

REGENERATION AND RENEWAL WITH THE GREATEST...

Following Muhammed Ali's recent 70th birthday celebrations, Geoff Thompson, Executive Chairman of the Youth Charter, looks at the great man's role in engaging young people and communities and the social and cultural legacy it has provided...

The regeneration and renewal of cities, communities and society as a whole through the bidding and hosting of major games will culminate in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in London. With the 2012 Local Organizing Committee raising the bar for the post-event use of Olympic facilities to provide a legacy and regeneration opportunity for the East End corridor over the next ten years, the centrepiece of this effort will be the Olympic Park.

Cultural regeneration worldwide

The social and cultural-renewal proposals have also played a major part in Britain's bidding and hosting of major games. The Youth Charter, launched in 1993 in response to the social and cultural disaffection of young people and communities, was the social and cultural legacy of the 2000 Olympic Bid and 2002 Commonwealth Games.

Since the 2002 Games, the Youth Charter has developed a global programme of work that has pioneered the role that sport can play in the cultural regeneration of young people and communities on all five continents. One of its longest running programmes is the Anglo International Youth Culture Initiative. An exchange programme that sees young people from urban communities of deprivation visit, discuss, experience and, above all, exchange good ideas as well as establish long-term relationships that will add to their own individual personal growth and in particular a contribution and benefit to the wider community.

Rights, responsibilities, challenges and opportunities

Over the last 18 years, the Youth Charter has hosted over 20 youth delegations representing over

30 countries. One of the most successful and long-standing Anglo-international relationship is the Anglo-American Youth Culture Initiative. Inspired by the 1984 Spirit of the Streets Tour of Los Angeles, in collaboration with the LA 84 Foundation in the international Olympic Centenary year, the groundbreaking tour led to ongoing lessons and opportunities for travel to not only broaden the mind, but to improve the social, cultural and economic environment.

In 2003 the Anglo-American Youth Culture Initiative was to take another major leap of faith in an incredible journey with the United Nations 2003 Conference co-hosted by the Youth Charter. 'The Day of the African Child' – a legacy of the New York 2012 Olympic Bid, which also marked June 16th Youth Day (which commemorates the Soweto uprising in South Africa in 1976), saw Olympic and Boxing legend Muhammad Ali's Institute establish a support agency provision as part of the Youth Charter's Citizenship in Action legacy initiative. The Muhammad Ali Scholars are students based at the University of Louisville, provided with scholarships by the Muhammad Ali Institute to act as global ambassadors and reflect the Ali values of respect, dedication, confidence, conviction, spirituality and giving. In 2006, the Youth Charter hosted the Muhammad Ali Scholars Tour of the North West and visited the cities of Manchester and Liverpool where they contributed to the social and cultural issues surrounding young people, the regeneration and renewal of communities and the citizenship rights and responsibilities, challenges and opportunities.

A legacy manifesto

The Youth Charter visited Louisville in 2007 as part of the 'Muhammad Ali in Focus' week and community-engagement projects, programmes



and initiatives were established forging stronger links between university-campus student activity, young people and the wider community. In 2008, the Youth Charter supported the Ali Scholars Tour of Africa with further international community and legacy efforts contributing to the 2010 volunteer programme of the Soccer World Cup held in South Africa.

With the 2012 Games secured, the Muhammad Ali Scholars 2010 Tour brought together a multi-agency effort of academia, private- and public-sector and community-based agencies along with young people from different social and cultural backgrounds and experiences to interact and debate global youth experiences from a local youth perspective. The tour group met their UK counterparts as part of a British Council programme of young people identified from the Leasowe and Toxteth communities and visited Liverpool, Salford, Manchester, Bradford and London, culminating in their attendance and contribution to the Legacy Youth Conference held at Roehampton University in London.

The 2010 Muhammad Ali Scholars Tour of the UK provided a unique opportunity to debate, discuss and, above all, contribute ideas on issues that they felt were important in communities globally. Race, religion, politics, slavery, education, conflict and the role of a civil society and the social, human and cultural issues faced were debated and reflected in the legacy manifesto launched after last summer's riots.

Challenges and opportunities of a global youth revolution

As part of an ongoing dialogue in 2011, which saw the Youth Charter contribute to an international conference hosted by the Muhammad Ali Center and the Muhammad Ali Institute, the continued challenges and opportunities of a global youth revolution were discussed within the role that sport and its icons can play in improving and contributing to a more tolerant and peaceful world.

With the 70th birthday of the greatest Olympian, boxer, humanitarian and social activist and the social and cultural legacy and engagement of young people and communities challenging the institutions and governments of the day, the Muhammad Ali legacy – as one of the many 240 sportsmen and women who have signed the Youth Charter scroll – has improved the life chances and opportunities for those who least have the opportunity to feast on it.

The Youth Charter Muhammad Ali Scholars Report can be downloaded for free here:

www.youthcharter.co.uk/index.php?/products/details/youth_charter_muhammad_ali_scholars_report_2010