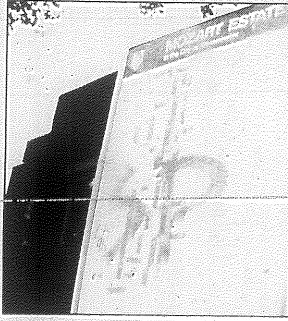


MUSIC TO THE

One man with one vision has helped bored youngsters reach their true potential. VICTORIA BARLOW looks at what makes Sam Essien tick



ON A sprawling housing estate with 800 homes, it is not an unusual sight to see gangs of bored youngsters hanging around street corners.

And on the Mozart Estate in Queen's Park these youths have gained a reputation as teenage tearaways committing petty crime and terrorising elderly people.

It is a problem which Westminster residents, police and councillors have challenged over the years.

Yet it is also a situation that is gradually – and finally – changing with crime crackdowns such as the latest scheme to evict families of consistently troublesome youths.

Although the estate has not been targeted in the recent Government plans to revamp run-down housing estates, a dedicated team of people on the Mozart Estate have been working to transform the 34 blocks of flats into stylish family homes.

Apart from the dedicated team of council employees there is one man working to realise his vision for the estate's youth.

Sam Essien prefers to stay in the shadows. He won't reveal his age and divulges little of his own background.

But when he speaks of his football and music projects, Sam is animated and displays the passion which motivates his young followers.

“Now kids are demanding more. Perhaps it's a result of constantly changing technology but they want to be entertained, they want more stimulation.”

He's not a council employee and volunteers his time for free.

His commitment to his projects and the community is not measured in wages but in the remarkable achievements of young people who have little funding and no permanent meeting place.

The South Kilburn Football Club is known as the best youth team in London after winning the Harrow Youth League and it has gained recognition throughout the country after winning the national Snickers Minifit League on August 1.

Yet this is a team that has no sponsor, no club-house and no training pitch of its own.

Set up five years ago, the South Kilburn Football Club started when Randolph Phillips (Sam's friend) was asked by his son to coach him and a small group of friends.

Randolph asked Sam for help and soon the team started to meet regularly for training at Paddington Recreation Ground in Crompton Street.

As the team improved and won minor London league games, Sam no longer had to recruit players but was inundated with requests for try-outs.

The success of former players speaks volumes for Sam and the club.

Junior Agogo, 19, is now in the Sheffield Wednesday youth team while three other former players Daniel Lewis, Rio Ellis and Justin Wilson have started training with Fulham.

Despite his success, Sam has to battle to keep the club in credit at the bank.

His attempts to find sponsorship have been met



EVERYONE'S A WINNER: Youngsters proudly show off one of their cups

with little response and now the club has been told the use of a grass pitch in Shepherd's Bush has been withdrawn.

The Harrow League is a grass-based competition and Sam is having difficulties finding a pitch.

He said: "Most clubs have their own pitch and club-house. It's something we aspire to if only we could raise the money. With our own club house we

would have a venue for fundraising events and we could keep ourselves going.

"At the moment it's a struggle. We are still over-drawn on last season's bank account.

"It's a constant battle for us. The boys are still achieving great things on the pitch but behind the scenes it's a different story. They don't know the extent of the difficulties and we won't put pressure

on them by telling them our worries.

I have approached several companies for sponsorship. JD Sports provided the strip during the Harrow League but they didn't support us during the national competition.

"It's all about vision and investing in the team. These boys are rising stars. If JD Sports had stuck with us they would have seen the company name all over television on Sky Sports."

The club is kept going by small grants and hand-outs from charitable organisations and from the limited amount of coaching Sam and Randolph give to private groups.

“Getting into the system as a youth worker doesn't interest me. I just want to get on with what I do without being tied to rules, regulations and bureaucracy.”

Sam has not given up on the club but he has diverted some of his energy elsewhere – into a music project for young DJs, dancers and singers.

He said: "The football club will survive and I will always be a part of it. My new challenge has restored my motivation to give the kids something positive to do with their time."

The Scenario Music Group was set up as a one-off project funded by Greater SFB – the body which oversees the Government's single regeneration budget used to improve facilities on the Mozart Estate.

Sam was given £500 to put together a music group to perform in Westbourne 2000 – a showcase of young talent from arts centres held last month at Meanwhile Gardens, Elkstone Road in North Kensington.

After bringing together youngsters who had never met but had expressed an interest in music, Sam helped the group develop their show but left the content to the performers.

The show was so well-received, the group, by now firm friends, decided to perform at the Notting Hill Carnival.

Sam said: "I didn't tell them what to do. I had to stand back and let them get on with it. Once they'd decided what they wanted I organised the sound system, generator and staging."

"We played from noon until 7pm on both Carnival days and drew in large crowds."

Such was Scenario's success that Sam hopes to put on a regular event called Hall of Fame to showcase talent and develop a positive sense of community.

“It's always the way with kids, they think the system is against them and that they can just ride along and be alright. They think they are invincible.”

But the obstacles of funding and finding venues have appeared once more. Sam calculates it will cost £2,000 to hire a venue, print promotional leaflets, pay for security staff and rent a sound system.

He has returned to the well-trodden path of approaching groups which give donations to youth projects.

Despite his hard work and dedication, Sam does