out and engage with local communities in the community space. Utilising our public spaces provides an amazing opportunity to connect with local communities in a normal, fun and sustainable way.

Public spaces provide the opportunity to engage with our local communities, to offer hope, build relationships, and share the good news. Sport is just a normal means for us to engage. If we are to fulfil our role in the great commission, then we need to step out and go into these spaces.

More information around the importance of parks and broader public spaces can be found here:

- [The social value of public spaces: Joseph Rowntree Foundation research](#)
- [2017 Government report on Public Parks for the House of Commons](#)

STORIES OF MISSION THROUGH SPORT IN PUBLIC SPACES

Below are a few stories showing how churches have built relationships and shared faith in public spaces through sport with young people who they did not initially know.

INNER CITY CHELTENHAM

Eight years ago, a church in Cheltenham was challenged to connect with their surrounding community and with young people who were not interested in any church activities. They started by taking sports equipment into their local park and playing.



Scripture Union

SPORTS

Today, they have trusting relationships with young people and their parents that allow the good news to be shared and the young people to know they are loved, encouraged and supported by the church, and to respond in a way relevant to them.

Tim, a youth worker, has taken a lead with heading up the community sport sessions over the last three years. Although Tim wouldn't regard himself as a sportsman in the slightest, he has realised that mission through sport in public places can be simple and effective, and requires more heart than sporting ability.

The young people naturally pass through the park and hang out there. Playing informal sport in a shared space, which is neither owned by church, individual or institution, creates a new and ideal environment to establish trusting relationships and serve the local community. By being in this shared space the relationships are formed on neutral ground, which is completely different to running it in a church or school building. Playing and meeting in a shared community setting, leaves young people feeling more inclined to join.

One lad in Cheltenham, who had come along to community football sessions for many months, enjoyed them so much that he has chosen to get stuck in with the church youth group on a Friday, taking steps towards following Jesus.

INNER CITY BIRMINGHAM

Every Friday at 3.30pm, a group of local Christians begin litter picking on an estate on the western edge of Birmingham city centre, getting the area ready for the session to come. It is an incredibly unassuming patch of grass but it is where young people

pass through after school, and every week it becomes a sports pitch, as a set of goals are set up. Between 20 and 30 young people turn up each week, none of whom have historically had a connection with church but now some of them call this gathering their church.

This success has come from being out in the public space, engaging with young people in an activity they love – sport and games – and being there every week, completely upfront and honest about who is running it (local Christians) as well as exploring faith each week during half time.

INNER CITY LONDON

Please follow this [link](#) on the Scripture Union website to find a sports story from inner city London. There is also a film clip which explains what one of the projects is doing in a public space.

LESSONS LEARNT

But the key question in all this is: how do we do sports mission in public places?

Here are some lessons learnt by Scripture Union from projects around England and Wales:

PRAYER

Prayer is vital, not just for the activities and the work but that faith can be shared naturally through relationships with those in the local community. Whether it is before, during or after a session, encourage all those attending to join in praying.

INVITATIONAL

As mission through sport in a community setting is low key and informal, it is important to think about and plan the



Scripture Union

SPORTS

next invitation for those attending. This is to ensure that those who come have the opportunity to explore faith more, if they choose to. If the communities you are



working with will have no appropriate group to join, then consider wider partnerships and subtle changes to other groups and activities that are running, or establish something new. A few key questions:

- Who are you inviting to your community sports session?
- Do they know what they are coming to?
- What else can they be invited to? Maybe a Sweaty Church, a non-residential sports camp, a screening of a sports event or an existing youth group.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Mission through sport is sports-based activity, initiated by churches, in and for the local communities. It is not about extravagant facilities or world class coaching; instead, providing sporting and

games activities that facilitate and inspire meaningful relationships in a Christ-centred culture for anyone to feel at home in.

Here are some pointers:

- ensure local volunteers are at the heart of who run it
- pray at the start and during the session
- create opportunities and time for natural conversation around faith, sport and life
- know the names of individuals
- seek to be intentional about sharing, exploring and discovering Jesus during the session
- keep the session fun and enjoyable
- ask those who attend for feedback
- tell the young people about future events they could attend.

CAN WE TALK ABOUT JESUS?

Advice from experts about working in public spaces can be found in 'Speak Up', produced by the Evangelical Alliance and the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship.

When working with churches, Scripture Union offers clear support on sharing faith in public spaces. At the heart of this is invitation, exploration and questions; it is not about 'preaching' to children and young people.

WHERE, WHEN AND HOW

WHERE

Finding a suitable public space

With many different public spaces appropriate for sports mission, select one which suits your local community and identified people group that you want to



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SPORTS

engage with. Here are some examples:

MUGA || recreational ground || park || village green || tennis court || trail || astro turf || skate park

Where do the young people and children pass through or hang out?

It is important that wherever you choose, it is a shared space. Ray Oldenburg suggests that shared spaces naturally encourage people to be themselves in that environment, and also promote a home away from home type of feeling, a playful environment. Often it takes some time and research to find the places where young people and children naturally pass through or congregate, and you will need to get out and visit possible locations a number of times, on different days and at different times, to see what works best in your area.

WHEN

All-year-round community sport

Community sport can provide the opportunity for regular contact, where people can meet, be themselves and develop meaningful relationships through sport while exploring faith.

Community sport doesn't need exhaustive planning or resources, and so allows for regular activity through which Christian and local communities can gather together.

Due to the simple nature of community sport, sessions can be easily moved or adapted in the winter months, to be done all year round. Some projects have bought rechargeable floodlights and others move to an inside venue over winter months. Providing consistency in sessions will grow more trusting relationships, as people find consistent belonging to a local community.

Seasonal community sport

Committing to longer term community sport can feel a bit daunting; why not consider trying something more seasonal?

Using the same principles of regular community sessions, seasonal sessions can be an amazing way of trialling sports mission, but with time to build trusting relationships with your local community.

To avoid the transitions of seasons and holidays, pick a block of six to eight weeks, perhaps after Easter or at the start of September, when people establish new patterns in their diaries. Select a time that will suit your identified community and enjoy your sessions without any longer-term expectations.

One-off community sport

One-off community sport is about making initial contact with local children and young people and is a way to dip your toes into mission through sport in a community setting. This can be a significant pointer towards local church communities, groups and events, while providing the opportunity to get to know the people in the area and their needs.

One-off community sport can be linked in with other events, such as community festivals, church fun-days and sporting occasions. This can take the pressure off running the session; serving as a safety net and confidence booster when encouraging teams for future mission in communities.

One-off sessions don't have to be complicated. What's important is to recognise that this is not mission accomplished, but merely a step towards loving, serving and enjoying time with our community as we seek God's kingdom through sport.



Scripture Union

SPORTS

HOW - (THIS IS THE VERY PRACTICAL AND GRITTY PART OF THE GUIDE)

Duty of care

In running mission through sport in a public space, you are accepting a moral and legal obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of the young people and children who attend.

In part, this means having the permission of land, policies, insurance, risk assessments, and making sure authorities (including the community police) are aware of what is going on in your community sport sessions. In other words, doing everything possible to ensure the care and protection of the young people and children who attend, and having clarity about whose ultimate responsibility this is (whoever is leading the event). But it also means looking after those who are with you to the best of your ability. If there is an injury, treat it and if you need to, take them home or ring an ambulance. If you notice unusual behaviour, record and report it.

Working with SU

Scripture Union is a national mission-movement, part of an international family of movements engaged in the same task around the world. Scripture Union England and Wales is involved in a wide range of activities, but they all remain true to SU's vision, mission and priority.

The **vision** is to see a new generation of children and young people who have a vibrant, personal faith in Jesus.

The **mission** is to create opportunities for children and young people to explore the Bible, respond to Jesus and grow in faith.

The **priority** is those who don't yet know him.

Scripture Union England and Wales is not

centred on a staff team. It is a volunteer movement that also works in partnership with local churches and other organisations. This is reflected by having thousands of volunteers and over 60 Local Mission Partners (groups of churches who employ a worker and who partner with Scripture Union).



For the welfare of the children and young people, as well the integrity of Scripture Union and other partners, when running events it is critical to be able to distinguish:

- an SU-led event without partners
- an SU-led event where they are the lead partner
- a partnership event where SU is not the lead partner
- an event where SU is advising and supporting others.

For the sake of this document, it is assumed that SU is purely advising and supporting local churches and Faith Guides. If you think that, for your event, you would like SU to partner with you or be the the lead or sole organiser, please get in touch.

Permission of land

Having identified potential public spaces for your sports mission, you need to contact the landowners to check if you need to register your activity. This is likely to be the local town council (there will be a phone number or an email address on their website, often linked to a parks or open spaces team) or sports club (if you would like



Scripture Union

SPORTS

to use some space on sports pitches owned by a club) or a housing association. This is a simple but important step that needs to be done, so you can use the spaces with a clear conscience and the backing of the authorities.

Safeguarding

All faith-based organisations are required to ensure the safety of those in their care and as part of this will have a safeguarding policy. Topics covered will include safer recruitment and disclosure procedures, ratios and volunteers. These topics should be simply adapted and implemented by your organisation's safeguarding officer for your public activity.

Current guidelines advise that all volunteers who will be present and working with children and young people in the shared space have an enhanced disclosure.

The 'Guide to child workforce roles for registered bodies and employers' by the DBS, gives the complete guidance.

A key, and often ignored, aspect of most safeguarding policies for sport in a public space is the 'no lone-working policy'. It is important that this is adhered to, even if, in exceptional circumstances, you end up walking a young person home.

Insurance

All groups should have appropriate insurance cover, including public liability. Make sure your activity is covered by your church's public liability insurance or partner with a group who can insure it. You need to tell the insurers what you are planning to do, and they will tell you if you are covered, if it is possible and what you need to do. If not, sort it before you start!

Venue diaries

It is helpful to keep a diary of the venue where the activity is taking place. This records key information that should be held by the project leader of each session to ensure safety. Diaries should include a register of names and emergency contact details, any concerns or incidences and any good news stories! It is good to keep track of who is attending community sport sessions for monitoring and evaluation purposes, accountability (to parents and venue) and prayer prompts.

The diary will need to adhere to your church's GDPR policy and be accessible and secure, with care taken over how it is transported, what is recorded and how it is kept. The diary could also be the home for notes around parental consent, first aid and risk assessments. An electronic version might work well.

Parental consent

These informal, outdoor sessions are different to running clubs in buildings; with the aim of engaging with all young people and children not just those who can easily get forms signed. These sessions are run as detached youth sessions, so one of the key differences is parental consent.

Young people and children attending do not have to have parental consent to join in but:

- every attendee will take home a card explaining where they have been and what is going on
- attempts will be made to contact parents of those who attend, and they will be strongly encouraged to sign their child up so that emergency details are gathered.



Scripture Union

SPORTS

- a diary of the venue will be kept with appropriate details recorded.

Health and safety

First aid – at least one person should be appointed as first aider. They should have an in-date first aid certificate and access to an in-date first aid kit. The first aider should be made known to volunteers and keep a list of participants with allergies and conditions. All incidences (or close calls) must be recorded in an accident book. This is essential.

Risk assessments – these are commonplace and a standard template can be used for them in this setting. Think through all the potential risks and then put things in place to minimise them. By writing them up in advance you will be able to minimise the risks and have a record that you have done this important task.

A couple of additional risks will be around external factors that you cannot control – these will include the environment you will be using, other people in the area, as well as who turns up and the weather.

For example – when you arrive to run the activity, always check the area for anything dangerous, such as broken glass, needles, even dogs' mess, and take stuff with you so that you can safely clear it up. If you can't make the area safe, then don't run the activity, or move somewhere safe.

FAQS:

Do you have some ideas and examples of what sport and games we can play and how we connect sport with faith in an appropriate way?

This is not the purpose of this guide but

below are some suggestions to get you started:

- Play a range of sports and games and ask the young people what they'd like to play. Scripture Union has a growing library of ideas for sports that can be played with young people, which is available to Faith Guides.
- A great way to start discussions is to use the Scripture Union sports cards.
- Think about games or sports that lead naturally onto a question about life. For example, what makes netball fairly unique as a sport? To play it you have to be utterly selfless.
- Share stories around your life and faith and maybe use the testimonies available to Faith Guides to spark some discussion.
- If appropriate encourage the young people to pray. Think about active ways that they can do this. Play '4 Square' (search for it online if you are not familiar with it) and as people enter the square get them to answer a question (such as something they are thankful for or a place in the world that is struggling) and turn these into prayers.
- Some mission through sport public space activities pause for a half time break, where a story from the Bible is shared.
- If appropriate, facilitate discussion around sport and faith but don't impose it. We take our inspiration from Jesus' model of asking questions, which is now the methodology of good coaching.
- Remember it is really important that we are completely transparent, so people know what they are coming to and can leave at any time.



Scripture Union

SPORTS

What should we do if there are already people using the public space we usually use?

If the session is compromised due to others already using the facility or turning up while you are playing, you will need to think about what you can do. They might be able to join in with what you are running or perhaps they will be happy to wait while you finish. What is critical is that you ensure the session remains safe and, if it no longer is, stop or move to another area. If you are unsure, just end the session and come back next week.

How do I make it clear who is running the session?

It is important to be transparent about what is taking place – when inviting people, when people turn up and in what people take back home with them.

Be explicit in explaining to participants, parents and onlookers that it is church-led. Wear T-shirts and put up flags and banners of the organising churches.

Provide handouts for players, parents and onlookers. Create a large business card with the key information on that people can take away with them. Information that could be included is:

- details of who it's run by, who it's for, time and location
- intention of activity
- assurance that volunteers are DBS cleared, that you have permission from local authorities and that police are aware – please do let them know and they might even want to turn up!
- contact details – for concerns, questions and updates.

How should we deal with anti-social behaviour?

You may come across behaviour that you do not expect and are not used to dealing with. It is helpful to talk about this before your first session and then to keep evaluating how it is going. It is important to:

- ensure all participants are safe – do not allow dangerous activities
- know that good behaviour will take time (we are not seeking perfect people to attend) and that good behaviour is not the same as safe behaviour (unsafe behaviour cannot be allowed)
- be clear of expectations from start, for the team and those attending
- agree values and behaviours.

What is an ideal mix of volunteers to run the sessions?

When building a volunteer team you are looking for members who will support the intention to create a natural overlapping Christian/local community. Your team needs to ensure that anyone feels welcome and should consist of both genders. Aim to have a team with not just sporty people in it and have young people leading the sports as well. Try to have people on team who are as local to the area as possible. You will also need those who are happy to chat and provide food and drink.

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