

SPORTS TO EMPOWER

Sport is often seen as a form of entertainment and, if merged with education, it can become an important tool to develop the youth of South Africa.



Growing up in Cape Town was not easy because of the community I grew up in. There were drugs, alcohol, gangsters and violence.

And for one to belong in that community, you had to do some of those things. I chose to be different – I played football – to keep away from the negative things happening around me.

I was fortunate to have a family like mine. They encouraged me and were passionate about my decision to play soccer. I don't regret playing football because it kept me away from troubles and has made me the person I am today," says Shaun Bartlett, soccer star and Unicef ambassador.

Sport improves the overall health and physical development of children, and allows them to have fun while being challenged.

Bartlett and other sporting legends have pledged to tour township schools to teach the youth about how sport can change their lives.

"I jumped at the opportunity to tour schools and show the youth how sport has changed my life and that it can do the same for them," says Bartlett. "I relate very well to the challenges that the youth of today are facing. I also come from a community that is full of gangsters, drug abuse and violence. Now I use my experiences and background to show the youth that they can also choose to participate in sport, to stay away from gangs or drugs."

It is difficult for children in the townships to fully engage in sporting activities because of lack of facilities and resources. And this is partly why Unicef and its partners have initiated The Safe, Caring and Child-Friendly

Schools campaign. The campaign provides sporting equipment and training for teachers and the community – to benefit the children. The programme aims to reach 585 schools over the next three years. The participating schools were chosen because of their high level of violence and low pass rates. "It's disappointing that violence and drugs still exist in schools," says Bartlett. "But I'm hopeful and very positive that, if we as sporting stars go out to schools and teach children to keep going and be positive, they'll have a bright future. And if we manage to give the youth other options such as sport, we will have good results and eventually overcome these problems."

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