

The London 2012 Games offers great promise for London. They bring with them the promises of an injection of revenue into the Capital via increased tourism revenue, supplier contracts, and opportunities for profit maximisation for corporate sponsors. They promise a regeneration of the East End of London, more sports facilities accessible to the general public, and more affordable housing for Londoners.



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However, the Games bring threats as well as opportunities. Most notably, according to Christian charity *More Than Gold*, the threat of increased prostitution, sex trafficking, homelessness and begging. *More Than Gold* co-ordinates church responses to major sports-events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup, and the very fact that such an organisation exists proves testament to the humanistic issues that appear consistently in a country when a sporting mega-event comes to town.

### ***The Olympics to End Homelessness in the Capital?***

The 2012 Games have oiled the ideological wheels of change, particularly with regard to ambitions to end homelessness. Homeless Link, a national homelessness charity, made the 2012 Games the goal for a timeline to end the scourge of homelessness in the Capital. The Government also

launched a homelessness campaign called *No-one Left Out: Communities Ending Rough Sleeping*. The current Mayor Boris Johnson also pledged to end homelessness.

Targeting homelessness in the Capital is a great place to start in tackling homelessness in the UK, as half of all rough sleepers are currently located in London. If the numbers of rough sleepers in London are not decimated in the years preceding the Olympics, then LOCOG and the Government have a major problem on their hands; a potential 'sweeping the homeless off the streets' PR problem, which has humanistic, ethical and logistical implications. Such a problem has occurred at many other Games; for example, controversy recently arose in Sydney (2000) and Atlanta (1996) as a result of forcible removal of the homeless from Olympic cities during the Games. This forcible removal of the homeless was implemented in both cities in order to present as impeccable a facade as possible for Games-time visitors. This issue was also something of a concern at the recent Beijing and Vancouver Games.

### ***Tackling Homelessness in the UK***

In terms of Government policies on homelessness, the number of people sleeping rough in England has reportedly dropped by about 75% in the 13 years that the Labour Government sat in power. The number of rough sleepers in 2009 was around 4,000 and it remains to be seen how this number might be affected by Games-time.

London-based initiatives have now received a significant boost from the Olympic *Personal Best* programme. Personal Best runs in the areas of Camden, Lewisham, Hackney, Southwark, Haringey,

Westminster, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea and Lambeth and offers disadvantaged Londoners the opportunity to participate in training programmes that could lead to employment. It is expected that around 7,000 people will benefit by gaining a qualification, building their self esteem, gaining work experience and gaining transferable skills via participation in a volunteering programme.

Personal Best is being funded by the LDA and the LSC. It is being supported by the London 2012 Organising Committee, the Department for Media, Culture and Sport, JobCentre Plus, Greater London Volunteering and London boroughs. So far, Personal Best has been trialled in 11 boroughs with 875 Londoners taking part, and current figures show that 14.5% of participants have already moved onto either full or part time employment, with 23.5% opting to pursue further education of some kind. The Personal Best training includes subjects such as Volunteering and the Olympics, becoming a volunteer, equality and diversity, customer relations, emergencies and basic fire awareness, public safety, conflict resolution in a public setting, and developing team and interpersonal skills.

Tom Russell, Group Director for Olympic Legacy at the LDA, commented that: "Personal Best can be a truly life changing experience. We have already seen participants turn their fortunes round through our pilot scheme. They have gained a new confidence and achieved that first job or qualification. We want to deliver an Olympic legacy now by helping Londoners of all backgrounds to benefit from the opportunities linked to the 2012 Games. Through Personal Best we expect thousands of people to be

leading new careers before 2012 contributing to a successful London for decades to come."

Mary Conneely, the Learning and Skills Council's Regional Director for Regeneration in London said that; "Personal Best has been developed to support the Olympic and Paralympic Games and ensure we leave a real and lasting legacy. It is hugely important, not just for the Games, but for each individual to gain vital skills and qualifications to set them up for life. Participants beginning their journey with Personal Best have a fantastic opportunity to achieve their personal goals and maximise their potential" Similarly, Mayor of London Boris Johnson attested to the success that the Programme has already achieved: "Many of those who have already taken part have now found jobs and others are further developing their skills with more training or volunteering at major events across the capital."

### ***Homelessness in Vancouver during the Winter 2010 Games***

Before the Games were awarded to Vancouver, great concerns already existed in relation to the lure of Vancouver to the homeless, due to its location, beautiful natural scenery, year-round temperate climate, all enhanced due to the positive impact that a mega-event might offer. Such fears were legitimate, as they were based on observations of a sharp rise in homelessness that occurred in 1986 as a result of the Expo '86 event.

One major reason for this increase was the decision by Single Room Occupancy Hotels to evict existing clients in order to rent out their rooms at greatly increased prices during the event. Sadly, many people were driven out of their Single Room

Occupancy accommodation as a result and, sadly, unable to afford alternatives, died or became severely ill on the streets.

As a result of this problem, the Vancouver Olympic Organising Committee guaranteed the protection of rental housing stock to ensure that no residents were displaced, evicted, made homeless or made to face unreasonable increases in rent during Games-time. Such a guarantee was partially successful, although rising property prices in Vancouver (partly due to the Olympic effect) led to increased sales of real estate, where Single Rate Occupancy housing was sold off at a profit. These sales resulted in inevitable evictions of existing tenants who could not find alternative, similarly cheap replacement housing.



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Vancouver's downtown East Side region is the poorest part of the City, and it is sensible to look within this community to understand how well the homelessness issue was really tackled. Indeed, the contrast between the greatest sports show on earth in the beautifully developed centre of Vancouver, and the grinding poverty of East Side is stark. During

the Games, the East Side played host to hundreds of rough sleepers who were housed temporarily in churches.

"There have certainly been some improvements but when you are spending \$6.9 billion on the Olympics, it's not been that much," commented Ric Matthews, a First United Church Minister who conducts services in the East Side area of Vancouver. Matthews commented that "The Olympics are a celebration of bringing the world together. But you just have to look around you here in Downtown Eastside to see how we have two worlds living next to each other in one city, the mainstream and the marginalised." It is fair to argue that, while nearly C\$7 billion (£4.2 billion) has been invested in the Games themselves, projects that tackle abject poverty have received comparatively little funding.

However, there is also evidence that positive movements have been made to tackle homelessness. Supporters of the Games point to the multiple investments in low-income housing and new temporary shelters that have greatly offset potential problems for many that would otherwise have become homeless. One might also observe that the 'street cleaning' of Beijing by the authorities did not occur to the same extent at Vancouver in 2010.

### ***Prostitution and the Olympic Games***

Prostitution is also a particularly worrying phenomenon that tends to accompany sporting mega-events, with the Olympic and Paralympic Games being no exception.

According to a recent report in The Telegraph Newspaper, the number of prostitutes working near

the main Olympic site in Stratford, East London, has reportedly doubled already since work began on the stadium, with an accompanying rise in cases of sexually transmitted diseases. Similarly, police and council staff in the five London boroughs surrounding the main Olympic site have already reported a sharp rise in the number of prostitutes on the streets, from around 125 to more than 250. If such a rise has already occurred two years in advance of the Games, one might only dread the increase that London might experience when the Games actually arrive in town!

Luckily, LOCOG have taken a proactive approach to dealing with this problem. Tessa Jowell, Labour Olympics Minister, held meetings with officials from the Vancouver Winter Olympics to try to learn from their experiences in dealing with prostitution (Vancouver reportedly experienced a five-fold increase in the number of sex workers as a result of the 2010 Winter Games). Jowell was quoted as saying that: "Trafficking women for prostitution is a vile trade and we need to treat very seriously any suggestion the Olympics might encourage it".

### ***START THE DISCUSSION***

- Why does crime generally increase when the Olympics come to town?
- Is this problem specific to the Olympics or do they occur with every mega event?

- Choose one city and research the statistics relating to homelessness and crime in that area.
- What measures were taken to fight the problems in your chosen city? Do you think enough was done and do you think the initiatives were successful?
- What can London 2012 learn from these stories?

### ***FIND OUT MORE***

Homeless Direct - to access the following downloadable .pdf reports ;

<http://www.homelessdirect.org.uk/inyourarea/london/policy/olympics>:

- [Fair Play for Housing Rights](#) - report on mega-events, the Olympics and housing rights from Centre on Housing Rights & Evictions (COHRE), 2007
- [Home Games](#) - a report on the possible housing and regeneration legacies of the 2012 Olympic games, including legacies in other recent host cities, 2007
- [A lasting legacy for London?](#) - looking at employment, skills, community participation and other areas. London Assembly report, May 2007.

[The Employment and Skills legacy - London Assembly report, 2007](#)

***CREDITS***

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