

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES

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*"Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does."*

*Nelson Mandela*

Sport really does have the power to change lives. This is not always about competing in world events or winning medals, but in the way it can improve our lives. The following collection of real life stories shows us examples of how LGBTI people across Scotland have changed their lives through sport and physical activity. Changes such as:

- **Improved physical and mental health**
- **Increased social connectedness**
- **Strengthened individual identity**
- **Greater resilience to deal with life**
- **Increased sense of belonging**
- **Feeling safe, accepted and included**

There are many inclusive sports clubs and groups across Scotland. Details for many of these clubs are contained in the booklet, or you can get in touch with us at LEAP Sports to find out more.

*"Success in sport means leaving every session knowing you gave it your all. You can only really do that when you are free to be your true authentic self. That's the key to moving from surviving to thriving. And it's the best feeling ever."*

*Claire Harvey,  
Gay Paralympian, Team GB*



## LEAP SPORTS SCOTLAND

LEAP Sports Scotland is committed to breaking down the structural, social and personal barriers which prevent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people across the country from accessing, participating and excelling in Scottish sports.

We work towards increasing the visibility and inclusion of LGBTI people in mainstream sports and we challenge discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity within sport. We work with LGBTI sports groups and are committed to both community and sports development.

We also work with national sports governing bodies, sports partners and mainstream sports organisations & groups to deliver training and help develop their policies & practices around sexual orientation, gender identity and inclusion.

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# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... AL'S STORY



Edinburgh Fronrunners (EFR) formed about six months after I came out and by pure fluke I happened to turn up to the first official club run. Up to this point I'd been running on my own for about three years, frequently but over short distances, and it had become an essential release for a lot of the feelings and frustrations I was processing as I was coming out to myself.

Within a few months from that first club run my pace, distance, and overall fitness had shot up, and for the first time I felt part of the LGBT community. And then in May 2014 EFR had its first official outing in a race, in our first official club kit, and suddenly there was the rest of the Fronrunners movement too. Fronrunners from Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester and London turned up to race, and a large crowd joined us to socialise and go out on the town afterwards. Since then EFR have hosted members of Fronrunners clubs all over the UK, the US, Canada, France and more on our weekly runs; and we've joined GFR, NFR, and MFR for events and races. I now know runners all over the world, and have standing invitations on several continents.

I love that EFR is as inclusive and welcoming as we can make it, regardless of where you fit on the LGBT spectrum, or off it, and regardless of running ability; I still remember how intimidating it was for me to turn up the first time and I was already a runner, so it's important to me that we maintain and improve on this accessibility.

To me, running is an essential part of my life and self-identity. It's a way of keeping fit and healthy, feeling good, dealing with stress, and having fun.

*"To me, running is an essential part of my life and self-identity. It's a way of keeping fit and healthy, feeling good, dealing with stress, and having fun."*

With EFR, it's now also a major part of my social life: I've met lots of properly lovely people and made some awesome friends all over the country. I'm now planning my year and holidays around the racing calendar, and I've gone from the closet to being part of an international LGBT community of runners. Quite some transformation from a few years ago!

## Edinburgh Fronrunners

Edinburgh Fronrunners is Edinburgh's running club for LGBT people and their friends. Membership is open to all, regardless of age, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation or running ability; this is reflected in our hugely diverse membership. We are also a Jog Scotland group, running regular walk-to-jog training programmes. We have a parallel walking group.

[www.edinburghfronrunners.org](http://www.edinburghfronrunners.org)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... ANNIE'S STORY

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In 2005 I spotted an ad for an initiative to set up a number of LGBT sports groups in Edinburgh. I had really enjoyed badminton at school and was keen to be part of establishing a friendly, welcoming group at Meadowbank which celebrated diversity as well as helped members improve their fitness and badminton skills.

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It was fantastic to be part of a group of folks with the focus on having fun, making new friends, and taking part in sports in an atmosphere which felt safe and free from gender restrictions or assumptions re age, race, sexuality or ability. The group is well run and supportive.

Little did I know the first evening that I went along that I would meet the woman who became my life partner (and is a demon on the court); that we would go on to take part in competitions with other LGBT badminton teams from around the UK and Europe, and that we would go on to make such strong and positive friendships with others in the group.

The group is always evolving, as members move away or take a rest and new members join. New members are always welcome with the Tuesday group available for beginners and the Thursday for more experienced players. We are currently particularly keen to encourage more women to join. It is great that there is flexibility for folks to come along purely for the joy of the game, or to get to know other members. It's a great way to unwind after work and to celebrate competitiveness, diversity, and the buzz of racing about the court.



*"We would go on to make such strong and positive friendships with others in the group."*

## *Racqueteers*

The Racqueteers is an LGBTI badminton club which meets every Thursday from 7-9pm at Meadowbank Stadium. The group plays more at an intermediate level and takes part in some friendly competitions. Come along, have fun, enjoy meeting the other members for a friendly game and a social get-together afterwards.

Email: [info@theracqueteers](mailto:info@theracqueteers)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... ASHLEIGH & CONNIE'S STORY

When we met one of us was involved in roller derby but after a few leg breaks we had to find another accepting competitive sport. Connie started powerlifting-style training as a means to improve roller derby so it seemed a natural transition.

At our first competition we were overwhelmed at how accepting everyone was and quickly made friends with people who were very supportive of us as a couple and forward thinking in their views of gender and sexual identity, which was a relief. There is still some improvement to be made, but Scottish Powerlifting's Diversity Officer has been working with equality organisations to continue these positive steps in the right direction.

We both have a history with anxiety disorders and in the past have struggled to overcome the feeling of not being fit enough or belonging. Although powerlifting isn't necessarily a team sport, there is a strong feeling of belonging and support.

The best part about powerlifting for us was that there was such a broad range of female figures, a mix of different body types, personalities, and sexualities. It's the first time we felt like we didn't have to fit a specific box or stereotype and were accepted for who we are, and excelled at being ourselves. It has given us a newfound confidence with body image and helped improve our mental health around believing in ourselves and what we are actually capable of instead of letting the anxiety of these situations take over.



*"Not many sports can bring you together as a couple and improve your identity and mental health."*

We love that we can train together and compete together while still planning our marriage and the starting of a family. Not many sports can bring you together as a couple and improve your identity and mental health, but with powerlifting we feel we've got all that and are very excited for our future and the future of the sport!

## Powerlifting

Scottish Powerlifting is a hugely diverse and inclusive sporting organisation, with members as far afield as Hawick and Orkney, ages 16 to 74 and everything in-between. If you can pick up a rucksack, or a shopping bag – you can pick up a barbell – check out:

[www.scottishpowerlifting.com](http://www.scottishpowerlifting.com)

 [scottishpowerlifting](https://www.facebook.com/scottishpowerlifting)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... DAVID'S STORY



I joined the Thebans in 2010 and it's been one of the best decisions of my life. I'd played rugby for a few years at high school and in truth, I didn't enjoy it; but when in my late 20s I wanted to make new friends and try a new challenge, rugby seemed an obvious – if slightly daunting – choice.

Six years on, playing rugby is fantastic. It's a chance to show my competitive, combative side in a way my banking career doesn't enable me to. A chance to be part of a team; a real team where you fight for each other and have a big role to play. And whilst it can be brutal and it hurts sometimes, it's a sport built on mutual respect and supporting each other. It's amazing how quickly a few bruises or a broken arm heal after the final whistle, a hot shower and a couple of pints!

Rugby is an inclusive sport and the Thebans gave me an amazing welcome. I was practically new to the game but it wasn't an issue – we have great coaches and great facilities, so all the ingredients for learning and developing are there. Another key ingredient is pubs – after all, we're rugby players and we like to socialise... I've made fantastic friends not just within the club, but among the many teams, both gay and straight, we've played across the UK, Europe and beyond. I even met my other half, Jack, on tour. But being a Theban is a serious business too, and as our committee's Publicity Secretary I have extra responsibilities and am learning business skills to go with my rugby. That's the impact rugby has on my life; and the more I'm part of it, the bigger the difference it makes.



*"A chance to be part of a team; a real team where you fight for each other and have a big role to play."*

## Caledonian Thebans RFC

Caledonian Thebans RFC are Scotland's first and leading inclusive rugby team, based at Edinburgh's BT Murrayfield Stadium. Founded in 2002, the Thebans develop both new and experienced players, whether gay or straight, and represent Scotland in international rugby tournaments across the world.

 ThebansRugby  
 thebansrugby

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... DOUGLAS' STORY

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When I first came out at 18, there seemed relatively few options for young gay people, other than to go to pubs or discos, of which there was just a small handful in Glasgow. As someone who has always suffered slightly from social anxiety, the idea of standing about in noisy bars or clubs, surrounded by complete strangers was well out of my comfort zone and just made me more nervous and less confident about myself.

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However, one evening when I visited the Vintners Bar in Clyde Street early in 1980 (now long gone and replaced by an internet cafe and multi-storey budget hotel) I happened to bump into a Gay News vendor and took this opportunity to buy my first copy. I was pleasantly surprised to read the listings section and find out that there were various special interest groups for gay and lesbian people across the country. One that caught my attention was the Gay Outdoor Club (GOC).

I had got my first serious road cycle for my 18th birthday and had already started using it to explore the fantastic countryside on the edge of Glasgow. I had also been hill-walking in the Kilsyth Hills and Campsie Fells a couple of times when I was in the Boys Brigade. In my naivety though it had somehow never occurred to me that gay people also enjoyed these kinds of activities. So without delay, I sent off my stamped addressed envelope for more information about GOC – we had no Internet then! It wasn't long before I ventured out on my first event – a cycle-ride from Edinburgh to Peebles and back in April 1980. The contrast with the gay scene was like night and day – it was such a positive experience to feel relaxed doing something I enjoyed in good company.



A few months later I ventured along to my first weekend trip with GOC in Argyll and climbed my first Munro. Since then I have climbed around 160 of the Munros and cycled thousands of miles around the entire country, mostly with GOC and more recently with a younger similar organisation, Outdoorlads (ODL). Being a member of both organisations has also given me the opportunity to try various other outdoor pursuits, like windsurfing, kayaking, mountain-biking and rock-climbing.

Having got so much from GOC and ODL, I've naturally felt I owed it to give something back to both and over the years have been glad to help both organisations thrive by leading many events – something I continue to do with great enthusiasm and commitment.

## Outdoor Activity Groups

Gay Outdoor Club and Outdoorlads run regular activities across Scotland and the rest of the UK including hillwalking, cycling, day walks, weekend trips, water based sports and much more. Check out their calendars via their websites:

[www.goc.org.uk](http://www.goc.org.uk)  
[www.outdoorlads.com](http://www.outdoorlads.com)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... EWAN'S STORY

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Even though I have spent three years at a sports-orientated university, forms of exercise where I can actually socialise comfortably with those around me have been sadly lacking. Before I hit puberty, I swam regularly with friends and family. One of my favourite treats was to go to a local outdoor pool in the summer. Unfortunately my discomfort with myself began to hamper that.

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Once I began my transition, any form of indoor sport where I'd have to use a changing room became problematic. Before I changed into my exercise gear, I would get questioning looks on my presence in the ladies. But using the gents has always felt out of the question. Poor experiences in bathrooms meant I certainly wasn't going to strip off in a male-gendered space.

So I withdrew from engaging socially and, though I adore my solo sports, I was lonely with it. Attending the first Seahorses group was a bit nerve-racking. I hadn't gone swimming in 6 years at that point, I felt like my fitness levels had plummeted. I spent an age trying on different combinations of swimgear to find some comfort. I almost didn't leave the house that Sunday.

But I did and I haven't regretted it for a second. Going to Seahorses has given me back something I didn't really know I was missing: the support of community in sport. I stepped into a changing room without external fear and I socialised with a group of people of all ages, identities and body types and where no-one made assumptions based on my own body. Not only could I exercise but I was able to interact without shame with the people surrounding me. That was something beautiful and liberating.



*"I stepped into a changing room without external fear and I socialised with a group of people of all ages, identities and body types and where no-one made assumptions based on my own body."*

## Seahorses Swimming Club

Seahorses was founded in 2016 as Scotland's first dedicated swimming club for transgender and non-binary people.

Everyone is welcome whether serious about swimming or just enjoying a splash around. We ensure that staff in the venues we use have been trained in trans awareness. Check out our Facebook page for up to date times, venues and dates.

 [Seahorsesglasgow](#)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... GINA'S STORY



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As I reach bus pass age there are various reasons for keeping active. I transitioned nine years ago and work in a very public environment and am well known across the Scottish Borders. Actual accessibility to different sports in this area is probably as much of a barrier to anyone and not just LGBT people.  
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Personally I actively mountain bike and motorcycle, which are both solo sports, and also I am actively involved with Jedburgh Badminton Club. I must confess I hadn't pursued joining a mixed club – perhaps it was not being local and also for how I may be accepted. But then I thought 'what the heck'. I've been more than welcomed in the club, as far as I'm concerned they accept me for me being Gina, and it's my personality that sees me through.

I've been in my work for 24 years, so obviously some staff knew me before and after transition and unfortunately this I feel has been an issue for some. With a new venture such as the badminton club, where I was an unknown, it is easier to stamp your mark as they've only ever known me as being Gina. The motorcycle scene is a difficult one, as the leather and exhaust fumed ambience is quite testosterone-filled.

I've always found that trying to be as confident appearing as you can, holding your chin up and smiling goes a long way to being accepted for who you are. Participation in any sport or hobby is so important, both for mental and physical reasons.

*"I've been more than welcomed in the club, as far as I'm concerned they accept me for me being Gina."*

It's even more so for those classed as having 'mental health issues'. The world needs educated into the fact – just because someone is different to you, for whatever reason, doesn't make them be open to scorn or vilification.

## *Jedburgh Badminton Club*

Established in 1974 and based in the Scottish Borders, Jedburgh Badminton Club (JBC) caters for all ages and abilities, beginners through to Border League level, young and old from the age of 6 to 60. JBC is an inclusive club - check out the website for more details  
[www.jedburghbadmintonclub.co.uk](http://www.jedburghbadmintonclub.co.uk)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... HEATHER'S STORY

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I have a strange relationship with running. I struggle at persevering with things that I'm not very good at. Skiing, playing the clarinet and driving are all things that I've tried and mostly failed at, and have given up unless it's an emergency. (Well, that's driving: there's never been a clarinet emergency yet.)

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So when I first turned up at Glasgow Fronrunners and couldn't run more than 50 metres without thinking my lungs were going to explode, I didn't think I would stick with it. However, in 2015 I ran three half marathon races, and the club was a major part of my transition from someone who couldn't run down the road to someone who can happily run that 13.1 miles.

The club's been a huge part of it because my running didn't really start to improve until I started attending regularly, pushing myself to go faster and further with the help of the jog leaders, and most importantly gaining the confidence to believe that I was a runner. I knew I could comfortably run about 15k but had never had much success with going further than that. I could never get into The Zone and feeling tired, bored and sore would always stop me. A training group with Frontrunners, with a baby-steps approach of increasing the distance by about a mile a week worked wonders.

Learning from more experienced runners about nutrition and pacing also made a huge difference. I now proudly race in my club t-shirt, which is rather different to a couple of years ago when I was too embarrassed to enter races as a club member because I thought I was too slow. I still have tired days when I think I can't be bothered or that I will be slower than everyone else.



*"The club was a major part of my transition from someone who couldn't run down the road to someone who can happily run that 13.1 miles."*

But I always surprise myself when I put my trainers on and get out there, and I finally understand the role that your mind plays in running any kind of distance. And I have a great group of pals to run with too.

## Glasgow Fronrunners

Glasgow Fronrunners is an inclusive community-based road-running group whose aim is to promote health and wellbeing in the LGBT community. We are a friendly club and welcome new members, supporting runners of all levels and abilities from complete beginners right through to competitive runners.

[www.glasgowfronrunners.org](http://www.glasgowfronrunners.org)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... JULES' STORY



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The LGBT Basketball group is so much fun. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what it is that makes me feel safer, more accepted or more welcome at this group as I think a number of things contribute to it.

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Taking part in sport requires confidence and my confidence gets stronger the moment I turn up to the group. Whilst my sexuality is barely mentioned, I get this buzz from being around other LGBT people, like a quiet recognition that we have something in common. As we often socialise after the session I can also chat about my wife and what's going on for me in my life, without feeling like I'm in the minority. I have years of experience of enduring 'locker-room banter' about boyfriends, people's social and love-lives and I can be part of that now, whilst being completely myself.

We've also had several trans players join the group, and they have told me that by just seeing the 'LGBT' written in our name, they expected the group to be safe and inclusive. One person in particular talked about how impossible it felt for them to go along to a 'men's' group, feeling so much smaller and less masculine than the people they'd expect to see. At LGBT Basketball, all genders are welcome and we love it that way. It makes the game more interesting, more inclusive and closes the divide between genders in sport.

Having the sessions based locally makes them feel really accessible and I particularly enjoy getting use out of a multi-purpose community centre. We turn up just after the kids' Karate sessions and just before the local men's 5-a-side team meet.

*"I can also chat about my wife and what's going on for me in my life, without feeling like I'm in the minority."*

Other groups and activities are going on alongside and around our group sessions, making them feel normal, and a fully integrated part of wider community life.

## *The LGBT Basketball Group*

The LGBT Basketball Group is a friendly and informal group for beginners and players alike. We do basic drills and enjoy friendly games to build our skills and confidence. You are welcome along, whatever your fitness level. The group is based in Leith, Edinburgh and you can get in touch with us here:  
[thesonics@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:thesonics@hotmail.co.uk)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... MARK'S STORY



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For a few weeks in September 2015 my best mate had been coaxing me into joining the newest all-inclusive club in Glasgow – the Glasgow Alphas. Since I was 23 I have been heavily involved in sport in both my personal life and working life, but rugby is one activity I had never thought about taking up.  
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On one cold September night I went along with my best mate to Whitecraigs RUFC in Glasgow; sitting in the changing room surrounded by a group of guys I had never met was, at first, unnerving. Since I came out I have found it hard to be around guys as I guess I always thought, even in the LGBTI community, there would be a lad bravado attached to such sports as football and rugby. Because of this 99% of my friends all my life have been female. However, my initial attitude could not have been more wrong. For years I've been shy when it comes to guys and if you put me in a room full of men I would fade myself into the background; now, because of the Alphas, this is no longer the case.

I'm much more confident in myself and my skills, and I've come to understand that my outsider's view of lad bravado couldn't be more different to reality because, to be honest, it isn't there. Our club is the same as any other sport, be it football, rugby, hockey or running: it's a group of LGBTI people coming together to play a sport, to get fit and to form a team. The Alphas have truly changed me: not only am I much more confident when doing sport as a whole, but I now have a group of friends I am more than proud to call my brothers.

*"The Alphas have truly changed me: not only am I much more confident when doing sport as a whole, but I now have a group of friends I am more than proud to call my brothers."*

## Glasgow Alphas

Glasgow Alphas are Glasgow's first and only LGBT inclusive rugby club.

Established in September 2015, we primarily provide a comfortable and relaxed environment for anyone to come and give rugby a try, while also promoting LGBTI inclusivity within sports in general and the wider community.

[www.pitchero.com/clubs/glasgowalphas](http://www.pitchero.com/clubs/glasgowalphas)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... MICK'S STORY

I joined Saltire Thistle four years ago after seeing posters advertising the team in gay bars around Glasgow. The idea of a gay-friendly football team intrigued me – I had always played football growing up and although I was still playing regularly at the time, I was finding myself falling a little bit out of love with the sport as I felt that I had little in common with the guys I was playing with.

Eventually I made contact with the team and was invited down to a training session. Although I was quite nervous initially, everyone made a big effort to make me feel welcome and I started to enjoy my football again. Playing in the GFSN league against other gay-friendly teams from around the UK has been a fantastic experience over the past few years and we also play in a local Glasgow league. Sometimes results might not go our way, but the team has a competitive spirit and we are not beaten easily.

On a personal level the club has had a significant effect on me. Meeting other gay people with similar sporting interests was not something I would have expected. The result is that I became more confident in myself and more secure in my sexuality. The club is very involved in the local gay community and enjoys the support of an extensive and eclectic mix of people (The Saltire Thistle Ladies Guild) which led to me expanding my social circle even further, beyond just football. Before I joined the club I never really spent much time in the gay community as I felt that I would not fit in, but I have realised that I could not have been more wrong.



*"I became more confident in myself and more secure in my sexuality."*

## Saltire Thistle

Saltire Thistle FC are the West of Scotland's LGBTI friendly football team, based in Glasgow. We play competitive weekly football in the GFSN and Glasgow Community and Cooperative Leagues. We are always looking for new members irrespective of sexuality, gender or background.

[www.clubwebsite.co.uk/saltirethistle](http://www.clubwebsite.co.uk/saltirethistle)

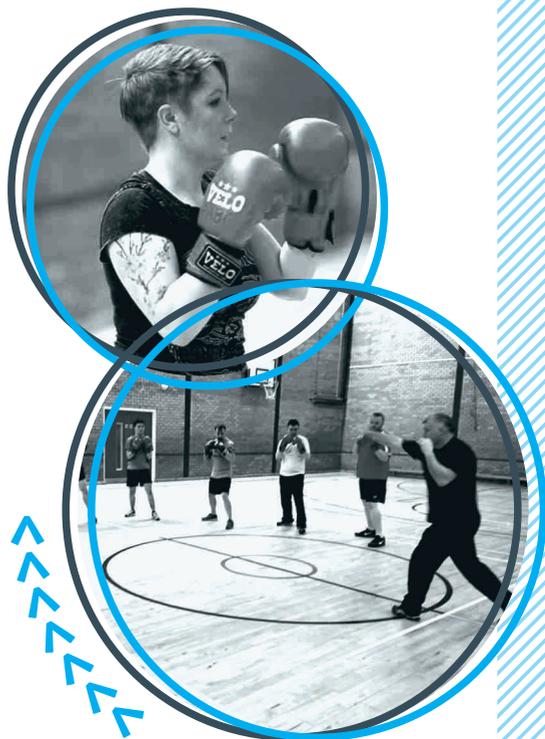
# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... SAMI'S STORY

I wanted to try boxing for over a year before I finally decided to go along to Knockout. The problem was that I wasn't too sure if I would be able to find a club that I would feel comfortable in. I decided to try Knockout and was really surprised.

At my first class I instantly felt relaxed and comfortable with everyone. I have attended many exercise classes and martial arts clubs and this is the friendliest, most welcoming group I have ever been part of. You really feel part of a team and we all encourage one another.

Over the course of a few sessions, I managed to improve my skills. I have joint problems and this was also putting me off, fearing boxing would be too physically demanding. I had to give up karate due to health. Our coach put my fears at ease. He encourages you to push yourself without overdoing it. The class incorporates a great warm up and cool down, minimising any muscle injuries. I haven't managed to make every class but can already see my fitness levels improving.

There is a lot more to boxing than I thought and I'm really enjoying the technical side of it – it's like playing a game of chess, you always need to be five steps ahead of your opponent. I'm totally hooked now and it's having such a positive effect on my life: I'm thinking more about what I eat now and I'm also making better choices with my spare time. As a full time carer for my son, sometimes all I want to do is sleep but I'm now dragging myself up and going to Knockout and walking or swimming on other days. I also like the social side of Knockout – it's a great way to meet new people with similar interests.



*"It's having such a positive effect on my life: I'm thinking more about what I eat now and I'm also making better choices with my spare time."*

## Knockout Glasgow

Knockout is a boxing club based in Glasgow for the LGBT community and friends, providing boxing training sessions, friendly sparring practice and a new pathway into the sport of boxing. All levels including complete beginners are welcome. Email us at:

[knockoutglasgow@gmail.com](mailto:knockoutglasgow@gmail.com)

or find us at:

 [knockoutglasgow](https://www.facebook.com/knockoutglasgow)

# SPORT CHANGES LIVES... STUART'S STORY

I have always enjoyed playing and watching football, so joined HotScots FC in 2008 as I was keen to make some more friends and improve my fitness.

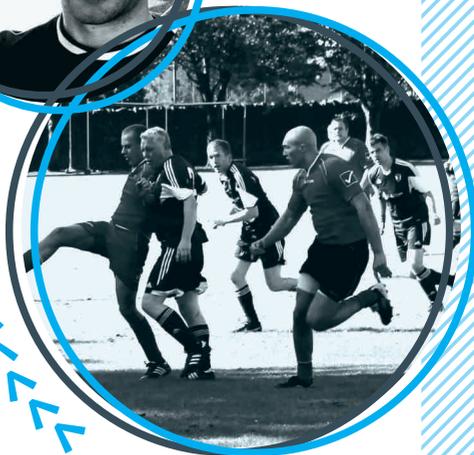
At the time, I wasn't out to my family and didn't have many LGBT friends so I felt that the HotScots could be a great opportunity for me to meet with like-minded people with similar interests. When I emailed HotScots, they were very welcoming and offered me the option to either join them at their next training session or at a social event they had organised.

After deciding to join the social, I joined the club – and I can't believe I am now in my eighth year as a member!

Since joining, I now have a close group of friends and I am much happier within myself. Also, I have come out to friends and family, with their reactions being even better than I thought they would.

With the HotScots participating in a UK-wide gay-friendly league I have had the opportunity to travel across the country with the team, and I have made friends with a number of people from other clubs. I was also able to play for the HotScots in international tournaments in Stockholm and in Antwerp – where I scored my first goal for the club! The competitions have been inclusive and varied between 5s and 11s, with opportunities to socialise with others as well as play football.

Not only has HotScots had a significant impact on my personal life, but playing football has helped me keep fit, and helped me become more comfortable within myself.



*“Since joining, I now have a close group of friends and I am much happier within myself.”*

I have made new friends and visited places that I wouldn't have otherwise.

The whole network has been very supportive, and eight years on I am still glad I made the decision to join the club!

## Hotscots FC

HotScots is a community club who welcome anyone with an interest in football and is honoured to be Scotland's first LGBT football team.

HotScots play weekly in the GFSN league as well as other tournaments around the world, and we pride ourselves on offering opportunities for all whilst remaining competitive on the pitch.

[www.hotscotsfc.com](http://www.hotscotsfc.com)



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