

Evaluation of the sportscotland Women and Girls Fund

Final report, September 2020



Research Scotland



Spiersbridge House
1 Spiersbridge Way
Glasgow
G46 8NG



0141 428 3972



nadia.hyder@researchscotland.org

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This report is supplemented with the following appendices:

- Appendix 1 – project summaries
- Appendix 2 – monitoring and evaluation approach
- Appendix 3 – profile of participants
- Appendix 4 – project case study (Scottish Fencing)
- Appendix 5 – participant stories

Note

This report was compiled from March to June 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. Although most of the work was complete, the sudden onset of new public health measures impacted on the final few weeks of the evaluation and project delivery. People delivering projects were not always able to gather feedback from participants and some modified their delivery. We have made use all the information that was available and included new learning from projects that modified their delivery in response to social distancing guidelines.

Executive summary

Introduction

sportscotland managed the Women and Girls Fund (the Fund) on behalf of the Scottish Government. The aim of the Fund was to support women and girls to engage in sport and physical activity. This aim was aligned to **sportscotland**'s wider priorities around engagement and inclusion, and Scottish Government's Active Scotland Outcomes Framework, which aims to:

- move people from being inactive to being active;
- support active people to remain active;
- help people develop confidence;
- help people improve their wellbeing; and
- address inequality and removing barriers to accessing physical activity.

The Fund was open to projects led by Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport (SGBs) or local authorities working in partnership with another organisation. It supported the development and delivery of 15 projects aiming to engage more women and girls in sport and physical activity.

This evaluation explores the outcomes achieved through the funded activity, in terms of physical activity, health and wellbeing, skills and confidence. It also explores partnership working, sustainability of the activity and the key factors for consideration when delivering activity for women and girls.

This evaluation is based on information gathered from project participants through focus groups and individual interviews, and monitoring information gathered in each project throughout the funded period. It also draws on information shared at two learning events.

Participation

In total, the programme reached approximately 3,268 women and girls. Most projects focused on direct engagement in physical activity. A few also offered wider support, or reached participants through another activity.

There was a wide variation in the size, type and duration of each project, with projects supporting as few as four participants to over 1,800.

Most participants were girls, and over half the participants (56%) were from one project which worked mostly with primary school girls. From the data gathered, 9% of participants identified as disabled. Around a quarter (24%) of these participants were from the two projects that targeted disabled women and girls.

Half of the projects delivered activity in areas of multiple deprivation. Some delivered all project activity in a deprived locality. Others delivered activity across different

regions and localities, with some blocks of activity targeted to areas of deprivation. A few projects targeted women and girls who might face additional barriers to accessing sport, due to wider disadvantages or social inequality. There was limited data available relating to ethnic origin, religion and sexual orientation. However, some projects did target minority ethnic groups or women who spoke English as an additional language.

Impact

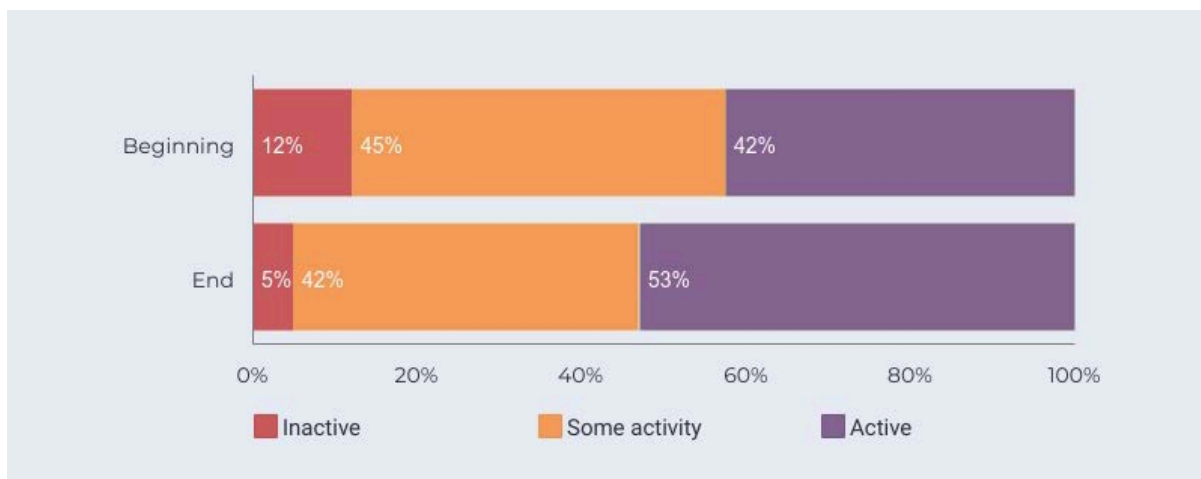
Physical activity

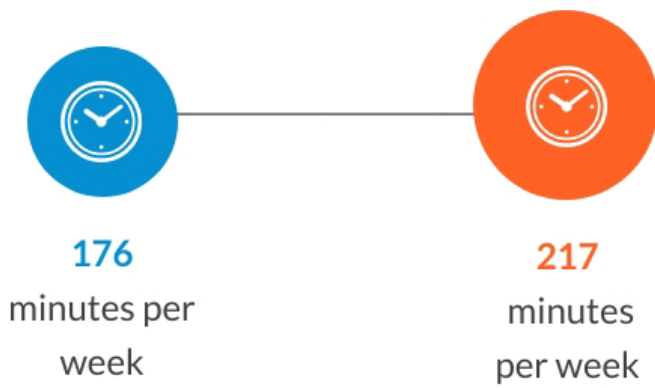
The Fund successfully supported women and girls to engage in physical activity and sport. Participants told us that taking part had increased their level of physical activity and a small proportion reported that without the funded project they would not have engaged in any physical activity.

Data gathered on self-reported physical activity levels for women and girls demonstrated a clear shift from participants being inactive, or participating in some activity, towards becoming 'active'.

Women

The proportion of women who were 'active' increased. More than half are now 'active' - doing at least 2.5 hours of physical activity per week.



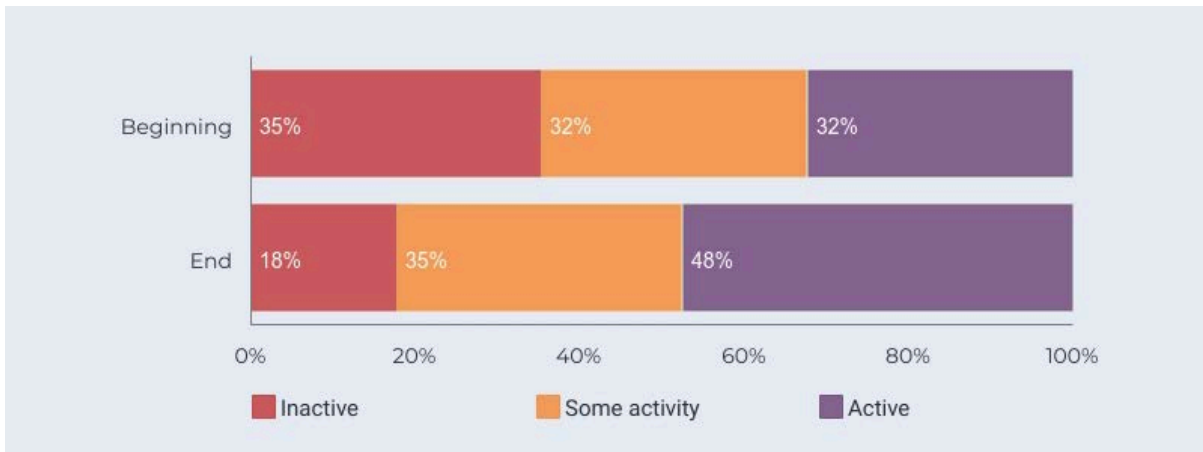


The average time spent being active per week increased from 176 to 217 minutes a week.

This is an increase of 41 minutes or 23%.

Girls

The proportion of girls who were 'active' increased, and the proportion of girls who were 'inactive' decreased, as demonstrated in the chart below.



Less than one third were 'active' and doing an hour or more of physical activity per day at the outset of the projects. Almost half were "active" at the end of the Fund.

More than a third of girls were inactive and doing less than half an hour of physical activity per day at the outset. This reduced to one fifth by the end of the Fund.



Beginning

The average amount of time that each girl spent being active per day increased from 48 minutes to 63 minutes.

This is an increase of 15 minutes a day, or 31%.



End

Participants indicated that they would keep active after the project was complete.

“I feel happier to be active again, not being a couch potato.” Participant

“It was fun and made me do exercising I wouldn’t normally do.” Participant

Health and wellbeing, confidence and skills

Over 90% of participants told us they felt healthier because of the project activity.

Has the project helped you feel...?	Women	Girls
Healthy	92%	93%
Confident	73%	89%
Close to other people	76%	-
Make friends	-	66%

Most participants we spoke with said that they enjoyed taking part and that having fun was an integral part of the activity. Many participants felt the activity helped improve their mental health - reducing stress, loneliness and anxiety. These benefits were often brought about through the combination of social and physical activity. Some participants also reported a positive effects on their physical health such as increased fitness, increased strength, improved physicality and loss of excess weight.

The improvements in health and wellbeing were closely linked to improvements in confidence. Participants reported that they felt more confident in themselves and their ability to try new things.

Participants said that group activities helped them develop teamwork and communication skills and some projects also offered opportunities for individuals to take on leadership roles. For some girls, the activity helped them improve their motivation and engagement at school.

Sustainability

Some projects offered a seamless route into further activity and club membership, which was taken up by many participants. Other projects developed a sustainable delivery model and would be able to continue achieving positive outcomes for women and girls beyond the funded period. For some projects, the Fund supported development of an existing project, or a pilot, which organisations hoped to continue.

Learning

Learning was an important element of the programme and was built in from the outset. **sportscotland** hosted two learning events during the funded period. The learning events allowed people managing and delivering funded projects to share ideas and experiences.

Our evaluation found that the key factors that enabled women and girls' engagement were:

- female-only sessions;
- working around family-life;
- inclusive activity;
- balancing fun and fitness;
- being part of a group; and
- digital platforms.

Across projects, women and girls said that they enjoyed participating in a female-only space. Planning sessions that fitted with caring responsibilities was important for many participants. Some women and girls reported that they preferred to participate with people of the same age or ability as themselves. This made them feel supported helped create a non-judgemental atmosphere.

Most projects recognised that it was important to balance the element of competition with personal development. Several projects planned competitions and events to encourage participants to demonstrate their new skills, and to consolidate their progress.

The coronavirus pandemic and lockdown required many projects to think creatively about how they could continue to offer activities. Some were able to use digital platforms for recorded and live-streamed sessions.

The key factors deliverers should consider when designing projects for women and girls emerged as:

- rapport and role models;
- adaptability;
- atmosphere;
- branding and marketing;
- cost, resources and equipment;
- opportunities for progression; and
- having a dedicated staff role.

The approach and individual personalities of staff delivering physical activity to women and girls influenced the engagement and retention of participants. Some projects used only female delivery staff to deliver activity, which worked well for participants who were nervous about starting physical activity.

Some projects identified champions for the activity, that the target group could relate to, in terms of age and ability. Others developed ambassadors for the sport who could promote the activity locally and mentor newcomers.

Some projects reported that the success of the project required a very open and flexible approach to delivery. For projects delivering across different localities, the approach was often different in each area, depending on what local partners and participants needed.

Projects tested different approaches in terms of the length of programmes and the duration of physical activity. Some projects encouraged participants to sign up for a fixed period of time, and others offered informal drop-in sessions. Where appropriate, the physical activity was complemented with other activities such as youth work or community support. Projects minimised the need for specialist equipment to make the activity as accessible as possible.

Some projects noted that the activity location was important and identified venues that were familiar and unthreatening for participants. A few projects used engaging marketing material and developed a brand identity for the project. This approach helped to raise awareness and reach more participants.

Most projects offered free physical activity sessions. However, a few projects requested a small fee from participants to support commitment and to build a sustainable basis for future activity. Some projects found it helpful to have a progression pathway in place for example through member clubs. This was helpful for participants who wanted to sustain their participation or to develop their skills further.

Recommendations

Targeted funding for women and girls

Targeted funding provides the additional resources organisations require to test out new approaches that engage under-represented women and girls in sport.

Recommendation: sportscotland and the sport sector should consider how it can support and enable organisations to test and mainstream new approaches to engage inactive and under-represented women and girls.

Targeting inactivity

Although inactive women and girls were engaged in this Fund, some were already quite active. A number of factors account for this. Some projects were designed to bring together a mix of levels or abilities. But also, the length of the fund was limited to one year of funding, to include project set up. That timescale was also shortened, by the public health situation which emerged early 2020. We think there is scope for further learning to support and engage the hardest to reach, inactive groups.

Recommendation: Going forward, funding to test approaches that engage the harder to reach, inactive women and girls should be prioritised. To be effective, this should be made available beyond one year and evaluation should be built in to capture lessons about “what works”.

Trusted intermediaries

Our evaluation found that one of the most effective methods for reaching disadvantaged women and girls was by working in partnership with organisations already engaging these groups.

Recommendation: For any organisation planning to engage new groups - particularly vulnerable, hard to reach women and girls - a partnership with an experienced, trusted intermediary is recommended. This could be achieved by employing an experienced and dedicated staff member and/or by working with an organisation already working with the target group.

Understanding longer term impact

As part of this evaluation, participants indicated that they would stay active in the future. It would be useful to dedicate some time to exploring whether these positive outcomes are sustained over the medium to long term.

Recommendation: **sportscotland** should follow up with projects after 6 months to a year, to explore the longer term impact of the project. This work should be light touch, and should bear in mind the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and the significant impact this has had on the lives of many.

Learning from online delivery

Some projects moved to online delivery as part of their response to the global pandemic. Some participants responded well to online opportunities. These early tests of online activity demonstrate that this type of delivery works well for some participants (while creating potential barriers for others). This learning could be built into **sportscotland's** wider support to clubs who may wish to pivot some of their activity from face to face to virtual activity in light of the public health situation.

Recommendation: If **sportscotland** is seeking to develop support to sporting organisations to pivot to digital approaches, it should engage with the funded projects as early adopters of online approaches, to explore further the lessons learned and advice to other projects that could be provided.

Raising awareness

The evaluation adds to the growing evidence bank that sport and physical activity can impact positively not only on physical health, but also wider factors such as mental health, connection to communities, confidence, skills and inclusion. The evaluation also provides evidence about how to achieve this positive impact, including using female only activities, having fun, introducing a social aspect to activities, building relationships and planning activities to suit the wider lives of participants (in terms of family, work and learning commitments).

Recommendation: **sportscotland** and organisations across the sector should develop a range of awareness raising activities to ensure that these lessons shared with practitioners and other key stakeholders.

1. Introduction

About this report

This report sets out findings from the evaluation of the Women and Girls Fund, from April 2019 to April 2020. The report provides analysis of the outcomes achieved throughout the delivery period and a discussion of the key learning points relating to engaging women and girls in physical activity.

About the Women and Girls Fund

The £300,000 Women and Girls Fund was managed by **sportscotland** on behalf of the Scottish Government. The core aim of the fund was to engage more women and girls in sport and physical activity.

The Fund was open to projects led by Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport (SGBs) or local authorities working in partnership with another organisation. It provided additional funding for a specific piece of work to engage more women and girls in sport and physical activity. Funded projects were also expected to consider the sustainability of the activity beyond the scope of the Fund.

The Fund was designed to contribute to physical activity outcomes as outlined in the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework:

- moving people from being inactive to being active;
- supporting active people to remain active;
- helping people develop confidence;
- helping people improve their wellbeing; and
- addressing inequality and removing barriers to accessing physical activity.

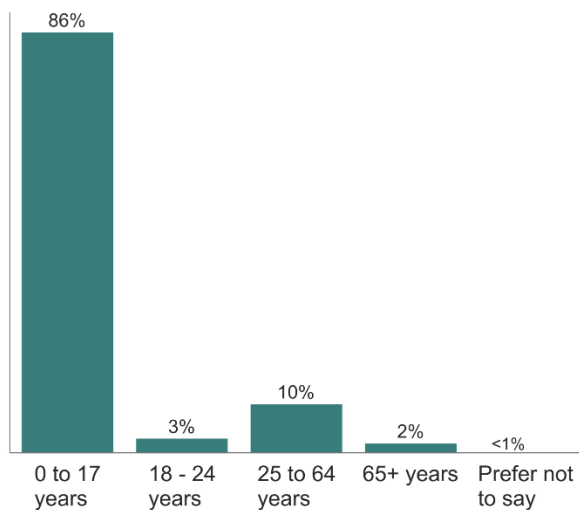
Fifteen projects were awarded funding, with awards ranging from £10,000 to £28,000. A full list of projects with details of delivery partners and participants reached, is included as Appendix 1.

Lead partner	Summary
Basketball Scotland	£13,500 Female-only sessions for those wanting to take up or return to basketball
Boxing Scotland	£13,600 To deliver introductory boxing sessions for girls and women to increase female participation in the sport
City of Edinburgh Council	£15,000 To deliver an inclusive outdoor education programme to young women and girls in North Edinburgh

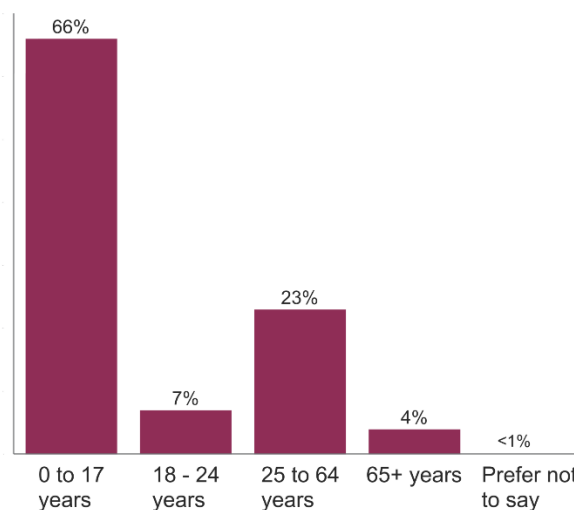
Clackmannanshire Council	£23,400 To develop sporting physical activity opportunities for women and girls in the Sauchie area
Fife Council	£11,950 To engage inactive girls and young women using fun activity sessions, building up to life-changing adventure experiences through cycling to develop confidence, self-esteem and social skills
Highland Council	£26,315 To engage young women with poor mental or physical health or social isolation who are struggling to find motivation to exercise regularly
Judo Scotland	£21,340 To build on the award-winning 'Judo Girls Rock' programme to narrow the gender gap in judo
Renfrewshire Council	£22,734 To deliver a coach education and schools-based coaching programme in all 49 primary schools in Renfrewshire
Scottish Athletics	£10,260 Deliver the Jogability project to increase participation and improve the mental health and wellbeing of young females with disability or additional support needs
Scottish Disability Sport	£15,000 To engage women and girls with severe impairments into the sport of boccia
Scottish Fencing	£17,841 Training for coaches to deliver sessions for female survivors of sexual violence
Scottish Golf	£15,360 To create four regional women and girls golf hubs running fun activity and coaching sessions for newcomers to the game to grow female participation in golf
Scottish Squash	£24,000 To build a workforce to support more women and girls into taking up squash
Stirling Council	£28,000 Work with women to build employability skills through sport and physical activity
Triathlon Scotland	£11,700 To offer safe and supported open water swimming sessions to encourage more women and girls to take part in triathlon.

Age of participants

Data relating to participant age was available from 13 projects. Most participants were aged under 18, as the largest project in the programme, working with 1,814 people, was based in schools. However, even across the other projects, most participants were aged under 18.



Age of all participants
[n=3,071]



Age of participants minus
Renfrewshire Schools project
[n=1,257]

Some projects worked exclusively with children, or with adults, however some offered opportunities for women of all ages. And a few projects brought different age groups together, for example, incorporating senior school pupils into leadership or delivery roles with primary school pupils.

Renfrewshire Council

As well as delivering additional sport and physical activity to over 1,800 primary school girls, this project provided leadership opportunities for over 100 senior schoolgirls. Senior pupils received training, gained coaching qualifications, and developed confidence and communication skills through project delivery.

Sauchie Women and Girls (SWAG) project

This project delivered a range of activities in the community. Some activities were designed to support families to be active together, such as the Young Mums and Babies sessions. This activity was added onto an existing young mothers support group, where participants were known to be inactive.

Feedback from the community group found that when the activity sessions were taking place, more participants attended.

Wider context

sportscotland's corporate strategy published in 2019 is entitled 'Sport for Life'. It sets out a vision of building an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport. It sets out a clear organisational mission to help the people of Scotland get the most from the sporting system. A commitment to inclusion underpins 'Sport for Life'.



sportscotland is a key partner in supporting Scottish Government to deliver its Physical Activity Delivery Plan and the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework, which aims to support people to be more active, more often.

This Women and Girls fund is also aligned with **sportscotland**'s current equality outcomes (2017-2021):

Outcome 1: Young people from our most deprived areas, girls and young women and disabled young people will have access to improved sport and physical activity opportunities, enabling them to participate and progress in school sport and club sport.

Outcome 2: **sportscotland** and Scottish sport are supported to embed equalities and inclusion in their work.

Outcome 3: Sports organisations and people working in sport will have an improved understanding and awareness of the needs of people with protected characteristics.

Monitoring and Evaluation Approach

Monitoring

Research Scotland worked closely with **sportscotland** and individual projects to develop monitoring tools and embed evaluation into the programme from the outset. The monitoring work focused on supporting projects to gather information relating to their participants, outcomes and activities.

Evaluation

The evaluation work focused on gathering information around:

- how to engage women and girls who are inactive to take part in sport and physical activity;
- how to engage with women and girls less likely to take part in sport and physical activity (including those with protected characteristics and from areas of deprivation);
- how organisations can work together to deliver projects; and
- how projects will remain sustainable beyond the funding period.

Learning Events

Research Scotland worked with **sportscotland** to deliver two learning events, which brought project partners together to share experiences. A key focus at both events was supporting projects to share challenges and learn from each other. Learning explored at these events is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

2. Impact

Introduction

This chapter explores the outcomes achieved by projects during the funded period. The core outcome of the programme was to increase the number of women and girls taking part in sport and physical activity.

The programme also aimed to contribute to physical activity outcomes as outlined in the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework. These included:

- moving people from being inactive to being active;
- supporting active people to remain active;
- helping people develop confidence;
- helping people improve their wellbeing; and
- addressing inequality and removing barriers to accessing physical activity.

Physical activity

Outcomes relating to physical activity were assessed through a series of standard measures. Projects gathered information about participants' levels of physical activity before they started the activity (baseline), and again towards the end of the programme or after it was complete (impact).

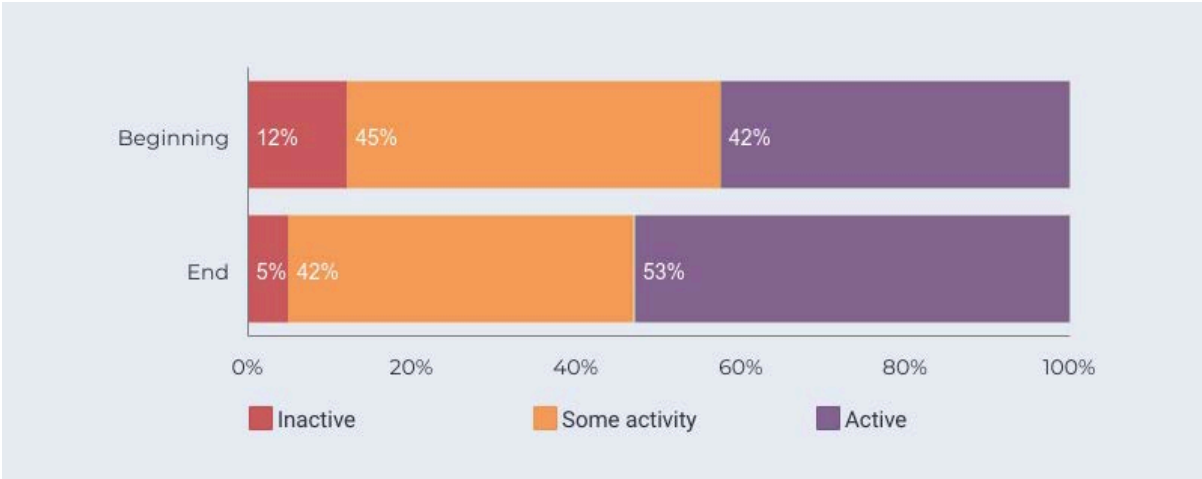
Women (18 and over)

Physical activity levels

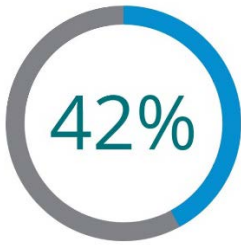
The total time that women spent being active per week was classed into three groups, based on the recommendations of the UK Chief Medical Officers:

- inactive – less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week;
- some activity – 30 to 149 minutes of physical activity per week; and
- active – 150 or more minutes of physical activity per week.

The bar chart shows that overall, women became more active throughout the funded projects.



This data is based on 9 projects which provided both baseline (“beginning” n = 393) and impact (“end” n = 279) results.



Beginning

The proportion of women who were active increased.

More than half now fall into the ‘active’ classification, doing at least 2.5 hours of physical activity per week.



End



Beginning

The proportion of women who were inactive decreased.

While 12% were inactive at the beginning of the project, this decreased to 5% by the end.



End



176

minutes per week



217

minutes per week

The average time spent being active per week increased from 176 to 217 minutes a week.

This is an increase of 41 minutes or 23%.

The data shows that at the outset, most participants were either doing some activity or were active. However, some participants told us that they had not engaged in fast paced or vigorous activity before the project.

“I do some sort of exercise every day, but not as intense as this – it’s hard! You can feel the difference.” Participant

“I wasn’t doing anything really energetic, you know, nothing to get your heart pumping.” Participant

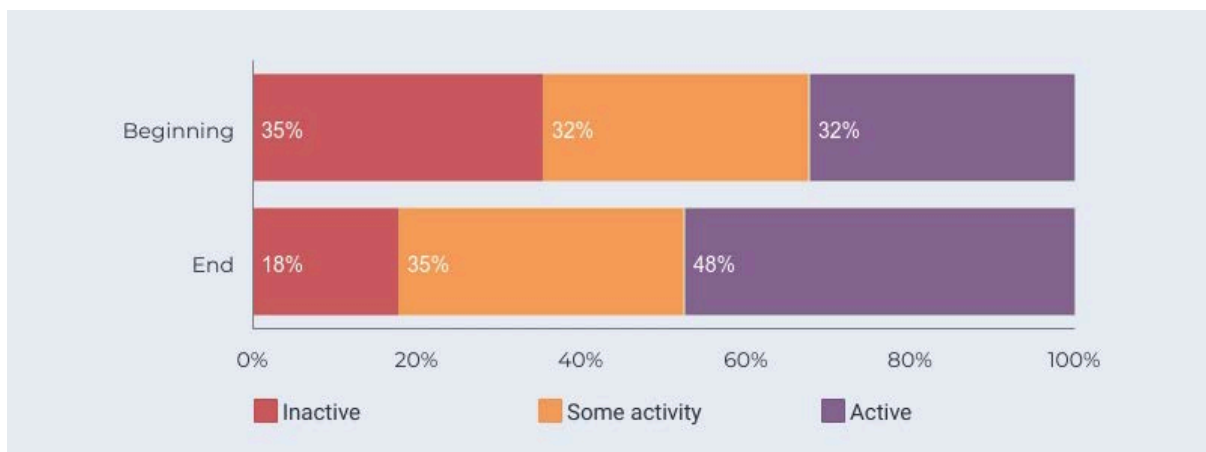
Girls (under 18s)

Physical activity levels

The recommended physical activity levels for girls is currently:

- inactive – average of less than 30 minutes of physical activity per day;
- some activity – average of 30 to 59 minutes of physical activity per day; and
- active – average of 60 or more minutes of physical activity per day.

The evidence shows a clear shift towards girls becoming more active by the end of the project.



Data is from the 10 projects which provided both baseline (“beginning” n = 269) and impact (“end” n = 162) results.



Beginning

The proportion of girls who were active increased.

Less than one third were active and doing an hour or more of physical activity per day at the outset of the projects compared to almost half at the end of the Fund.



End



Beginning

The proportion of girls who were inactive decreased.

More than a third of girls were inactive and doing less than half an hour of physical activity per day at the outset. This reduced to one fifth by the end of the Fund.



End



Beginning

Overall, the average amount of time that each girl spent being active per day increased from 48 minutes to 63 minutes.

This is an increase of 15 minutes a day.



End

Some of the girls we spoke with said that although they did some activity before engaging with the project, it was not the same type of activity. They found the project activity was more consistent and more energetic. Some girls said that the project activity was more focused than the activities they had done before.

“Before we did boxing you’d think you were fit, but there’s a big difference. It’s a different type of fitness.” Participant

The data gathered indicates that Fund has impacted on the level and types of physical activity for girls.

Becoming more active

Across the projects, participants reported that attending the activity had increased their level of physical activity.

For a small proportion of women and girls we spoke with, the project was the only physical activity they did. Because of the project, participants who previously rarely left their homes or did any physical activity started being active regularly.

“Before I started the Pick Up session I wasn’t doing any exercise, working full time and having two children there was just no time in the week to do it.” Participant

HIIT Squash

One person said that before she started this she was doing “virtually nothing” active at all. Since she started HIIT squash she has taken up two new activities. She says that it has motivated her to be more active.

“It’s pushing me to another stage – it’s not just about something you do when you’re young.”

Both younger and older participants said that they were less sedentary because of the activity, spending less time at screens and eating more healthily. And many mentioned that if they were not taking part in the project they would most likely be at home, watching television.

“It’s better than sitting in your house and watching telly.” Participant

“It gets you out of the house.” Participant

In a few projects, activity was highly targeted to inactive girls. For example, in one of the schools partnered with Boxing Scotland, staff specifically targeted the boxing sessions at girls who were completely disengaged from physical activity. Some of these girls took part in the sessions, and have continued to engage with physical education at school.

“It’s a bit of a kickstart, it’s a very good way to get involved.” Participant

Renfrewshire Schools project

In the largest project of the fund, the data gathered by the local authority indicates that between 3 to 10 inactive girls per school engaged with the programme. And across the area, more girls are attending community clubs – with an increase in community clubs delivering in the area from 15 in 2018/19 to 45 in 2019/20.

One project monitored participants’ activity levels using the Strava app, which showed that participants were taking part for longer and engaging in more activity over the course of their involvement.

“This really helped me with my running. And I feel more comfortable with running now.”
Participant

In the Edinburgh outdoor activity project, participants told staff that the climbing session was the only physical activity they participated in that week. Most of the girls indicated that they opted out of PE or did not feel comfortable participating due to issues with confidence and mixed sex groups within school. After the sessions, the participants said they had enjoyed the intense workout and they would climb more if they had the opportunity to.

Participant story

Ruby, Sauchie Women and Girls project

Ruby joined a walking netball group for older women after being prompted by a community sports coach at another informal fitness class she attends. She was unsure about joining as she felt her fitness levels were low and she wasn't sure that she would be able to learn a new sport.

“I wouldn't have come to netball a few months ago if someone said come and play netball I would have laughed and said 'at my age?'”

Before starting the class, Ruby was worried that as she became older she would become more isolated and would be at risk of depression. She also noticed that she became breathless and uncomfortable on long walks or climbing up steep hills. After watching a programme about the potential benefits of exercise for older people, she became determined to improve her fitness and her overall health.

“I saw a programme on television about premature ageing and the benefits of exercise, and that it can combat depression.”

Since joining she has really enjoyed the sessions. She feels she has gained new skills, new friends and importantly has improved both her physical and mental health.

“I felt I was losing my confidence walking up hills prior to doing these exercises. I feel a lot stronger now and I *will* walk up the hill!”

If she wasn't attending the walking netball group she feels she would probably be at home, and would be a lot less active.

Ruby plans to join the local netball club and she has started borrowing books from the local library about netball to learn more about the sport and improve her technique.

Staying active

Across the projects, participants indicated that they would be staying active, even after the project was complete. Some projects offered a seamless route into further activity and club membership, which was taken up by many participants.

Even in projects that engaged harder to reach or less active women, evidence from our discussions and from delivery staff indicated that they would continue to be active. Some women actively requested more of the same activity, or sought out new, additional activities.

“I’m going out on my bike more, with my friends.” Participant

Some participants said that because of the project they had joined a sports club, signed up for more sessions or were considering increasing their participation.

“I’ve now joined the 6-month membership.” Participant

“It has whetted my appetite.” Participant

This is a positive outcome for the programme as the transition to clubs membership is intended to support individuals to sustain their participation.

Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing data was available for 239 women and 162 girls from 11 projects.

The vast majority of participants (92% of women and 93% of girls) said that they felt healthier because of the project. The tables below show the findings from the participant surveys.

Women (18 and over)

Has the project helped you feel...?	Yes	Sometimes	No
Healthy	92%	7%	1%
Included	89%	10%	1%
Relaxed	79%	19%	2%
Useful	79%	15%	6%
Involved in your community	78%	18%	4%
Close to other people	76%	20%	4%
Optimistic	75%	22%	3%
Able to think clearly	64%	29%	7%
Able to make your mind up	56%	33%	11%
Able to deal with problems well	52%	39%	8%

Girls (under 18)

Has the project helped you feel...?	Yes	No
Healthy	93%	7%

Most participants completing the survey reported that the activity improved their health and wellbeing in some ways. The project activities seemed to have the greatest impact on participants’ perceptions of their health and feeling of inclusion.

Across the projects, participants we spoke with reported improvements in both their physical health and their mental health.

Physical health

Over 90% of participants said that the project made them feel healthier. When discussing improvements in physical health, participants said that they felt fitter and stronger. Some reported that they had lost excess weight. A few projects incorporated nutritional education into the programme and participants said that becoming more active had also helped them think about their diet.

“I’ve got so much more energy.” Participant

“I feel stronger. I think it definitely helps increase my muscle mass.” Participant

Where participants said that they were already active prior to the project, some felt that the activity had improved their stamina.

“I can hold my planks for longer at yoga.” Participant

“During the year many girls were able to increase the distance and duration of their walks and cycle rides with Joy Riders.” Project lead

Mental health

For many participants the most important aspect of the project was the mental health and wellbeing benefits. Of the women surveyed, 79% said that because of the project activity they felt more relaxed, and 75% said they felt more optimistic.

Whilst all projects acknowledged the broader health benefits of physical activity, a few projects also had a specific focus on mental health and wellbeing. For example:

- ‘Jogability’ was delivered by Scottish Athletics in partnership with Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH). The physical activity sessions incorporated discussions around mental health and part of the activity involved using tools to help manage and improve wellbeing.
- ‘Joy Riders’ cycling project focused on relationship building and providing the emotional support needed to engage girls. Staff supported vulnerable girls beyond physical activity by supporting transitions and attending statutory meetings with them such as Child’s Plan meetings.

Across all the projects, participants said that participating helped them feel:

- happier;
- calmer;
- less stressed;
- less anxious;
- less angry; and
- less lonely.

“I feel the best in myself when I’m here.” Participant

“It makes such a big difference to my mental health.” Participant

Many participants said that the physical activity helped them clear their minds, or better manage things that were causing them stress. For some, it provided a welcome distraction, and others said that they used the physical activity to “vent” their emotions. Some of the younger participants reported that the activity helped them manage anxiety and negative feelings. And a few participants said that the activity was so engrossing that for the hour of activity they were unable to be stressed.

In projects that had a focus on mental health and wellbeing, participants said that they were initially very nervous to join a new activity. And this sentiment was echoed by some participants, particularly younger girls, across the projects.

“[It] felt like big achievement coming along to new group not knowing what to expect.” Participant

Participants who struggled to engage with activities at school or in the community reported that the project provided a safe space to be active or try something new.

“It’s somewhere to feel safe. You’re not going to get judged.” Participant

Participants said that they felt better when they took part in the activity, but also that the positive feeling lasted for days afterwards, improving their whole week. And in a few cases, participants specifically mentioned that the activity had helped them manage diagnosed anxiety or depression.

“After a tough week, it makes you feel better.” Participant

“The buzz lasts all week.” Participant

“If it wasn’t here, I’d be lost.” Participant

Participants in one project reported that the increased exercise helped them develop a better, healthier sleep pattern and routine.

“It keeps you awake for the rest of the afternoon.” Participant

“It motivates me for the day.” Participant

Project delivery staff noted that some girls who were critical of themselves or who had low self-esteem demonstrated improved self-awareness. They also felt more able to talk about their feelings and to ask for help when they felt they needed support.

“...this is the one place where I can just be me and forget about all the ‘to do’ things and just play ball and look after myself both physically and from a mental health point of view as well.” Participant

Joy Riders

This project worked closely with other agencies supporting girls, including some girls who were looked after or care experienced. One care experienced young person was not engaging with school, did not socialise and had low self-esteem. She was initially reluctant to attend but enjoyed every session. After attending the sessions, her support worker noticed a significant improvement in her mood, confidence and engagement with school.

“She returns full of energy with a healthy glow.” Support worker

Having fun

For most participants we spoke with, having fun was the most important element of the activity. Some participants, mostly younger girls, said they chose to join because the activity looked fun.

“...my main goal out of it is to enjoy it and have fun and be healthy.” Participant

Women often said that they had not expected the activity to be so enjoyable, but that because they had fun, they were more likely to engage and stay engaged.

“After my first session my nerves went straight away, and I couldn’t wait to go back next Thursday. It was such good fun...” Participant

Focal point of the week

For participants who did little or no physical activity prior to the project, the activity provided a useful focal point to the week, which itself improved wellbeing.

“For me, it helps me to relax. At the end of the week, it helps wash everything away and helps me unwind.” Participant

Participants across most projects said that they looked forward to the activity and were disappointed if they were unable to attend a session. Some said that once they started, they needed to attend regularly, because they felt the loss of the beneficial effect of exercise.

“No matter how tired I am at the end of the week, it just gives me that buzz, it gives me a lift. It’s definitely benefited my wellbeing and made me feel good.” Participant

Some women with young families told us that the activity might be the only time in the week that they took time out for themselves.

“You’re not just a mum, you’re not somebody’s anything, you’re just playing sport. It’s liberating.” Participant

Participant story Melissa, Pick Up Hubs

Melissa has been attending the Basketball Scotland Pick Up Hubs for six months and helped get the project started. She used to be very sporty when she was younger but has not been physically active for three years as she was raising her children. Over the past few years she had tried to get back into sport but she found that her attendance was inconsistent and infrequent.

“The kids had to come first.”

Towards the end of 2018 she worked with her son’s basketball club to set up a session for mum’s to get back into sport. The club took time over the initial planning, as everyone had different demand, expectations and availability. However by May 2019, the sessions were up and running, charging a small fee for attendance and running concurrently with the boys afterschool club sessions.

For Melissa, the basketball sessions provide an opportunity for her to take care of herself, physically and mentally. The activity gives her a valuable respite from work and caring responsibilities. She told us it was the time within the week that she takes solely for herself. Prior to attending the club, she says she would have felt guilty about taking this time. Since attending, she feels that the benefits of the hour of activity are significant, and improve her outlook and energy levels for the whole week.

“We (women) have too many responsibilities – children, parents, work, partners. Everyone’s got expectations of you. So to come to a place where nobody’s actually expecting anything of you, where you’re just yourself, it’s actually really refreshing.”

She likes the Pick Up Hubs because the activity is regular, relaxed but still underpinned by the fundamentals of the sport. She thinks it is important that as well as having fun and doing basketball based fitness, they are learning the real rules of the sport.

“It gives it a legitimacy, and it gives me confidence in what we’re doing.”

Social aspect

For many project participants, the activity provided an opportunity to socialise, meet new people and make new friends. Over half of the girls (66%) reported that the project had helped them make new friends, and 76% of women reported that the project helped them feel close to people. And for many of the women we spoke with, the project was the catalyst for new and lasting friendships.

Projects incorporated the social aspect of physical activity in different ways. Some projects were built around a social activity, such as a coffee morning, and others incorporated socialising informally or as an addition to the physical activity. Some participants said that they would continue their friendships after the activity had finished, and some set up WhatsApp groups to stay in touch.

Participants said that the activities, which for most projects were delivered in groups, were a good way to meet people with similar interests. Although many participants said they were nervous about meeting new people, learning something new together facilitated bonding. A few participants said that the activity had helped them feel more involved and included in their community.

“I’ve been able to make new friends – with people who have the same interests.” Participant

“It makes you feel like you’re not alone, there are people on the same wavelength or on the same page as you.” Participant

One project lead reported that the girls had been socially isolated and struggled to fully participate in activities. The project gave them the freedom and security they needed to be themselves and feel more comfortable within a new environment.

“Before, I really hated going out, even the first few weeks of us talking I didn’t leave the house and every time [delivery staff] called I just made excuses! Then I got out and it just changed my perspective on things, I realised that old friendships didn’t work out but that doesn’t mean I can’t form new ones....” Participant

For women in some projects, particularly older women, the activity helped them feel less lonely and isolated. Some projects reported that these friendships were ongoing and had become particularly important during the coronavirus lockdown.

“I have been joining in with the live classes online and although they are excellent. I’m still missing the friendly chat from others I look forward to these classes continuing...” Participant

Skills

Participants across all projects reported that they learned new skills. The skills that most participants reported developing were around:

- physical skills;
- leadership;
- teamwork;
- communication; and
- engagement at school.

Women (aged 18 and over) were surveyed on three areas relating to life skills. Although most projects did not actively seek to achieve these outcomes, over half of

the women surveyed said that participating in physical activity helped them make decisions, think clearly and deal with problems.

“My head is a lot clearer, it’s easier to deal with things.” Participant

Women commented that they felt “refreshed” or more alert when they took part in regular physical activity, and that they felt the benefits of this at home and at work.

“It feels like it’s good for the brain because you have to think a lot.” Participant

“I think I’ve gotten a bit sharper, just with day to day stuff.” Participant

Girls (under 18) completed a simpler survey and were not surveyed on skills development. However, our fieldwork indicated that some girls also felt that physical activity helped them think clearly and deal with problems.

Girls at one project said that the activity had helped them learn how to better manage their emotions. They felt that being a teenager was difficult, but having a sport to focus on, and a safe, non-judgemental space to engage in activity was beneficial. A few of the girls said that they felt more able to cope with complex interpersonal relationships at school because they attended the club.

Physical skills

Most participants said that they developed physical skills or knowledge relating to the sport they were learning. Participants reported feeling more skilled at sport, and a few said that they felt their hand-eye coordination had improved.

*“New skills learned as I’m new to squash and my fitness is improving! Thanks SO much!”
Participant*

“I learned lots of stuff that I never knew...one trick looked really hard but after I learned it, it wasn’t so hard.” Participant

Some individuals said that the sense of achievement they felt when they had learned and accomplished a new skill motivated them to continue. Where parents provided feedback, they also noted that skills development was important, and contributed to sustained engagement.

“I feel like I’ve achieved something.” Participant

“Having those achievements week after week means she’s keen to go back.” Parent

Women said that they felt learning skills along with correct technique and terminology was beneficial. It gave them more confidence when playing, but also made them feel that they could confidently talk to others about the sport and engage in a wider culture based around the sport. This was particularly true for participants in activities involving golf, squash and swimming.

“There’s a really good structure though the HIIT – knowing the techniques and how to do them properly.” Participant

“You’ve suddenly got this knowledge and you can actually talk about it as if you know what you’re talking about.” Participant

Leadership

Several projects offered participants the opportunity to develop leadership skills, coaching qualifications and take on a leading role in the activity. These opportunities were valued by the participants and the wider community. Where possible, the opportunities were designed to embed the activity in a sustainable way, so it could continue beyond the funded period.

“The young mums were taking part in canoeing for the first time and enjoyed it, some were happy to take the lead and learned quickly.” Delivery staff

For example:

- In Renfrewshire Council’s school-based programme over 100 secondary school girls were trained as coaches to deliver the activity to primary girls.
- The Pool to Pond project provided more confident, experienced swimmers to take on a mentoring role as a ‘buddy’ for less confident swimmers. Subsequently, some buddies signed up to a formal training course to become accredited Open Water Activators.
- In the Edinburgh Outdoor Activity project, youth work staff reported that the activity (climbing) facilitated the development of leadership skills and building confidence.
- In Boxing Scotland’s project, a participant completed a level 1 coaching qualification and now assists the coach during sessions, as well as continuing to attend the sessions herself. Girls who took part have given talks in school assemblies to raise awareness of boxing and to encourage participation.
- In Basketball Scotland’s Pick Up Hubs, one young woman was offered the opportunity to coach the junior group. The role helped her to develop a range of personal skills as well as improving her coaching skills and her confidence.

“...at the start of the year I wouldn’t stand up and coach in front of any kids and now I’m wanting to....coach anywhere, meet different people, gain new skills, develop my own coaching and just develop as a person really...” Basketball coach

Sauchie Women and Girls project

This project offered volunteers the opportunities to help them develop skills relevant to leadership roles in the community. The opportunities for training included first aid, child protection, walk leader, strength and balance and mental health awareness training. The participant volunteers who had attended these sessions had previously never been involved in sport or leading sessions before.

Jogability

The project adapted existing junior jog leader training to make it accessible for disabled participants. The junior jog leaders then delivered Jogability sessions to their peers or to younger girls. The project helped develop their skills for the Duke of Edinburgh awards and counted towards their skills and volunteer time.

“I feel it will be a lot easier to do now that I’ve done it once. And I would like to run more sessions.” Junior jog leader

Communication

Across projects, delivery staff reported that they saw improvements in participants’ communication and social skills.

In the Edinburgh Outdoor Activity project, youth workers noticed that the activity encouraged participants to speak out more – particularly those who were normally quiet in the larger group setting. They felt that this may have been due to the context of the activity, and the smaller, closed group setting.

“...during the climbing she was very vocal and communicated confidently with her climbing partner. This is the first activity where staff have observed her increase in communication...” Youth worker

In the Renfrewshire schools project, delivery staff noticed improved communication skills amongst the project participants and the girls who were trained to deliver the activity.

“Throughout the programme their confidence has grown to allow them to become better and clearer communicators during their sessions.” Project lead

In the Jogability project, which supported disabled girls, communicating clearly was very important. Instructions had to be kept short and simple and activities were demonstrated and talked through before participants began. Training to become a junior jog leader helped participants develop communication skills allowing them to explain the games and skills in simple, accessible language.

Girls into Boccia

One player developed her communication skills after taking part in the project and socialising with other club members. Prior to the project she was self-conscious of her speech impediment, but she has developed her communication and leadership skills, expressing herself more and supporting newcomers.

Wallace Women

Women involved in this project said that they felt unskilled or under skilled as they had taken time away from work to bring up their children. The sports activity was closely linked to employability support, with the aim of motivating and empowering the women to take control of their lives.

The women involved demonstrated improved teamwork and social skills. A few women indicated that they were keen to return to work, with one participant reporting that the activity had given her the confidence to return to volunteering.

Teamwork

Where projects involved group activities, participants and project leads reported improved teamwork amongst participants, particularly younger participants.

In two cycling projects girls said that the activity had helped them use all of their senses to be aware of people around them, and that this helped them work better as a team.

“Girls and young women developed their teamwork skills such as using active travel maps to plan their journeys together.” Project lead

“She teaches you how to recognise your own strengths and those of other people.” Participant

And women said that being part of a team gave a sense of belonging, and a reason to continue participating.

“We’re all like a big family. I just fit in with them.” Participant

Engagement at school

For some girls, the activity helped them make new friends, and so they felt less isolated and anxious at school.

In a few projects, girls said that taking part in sport regularly, helped them feel more focused and motivated at school. As a result, they felt that they were doing better at school and had a clearer plan for their futures.

“You’re basically doing something good with your life. I’d rather be here than anywhere else.” Participant

“It’s a different mindset. You learn to ‘switch on’ and you can use that at school.” Participant

Joy Riders

This cycling project supported some girls who were not engaged in mainstream school. The project incorporated a bicycle maintenance course, which was often delivered on days when the weather prohibited cycling.

After taking part in the project, many of these girls felt able to return to school, join a new group or move onto further education. One participant gained part-time employment at a local café and started studying at college.

For some participants the activity provided a structure and routine that helped them become more disciplined in other aspects of life, at school and at home.

“Before I started boxing I wasn’t very good at school. But now I’m getting my head down because I have something to do, something to look forward to and to focus on.” Participant

“I think she’s more well-mannered. Although it’s fun it’s still disciplined and they’re all so well behaved when they’re there.” Parent

Confidence

Increased confidence was a key outcome for participants across all projects. Participants reported increases in their self-esteem as well as increased confidence in playing sport and trying new things.

Of the women (18 and over), 73% reported that the project helped them feel confident. Of the girls (under 18), 89% said the project helped them feel more confident.

Where participants were not able to comment on their own confidence (due to communication barriers) project leaders and delivery staff reported that they saw improvements over time.

Self-confidence

Participants told us that the activity had helped improve their self-confidence because the activity helped them:

- gain skills;
- feel fitter and healthier;
- feel stronger;
- lose weight;
- feel more capable; and
- make new friends.

The improvements in self-esteem were noticeable across all projects but manifested in different ways. Where projects worked with particularly vulnerable people, or where activity was targeted at the most inactive and hard to reach women and girls, the increase in self-confidence was particularly noticeable.

“I think it brings me out of my shell a bit.” Participant

“It gets you more confident as a person.” Participant

“You’ve inspired her... she was nervous and unsure before but her confidence has grown... I can’t thank them enough for the difference they have made to her.” Parent

For many participants, having more self-confidence gave them the boost they needed to meet new people and make friends. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the social aspect of activity was important. The more that participants were exposed to new people, the more confident they felt. And in turn, as these social connections developed into friendships, their confidence grew as well.

“The biggest change in confidence for me is about meeting new people, you know, coming to a new group where you don’t know the people.” Participant

“I have gone from a 2 to a 9 in confidence... at first I only wanted to go out with you [delivery staff] and my mum but now I like being part of a small group.” Participant

The activity helped some participants to become more active in their communities, spending less time alone or at home. Getting out of the house and successfully engaging in an activity with others made these participants feel more confident. As with socialising, the more they got out, the better they felt, and the more they wanted to engage in the activity.

“The more you’re inside [the house], the more you’re inside yourself.” Participant

“Platform makes me get outdoors more often and has allowed me to get better on my bike. Platform makes me take on board more important things in life. I feel like Platform is a way to express what you are capable of.” Participant

Some participants said that the activity gave them the confidence to be assertive. For one young person, this had helped them manage bullying at school.

“When someone’s picking on you, you can pick yourself up and walk away.” Participant

Girls into Boccia

One participant is unable to play any contact sports and boccia allowed her to reengage with physical activity. This has improved her confidence and self-esteem as she can now take part and compete on a level playing field with her peers in a club environment.

Trying new things

Across projects, some participants said that the project had given them the confidence to try new sports and develop their interest in sport. The approach of offering short taster sessions, or activities based around sport skills helped people feel more confident to move into playing the sport.

“I think it’s made me more confident to take on things that in the past I maybe wouldn’t have. Now I think, yes, I can do that.” Participant

Where the activity involved using the local area (e.g. walking or cycling) participants said that they felt more confident travelling independently and exploring the area further.

“Now I don’t feel frightened to go out and try it.” Participant

“Again, as the rock climbing weeks progressed, confidence levels grew, and the group were able to climb higher with more independence.” Youth worker

Some activities involved a level of risk or excitement – such as off-road cycling, open water swimming or rock climbing. And other activities involved taking participants to new and unfamiliar environments or specialised settings, such as a gym or golf course. For participants in these projects, the activity helped them overcome fears, and even learn to enjoy the adrenaline rush of the activity.

“I absolutely love it because they always push us to go over the limits and not to have any fear.”
Participant

“I feel quite proud that I’ve done something that I was scared of for so long.” Participant

“I feel more confident in swimming, but also in other ways I’m more confident about trying new things, like going on rollercoasters with the family.” Participant

In the Edinburgh Outdoor Activity project, staff observed a dramatic difference in the confidence and self-esteem of the girls. Some of the participants received one to one support for mental health, social isolation and lack of confidence. The activity allowed them to try a new activity and speak about their experience without fear of judgement.

“This is one of the only activities this particular group of girls have participated in where they have all left at the end of the session speaking positively about what they have achieved.” Youth worker

Sustainability

There is evidence to indicate that some projects developed a sustainable delivery model and would be able to continue achieving positive outcomes for women and girls beyond the funded period.

Where projects were affiliated with a Scottish Governing Body (SGB) and local clubs, there is evidence that some participants have become club members or signed up for further activities and events.

In some projects, elements of leadership or investment were inbuilt, to support sustainability over a longer period. For example:

- the Jogability project involved training girls as Jog Leaders, who can continue to lead sessions after the project is complete; and
- Basketball Scotland’s Pick Up Hubs charged a small fee to cover running costs.

These models will allow the projects to continue independently in localities beyond the funded period.

For some projects, the Fund supported development of an existing project, which the lead partner organisations hoped they would continue to offer. And for a few projects, the fund has supported a pilot, providing a valuable opportunity for learning and improvement.

Across the projects, individuals said that because of their participation in the project, they would continue to be active, independent of any project. This is a particularly strong outcome, for some individuals.

Scottish Squash

The HIIT squash programme was developed in partnership with Scottish Women in Sport and utilised their expertise to ensure the creation of a bespoke programme that catered to the needs of all women and girls. The funding period acted as a pilot phase allowing Scottish Squash to investigate what works.

During the lockdown period Squash Activators pre-recorded sessions and made them freely available online. Participants were encouraged to get their family members involved and use any equipment available e.g. using a frying pan as a squash racquet.

Scottish Squash will continue to work with women and girls to refine the project before launching the HIIT squash package nationally across all clubs in Scotland. In addition, Scottish Squash is working with Activators to develop a Squash Leaders award.

Scottish Squash has committed to hosting and organising two women's only bronze events next year, where the women and girls from HIIT sessions can come together in a fun, community setting to compete in a squash tournament.

3. Learning

Introduction

This chapter explores the key success, challenges and areas for learning in terms of engaging women and girls in physical activity. This chapter is based on information gathered through:

- discussions and feedback at learning events;
- information in monitoring forms; and
- feedback from participants.

Learning was a key element of the programme and was built in from the outset. **sportscotland** hosted two learning events during the funded period and planned a final learning and sharing event at the close of the Fund¹.

In June 2019 **sportscotland** hosted a learning event to ensure that project leads understood the role of monitoring and evaluation. The aim was to create an atmosphere that facilitated peer support, openness and sharing challenges - with a view to finding solutions.

In February 2020 **sportscotland** hosted a second learning event, which was attended by project leads, delivery staff and other project representatives. This provided another opportunity for funded projects to meet and share their experiences. At this event, four project representatives presented their key successes and challenges. The event also offered the opportunity to share learning in small group discussions, based on an action learning approach.

Over the course of the funded period, project leads and participants also shared the key success factors and the areas where they felt there was room for improvement informally.

Enabling engagement

Across projects we asked participants and delivery staff to consider the key factors that would enable women and girls to engage and stay engaged in sport and physical activity.

Many participants commented that initially they were concerned about joining a project simply because they were worried that they would not be good at it. This was a common anxiety across all age groups and all activities.

¹ This event had been planned for June 2020. Due to the coronavirus pandemic the event has been postponed.

The factors that helped participants overcome this fear were:

- participating with a friend;
- participating with others who were also new to the activity; and
- being reassured that the only goal was enjoyment, rather than the pursuit of physical fitness or skills development.

“I was worried in case I wasn’t very good, but now I feel great!” Participant

Where participants stayed engaged in activities, we found that the main reasons were because they enjoyed attending and had felt the health and wellbeing benefits of regular physical activity.

The key factors that enabled engagement were:

- female-only sessions;
- working around family-life;
- inclusive and exclusive activity;
- balancing fun and fitness;
- being part of a group; and
- digital platforms.

Female-only sessions

Across projects, participants said that they appreciated the opportunity to engage in a new sport in a female-only space. Some women said that they felt sport in a mixed group with women and men was more competitive, and that this wasn’t always what they were looking for.

“I think single sex is very important. I feel if it was a mixed group that boys would dominate.” Participant

“It helps that it’s a woman’s group – because of the physical differences between men and women.” Participant

Boxing Scotland

One participant said that she had always been interested in trying boxing but was not keen on training with men. This project allowed her to try boxing for the first time in a female-only environment and she has said she will continue to come to the female-only sessions when they restart.

One participant taking part in the Pool to Pond open water swimming sessions said that she was nervous about wearing a swimming costume or wetsuit, and that this would have been further intensified if it was a mixed group. She noted that once the activity began, she was much more relaxed and that “nobody was looking at anyone’s body”, but the idea of a mixed swimming group would have been a barrier to signing up. Similarly, women taking part in basketball Pick Up Hub activities said that they appreciated the atmosphere of an all-female environment.

“You need to go with people who don’t judge you. That’s what was nice about doing it with women – in a wet suit there’s nowhere to hide. Now, I wouldn’t mind being in a wet suit with men in the group. But with women, from the beginning, you’re not worried about how you look.”
Participant

Golf Hubs

Women engaging in the beginner golf sessions said that being part of a specific programme for women made them feel much more at ease, as they felt golf was a male dominated sport and that men played in a more competitive way. Some of the women had spent time in a golf club or on a golf course with their husbands but had never felt comfortable enough to try the sport themselves.

Conversely, one group of teenage girls who started boxing reported that they enjoyed engaging in sports alongside boys. These girls had previously engaged in female-only sport sessions (dancing, trampolining and gymnastics). The girls said that the environment in the boxing club was less stressful than at their previous activities, as everybody was focused on physical activity and individual goals, rather than socialising and gossip.

Not all activities across all projects were delivered in female-only settings. Some projects found that over time, women became more comfortable in a mixed setting, or that the mixed setting was appropriate depending on the context.

In some groups within the Sauchie Women and Girls project, women were joined by their male partners with the consent of others in the group. And some Jogability sessions in schools providing additional support needs, included both boys and girls - to ensure that all young people who were interested in being physically active were not excluded from activity.

Working around family life

One of the challenges identified by project deliverers was engaging women who had childcare responsibilities. Often when we asked participants how they would encourage others to get more active they said that most of the women they knew wanted to be more active, but they were not able to find time.

“...I’ve got two children and their activities always seem to come first...but you know I thought, I need to have something for myself...I just wanted to do something where I had a sense of achievement. As I say, it’s all about my children and their achievements, but I wanted something for me.” Participant

A few projects managed to mitigate this challenge by offering family friendly activity or by engaging women at a time when they would not require childcare.

Basketball Scotland designed women’s sessions to run alongside children’s sessions – realising that many parents were dropping off their children and could engage in sport whilst they waited to pick them up.

“...it’s nice to be able to play with your children...and have something in common together.”
Basketball participant

Boxing Scotland offered a session that was accessible to women of all ages, encouraging mothers and daughters to attend together. Sauchie Women and Girls project delivered family-based activity as well coordinating childrens' and adults' classes to avoid childcare issues. They also designed group activities suitable for all ages.

Wallace Women

This project found that the timing of classes was very important for engaging women and girls. Classes at dinner time or during school pick up conflicted with other commitments. They found that after the school drop off (9.30am) or after dinner (7pm) were the best times to deliver classes and get most engagement from younger women. During the day worked best to target older women.

Inclusive environments

In some projects, women said that they liked how open the sessions were. They said it was important for them that there was no pressure to progress to a higher level, and that the sessions were accessible to people with little or no previous experience.

"I thought it was potentially good because it was open to anyone..." Participant

"I liked that it seemed social, with no expectations." Participant

Some projects offered activity which was inclusive for women and girls of all ages and abilities. Most participants in these groups appreciated this approach, as it allowed anyone who was less confident in their abilities to mix with and be supported by those who were more confident.

"I liked that we were all on the same level." Participant

"We are all different fitness levels but as we are similar in ages with similar goals, we help each other and motivate each other..." Participant

"Some people have never played sport before. It's hard to believe that you can come even if you've never played before." Participant

One project noted that it was important to understand the level of physical fitness each participant had at the outset to tailor the activity to their ability.

"Establishing why each participant was there allowed us to set realistic expectations." Project lead

However, some women said they preferred to take part with people who were a similar age or ability level as themselves. They said that this made them feel safe, and helped create a non-threatening, non-judgemental atmosphere.

"I really enjoyed meeting new women in a similar situation in their lives as me and it made me feel less intimidated about trying a new sport." Participant

"I wouldn't want to do it in a room full of 20-year olds." Participant

Balancing fun and fitness

Most projects recognised that it was important to balance the element of competition with participation and personal improvement. Several projects planned competitions and events to encourage participants to demonstrate their new skills, and to acknowledge their achievements.

In a few projects, participants noted that activity was rigorous, but still fun. They commented that it was important to balance the intense physical activity and training with other activities. Where the fitness was interspersed with lighter activity, or even other activities (such as socialising, youth work, cooking, tea break) this worked well and made the sessions more engaging.

Participants and those delivering activity said one of the key success factors was making sure that the activity was fun. Across a few different projects participants and delivery staff said that people were achieving physical activity goals without feeling that they had to put in effort, as the activity was so enjoyable.

“It’s so much more enjoyable than going to the gym. You don’t even notice that you’re getting such a good workout.” Participant

“I wasn’t sure about HIIT – it’s horrific at the time but I don’t mind it and you still get to play squash. I think they’ve got the balance just right.” Participant

Being part of a group

In a few projects participants said that doing activity as a group helped them to stay engaged. Others felt that once the group had bonded and they were all learning together, they did not want to let others down by not continuing.

“I’m not as motivated on my own, I’m better in a group.” Participant

“Going with friends, with people that you know – means that you can’t just opt out one week – you all push each other along.” Participant

Younger girls said that they were more likely to join a new activity and less nervous about attending regularly if their friends were going. For most of these girls going with friends gave them a sense of security.

“I feel confident because nearly everyone from my school is here.” Participant

Using digital platforms

The coronavirus pandemic and lockdown encouraged many projects to think creatively about how they could continue to offer activities. For many, this has involved developing a stronger digital presence:

- Eight of the nine Judo clubs involved in the project have continued to offer the Judo Girls Rock programme, using Zoom to deliver online classes.

- Sauchie Women and Girls Project has continued several of its classes, offering both live-streamed sessions and posting videos to support ongoing independent activity.
- Boxing Scotland's local clubs have engaged via social media daily, encouraging participants to share videos of themselves training.

An important element of this ongoing, remote activity is ensuring that the activity does not require equipment, or that household items can be substituted for specialised equipment.

"So far, they have been using toilet rolls, towels and a mop to do their exercises. All exercises can be adapted, making it accessible for all levels and abilities." Project lead

Participants have responded well to online engagement, although some note that they miss the social elements of community-based activities.

"During this lockdown the sessions have really come into their own and continued to motivate me and keep me mentally active as well." Participant

"I have been joining in with the live classes online and although they are excellent I'm still missing the friendly chat from others" Participant

Others have used social media to continue engaging with participants and encouraging ongoing physical activity. The requirement to use digital tools to engage with people remotely may provide further options for sustainability of project activity, beyond the public health crisis.

Project delivery

Feedback from participants as well as discussions with people delivering projects helped identify key factors which affected engagement. The key factors were identified as:

- relationships, peer support and role models;
- adaptability;
- atmosphere;
- branding and marketing;
- cost, resources and equipment;
- opportunities for progression; and
- having a dedicated staff role.

Relationship building

The approach and personality of the individuals who engaged directly with participants had a pivotal role, both for initial engagement and retention of participants.

Participants at almost every project commented on the delivery staff. Most participants said that one of the reasons they enjoyed the activity was because the people delivering it were fun, friendly and approachable.

“[Delivery staff] has been here from day one. She holds it all together.” Participant

“[Delivery staff] is very well respected...she wouldn't have any problems filling a class.” Participant

Some projects chose to use only female delivery staff to deliver women and girls funded activity. This worked well for groups where participants were particularly nervous about starting physical activity, or where participants had particular issues around anxiety.

“If it hadn't been for her [delivery staff] and my friend who encouraged me to go in the first place, I wouldn't have done it.” Participant

One project found that participants required and benefited from emotional support. However, providing this support required significant time and resource, to build honest relationships. Working with smaller groups of girls allowed delivery staff to build these relationships and provide longer-term, in-depth support. The depth of relationships helped sustain engagement and support the girls to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Role models and peer support

Four projects used role models to engage and support participants into new activities. These individuals acted as ambassadors for the sport, promoting the activity locally and mentoring newcomers.

“...we saw how having a young and engaging female coach who was relatable and could be a positive role model for the participants, was effective.” Project lead

HIIT Squash created the ‘Activator’ role for coaches leading the activity. The Activators had an important role as ambassadors for the sport within their area and were deliberately chosen to represent a wide range of women, to make the activity feel inclusive and accessible.

Pool to Pond

In this project, less confident swimmers were paired with a ‘buddy’. Usually this was someone who had overcome their own open water fears and taken part in an open water triathlon. Participants said that being paired with someone gave them reassurance in the open water sessions, helping them feel less self-conscious about their own abilities as beginners and encouraging them to build confidence.

Adaptability

Some projects reported that the success of the project required a very open and flexible approach to delivery. For projects delivering across different localities, the approach was often different in each area, depending on what local partners and participants needed. Adaptions to delivery of physical activity included:

- length of the programme;
- duration of physical activity sessions;
- commitment to the project – signing up for a fixed period, or offering drop-in sessions;
- creative use resources and equipment; and
- incorporating other activities.

“To make the project a success we have had to be open-minded and adaptable. At times, what the project proposed to do and what the participants wished to happen were different.” Project leader

One of the key aspects to encouraging initial engagement was the elimination of unfamiliar resource or apparatus – such as specialist clothing or equipment. Across the projects, delivery staff adapted the activity so that participants did not need to wear specialist sports clothes or shoes. This approach made a difference, particularly for sports such as golf, where the initial cost of equipment was a considerable barrier.

Some projects were especially creative in how the physical activity was delivered. In some places the physical activity was incorporated into pre-existing broader activity such as youth work, employability work or community support. This approach worked well to encourage participation from people who would not normally engage.

Some projects offered informal drop-in sessions. Participants did not have to sign up to a programme or commit to engaging for a specific period of time. This approach worked well for initial engagement with less confident people.

Some projects delivered a more formal programme of activity, as a 4, 6 or 8 week course. This approach required participants to formally sign-up and commit to the activity. One project marketed the activity as an exclusive opportunity with limited spaces and a waiting list. Participants were made aware that if they did not attend regularly, their place would be offered to someone else on the waiting list. This worked well for participants who appreciated the support of a close-knit group. It helped develop a dedication for regular activity and sustained participation.

“You know that your place can go to someone else.” Participant

Some projects supported participants to pursue other activities, beyond the physical activity. Offering the physical activity as part of a broader programme of support, and mixed in with other activities worked well, particularly for younger people or more vulnerable people who were less likely to engage in direct physical activity.

“I like the fact that you get your own choice – you do what you want to do.” Participant

One project offering mixed activities noted that having a range of different activities helped to educate the participants on what it means to 'be active'. As well as engaging them in new things, they were able to understand what constitutes physical activity.

“...for some, they had not done much activity since they left school so going back to just getting them moving was success for some, and changing the perception of what sport and physical activity actually is and what success meant for them...” Project lead

Where projects worked with disabled participants or girls with additional support needs, key adaptations were: group size, pace of activity and communication methods.

The target group for the Jogability project was girls with additional support needs, so the messages and resources were designed to be accessible – using images rather than words where possible.



Atmosphere and setting

Participants noted that the atmosphere and setting of the project activity was important. Some projects used venues that were familiar and unthreatening for participants. One project asked participants to meet in a familiar community venue before taking them to the specialist sports venues. Others made use of existing community facilities, adapting the activity to fit that facility.

“...there is a real family feeling at the club – you’re welcomed from day one. It’s very friendly and everyone is equal.” Participant

Two projects recruited women who were already coming to a sports venue, but were not engaging in sport. For example, in one basketball Pick Up Hub, many of the participants were women whose children were attending basketball sessions. And many of the participants in the Scottish Golf programme had spent time in golf clubs but had never tried the sport.

One project lead noted that it was straightforward to engage girls in a school setting, such as through Active Schools. However, transitioning them into community settings was challenging.

Branding and marketing

Across almost all projects, participants said that the main thing that would encourage more women to get active was increased awareness of opportunities.

“If I hadn’t been told about it, I wouldn’t have known about it. And if you’re not in that circle, you’d struggle to find out about it.” Participant

A few projects reported that using appropriately engaging marketing material, and carefully selecting where to display the material helped recruit participants in the first instance. Many used social media platforms to publicise the activities. And some projects developed a ‘brand’ that people could associate with the project, either through marketing or through a club uniform.

Taking the time to develop an identity for the project and having an official ‘launch’ worked well and raised awareness, helping to reach and engage more participants. Where projects were not able to do this, they felt it would have been beneficial, and would have established the project more effectively.

“Several clubs who delivered teen sessions invested some of their funding into t-shirts and bibs for the participants. This proved very successful in cultivating a sense of belonging in the sessions and ensuring participants felt welcomed and valued.” Project lead

Other projects found that word of mouth was the most effective method of reaching people and translating the advertising into engagement.

HIIT Squash received positive media attention, including a segment in BBC Scotland news. This helped to boost awareness locally and resulted in international exposure of the HIIT Squash programme.

Girls into Boccia also promoted its activity through local and national conferences for disability sport. This helped to raise awareness amongst organisations working with the target group.

Cost

Most projects offered free physical activity sessions, using the funding to cover the cost of project delivery and management. However, a few projects chose to request a small fee from participants to acknowledge the value of the activity and to build a sustainable basis for future activity.

Where there was cost associated with the activity participants commented that it was reasonable, and they appreciated that it was a subsidised price.

“It needs to be made more accessible – like this programme – needs to be affordable.” Participant

“The other clubs are too expensive and people in this area don’t have much money.” Participant

Progression pathways

Although the key to initial engagement was often to market the activity as purely for enjoyment, rather than developing sports skills, some projects found it helpful to have a progression pathway in place.

In a few projects this club membership helped sustain participation for individuals. In other projects the activity was designed to be informal, recognising that the idea of club membership might be intimidating for newcomers.

A few participants said that because of the project activity they had “caught the bug” for sport. These participants, who were completely new to the sport, became heavily engaged and were keen to pursue further opportunities and challenges.

“I used to hate cycling – now I want to train for the Olympics!” Participant

Case Study

Sarai, Boxing Scotland



Sarai started coming to the boxing club in summer 2019, after taking part in taster sessions at school. Initially she attended three times a week. After seeing her potential, the club coach encouraged her to come more frequently. Within a month of starting the sessions she was sparring and training every day after school. Initially her mother was not sure about boxing and was not keen for her to take part. After seeing how much she

enjoyed the sport, and the positive impact it had she felt more comfortable with Sarai's participation.

“I'm the only girl in the family and she didn't want me going into boxing...now my mum is proud of me.”

Before attending the boxing sessions, Sarai had been heavily involved in dancing – training every week and competing at a high level. She finds that boxing suits her better, as it is more focused on personal development, and there is less room for social politics at the boxing club.

“It made me feel really good about myself.”

Sarai has progressed quickly in the sport and has already fought in two competitions. She loves competing, and although she hates losing, she has learned to use every fight as an opportunity to learn. Less than a year from donning boxing gloves for the first time, Sarai won the Junior National Championship.

For Sarai, the sport changed her attitude. She found that the rigour and discipline of the physical activity helped her to become more focused at school.

“I'm way fitter, I've come out of my shell and I get along with more people now.”

Dedicated staff role

Where projects had allocated a staff member to manage the women and girls project activities this worked well. In addition to delivering activity, dedicated staff focused on programme development, engaging partners, recruiting participants and managing monitoring and evaluation requirements. Some projects noted that administrative work was more than they had anticipated and would build this into future project planning.

“Having this consistent and reliable member of staff engaged with the community and participants helped with the relationship building and support from partners.” Project lead

Challenges

Project leads identified a number of challenges that they encountered when planning and delivering activities. The key challenges were around:

- engagement;
- timing; and
- monitoring and evaluation.

Engagement

Several projects reported challenges in reaching their target group. Project leads noted that different groups needed to be targeted in different ways – and an approach that worked well with one group would not always transfer well to another group in another area.

Due to the limited time frame of the funded activity, a few projects chose to focus delivery on women and girls who were engaging, rather than continuing to pursue hard to reach groups.

Timing

One of the key challenges for projects over the past year was timing. Initially, some project leads reported that they were unable to start activity as the announcement of the funding was embargoed until May 2019. The extent of the embargo was not clear to all projects leads, and for some, this delayed the recruitment of staff, marketing of activities and the onset of activity. Several projects indicated that they intended to continue funded activity beyond April 2020, as there was an underspend due to the delay in commencing activity.

Some projects felt that the time available for project delivery was too limited. A few projects aiming to engage girls through schools were not able to begin delivery until summertime, when schools were closed.

Projects were unable to deliver the final weeks of funded activity and end of project events due to the public health measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Whilst projects understood that sustainability was a key element of the programme, some felt that it was unrealistic to plan, establish and deliver a sustainable programme within the timeframe. Some felt that the limited time frame became even more challenging when there were unforeseen delays.

“While we are extremely grateful for the one-year funding, future projects may benefit from two years as the first year is primarily setting up the project, recruiting coaches and volunteers for the project and setting up activities. Additional time would provide the opportunity to develop more solid foundations ensuring easier sustainability of the project. This would have provided more time for training volunteers to ensure the sustainability of the program.” Project lead

Monitoring and evaluation

Project leads expressed mixed views on fulfilling the monitoring and evaluation requirements.

The short, anonymous survey was appreciated by some projects as it could be easily and quickly completed without gathering identifiable information.

However not all projects were able to build monitoring into the activity. In most projects, the staff delivering activity were responsible for gathering this information. However, they were not always able to because they:

- were unfamiliar with this type of monitoring;
- were unsure about asking participants the monitoring questions;
- did not have the time or capacity to gather the information; and
- did not understand the importance of gathering this information.

“There was an issue with getting young participants to complete the impact survey. Most of the activities were staffed by sessional youth workers and again this could have been addressed by a more robust briefing for the staff and budgeting for some additional time to complete the impact survey.” Project lead

While monitoring and evaluation can be embedded at the project management level, it is important those responsible for front-line delivery are fully supported to gather monitoring and evaluation data.

Judo Girls Rock

The lead partner, Judo Scotland, emphasised the importance of monitoring and evaluation. In order to secure a good response rate from the feedback surveys, the project lead required clubs to return baseline surveys before releasing additional funding. This method worked well and ensured that clubs understood the importance of the evaluation work.

Measuring the baseline

Although most project activity was aimed at inactive women and girls, only 12% of women and 35% of girls were classed as ‘inactive’ when they joined the activity. This could indicate that the projects attracted people who were already active to some extent, and that completely inactive people are still difficult to reach. It could also be an indication of how this information was gathered. We also note that participants completing the baseline survey may have been unwilling to report low levels of activity, because of a perceived stigma associated with being classed as inactive.

Organisational challenges

A few projects noted that unplanned changes within their organisation, such as delivery or management staff moving on to other roles, impacted their ability to deliver the programme as planned, or within the planned timeframe.

Weather

A few projects had limited time to deliver, as the outdoor activities were dependent on weather. Activities such as golf, cycling and open water swimming were negatively impacted by a bad winter. Where possible, an indoor replacement activity, or suitable complementary activity was useful.

Engaging volunteers

In a few projects, leads noted that they had anticipated some participants progressing to become volunteers, to help lead activity and make it more sustainable. In some areas this did not happen as participants were not ready or willing to take on the responsibility of leading activity.

Mental health and wellbeing

Although there is good evidence to show that projects supported positive outcomes for mental health, some project leads felt that they could support this further. In some cases, delivery staff did not feel well equipped to discuss mental health issues with participants, particularly younger girls. This was a challenge for delivery staff in projects targeting girls with mental health challenges, and those that were not.

Partnership work

Partnership work was key to the programme, at all levels. Where partnerships worked well, they facilitated engagement and helped share the workload and responsibilities associated with delivering the project. A few projects said that they made use of existing relationships with organisations. This allowed them to reach the target group and to provide wider opportunities for progression.

“The involvement of five large voluntary sector youth organisations meant that recruitment was relatively easy and this allowed the total award to be targeted on the cost of providing outdoor activities.” Project lead

Sauchie Women and Girls project

This project delivered activity in a small locality which already had a number of organisations aiming to engage the community in positive activity. To foster good relationships and ensure efficient use of resources, the project developed a working group alongside community partners from Sports Development, Community Learning and Development, local sports clubs and representatives from local schools. The working group will continue liaising to build on the success of the project.

Joy Riders

This cycling project provided a range of opportunities for participants, beyond the core physical activity and wellbeing support. Participants who were interested were able to learn more about bicycle maintenance and mechanics. Existing partnerships with local organisations allowed the project to refer girls onto other cycling projects and in one instance, a partner organisation provided a bike for a participant and her mother.

For several projects there were key relationships between the Scottish Governing Body of sport and its local member clubs. Clear communication between the governing body and the clubs was very important for smooth delivery and gathering monitoring information.

Similarly, a few projects aiming to engage younger girls worked in close partnership with Active Schools to promote and recruit participants. Overall, these partnerships worked well, however in some cases there was a lack of communication between club staff and Active Schools co-ordinators. This led to frustration and an increased workload for project leads, some of whom took on a more active role in the day-to-day running of activity than planned.

Three governing bodies noted that whilst they had tried to give member clubs a high level of autonomy, this approach did not always work. In some cases, clubs needed a high level of support from governing bodies. One reason provided for this challenge was the role of volunteers in clubs who sometimes have to balance a wide range of demands and responsibilities.

“In the past, with similar programmes, we have retained ownership of the programme and clubs were much more accountable...In this instance we relinquished this ownership to the club to allow them more autonomy with how they delivered the outcomes... It would appear that much more assistance is required...” Project lead

One governing body said that going forward, it would consider having a training day for clubs involved in the project and a contract for them to sign. They felt that this would help local clubs understand their responsibilities and establish stronger buy-in from the outset.

In a few projects, partners responsible for supporting recruitment of women and girls into activities were not forthcoming, and this posed a significant challenge. Where possible, lead partners sought out alternative partnerships and recruitment routes.

And in a few cases, although all partners were keen, there were logistical challenges to overcome, in terms of fitting the funded activities into existing schedules.

“With hindsight, we should have set aside a small budget for sessional youth work staff to support the activities. This would have allowed more flexibility than having to align some of the activities with existing programme schedules.” Project lead

A few projects noted that in the future they might narrow the focus of the work, targeting one particular area or demographic, and working with fewer partners. They felt this would allow them to do more effective work with people, create lasting impact and develop stronger relationships.

“Next time we would target specific areas of the country (local to established clubs) so that we could focus our efforts in areas where we see bigger results.” Project lead

One project led by Scottish Fencing was unable to deliver during the funded period due to a series of challenges around partnership working. The planned project required cooperation between two key partner organisations. Although Scottish Fencing had good relationships with each partner, the partners themselves were unable to reconcile differences, leading to a significant delay in project set up and delivery. A full case study on the project, its challenges and learning is included as Appendix 4.

4. Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter sets out our conclusions for the evaluation of the Women and Girls fund.

Overall, the programme succeeded in engaging women and girls in sport and physical activity. Many of those who were inactive became active, and those who were already doing some activity, became more active.

The 15 funded projects delivered a wide range of different activities. Where projects were led by a Scottish Governing Body of sport the activity was based around or inspired by a particular sport. Where projects were led by a local authority they were more likely to involve a range of sports and activities. Most projects delivered group based activities, however a few projects were able to support individual participants as well as groups.

In addition to delivering sport and physical activity, some projects offered participants opportunities for leadership and skills development through volunteering coaching and leadership programmes.

Programme reach

The programme successfully engaged at least **3,268** women and girls across Scotland. The largest project within the programme worked with primary school girls, and the majority of participants (84%) were under 18 years old. Some projects targeted specific demographic groups, either by age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity or disability.

The programme afforded projects a high level of flexibility, with a primary focus on engagement and learning. Although projects set targets in terms of anticipated participants, many projects changed or adapted the proposed approach to better meet the needs of participants, partners or localities.

Impact

The programme achieved its aim of engaging women and girls in physical activity. The proportion of women classified as 'inactive' decreased by more than half, reducing from 12% to just 5%. The proportion of girls classified as 'inactive' fell from 35% to 18%. Although some participants were classed as 'active' when they started, the proportion of 'active' women increased from 42% to 53%, and 'for girls this increased, from 32% to 48%. For both women and girls, there was a clear shift in participants becoming more active – doing more physical activity, more rigorous activity, and doing so more often.

Participants reported feeling healthier, fitter happier and more confident because of the project activity. Many individuals reported significant improvements in their mental health and wellbeing, with a few projects focusing specifically on using the activity to improve wellbeing. Participants said that project activity was enjoyable, making them feel happier and less anxious. The social aspect of sport and physical activity was important, with participants reporting that the activity helped them make new friends and feel part of a group.

Almost all participants (96% of women and 89% of girls) reported at least some increase in confidence as a result of the project activity. Participants reported improvements in their self-esteem, as well as their confidence in engaging in sport, trying new things and making new friends.

Most participants reported development of new skills. These were predominantly physical skills relating directly to the sporting activity, or skills in leadership, teamwork and communication. Over half of the women surveyed said that participating in physical activity helped them make decisions, think clearly and deal with problems. Younger participants also reported improved engagement, motivation and focus at school.

Engaging women and girls

Projects identified many useful and practical ways to engage inactive women and girls and to engage those who are less likely to take part. Marketing the opportunity was key, with many women saying that lack of awareness was a barrier to engagement.

Women also identified a range of barriers which prevented them from engaging in sport, including fear/anxiety of trying something different, perceptions of certain sports, lack of time and the cost or resources required.

The projects worked to identify and mitigate these barriers. Some of the ways that projects engaged women were by:

- creating a welcoming, non-threatening, informal atmosphere where women and girls felt part of a team;
- using relatable, personable role models to build relationships, raise awareness and deliver activity;
- incorporating physical activity into wider activities, particularly social activities;
- reducing or eliminating the need for specialist equipment;
- offering activities at different times, to allow working women, retired women and women with childcare responsibilities opportunities to participate;
- offering opportunities in a female-only space; and
- balancing the elements of fun and fitness.

It was important for projects to be flexible, adapting as needed depending on the target group and the area. Where projects worked well there was often a dedicated role in the organisation focusing on engaging women and girls.

For most projects, the onset of the coronavirus pandemic caused significant disruption to the planned activity. Projects that had planned events and celebrations to mark the end of the project were not able to deliver them, and those offering ongoing activity had to find an alternative method to engage with participants. Several projects made good use of online platforms to deliver live or pre-recorded sessions. Although an unplanned approach for most projects, the use of digital technology provides good scope for projects to sustain activity over a longer period of time.

Sustainability

Projects aimed to be sustainable beyond the funded period by training volunteers to take on activity delivery roles, working with partners and charging for activities. Some projects built on existing activity and a few used the Fund to develop and evaluate a pilot project. For both types of project, the monitoring and evaluation elements of the programme helped demonstrate the demand and impact of this work, making them better placed for future funding proposals.

At an individual level there is evidence that some women and girls will continue to be active beyond the duration of the funded activity.

Partnerships

Most projects required close partnership work in order to recruit participants and deliver activity. Where there were existing partnerships, projects were able to continue and develop these relationships. For some projects, partnership working caused challenges, particularly in terms of managing responsibilities and oversight of monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations

Targeted funding for women and girls

Targeted funding provides the additional resources organisations require to test out new approaches that engage under-represented women and girls in sport.

Recommendation: sportscotland and the sport sector should consider how it can support and enable organisations to test and mainstream new approaches to engage inactive and under-represented women and girls.

Targeting inactivity

Although inactive women and girls were engaged in this Fund, some were already quite active. A number of factors account for this. Some projects were designed to bring together a mix a levels or abilities. But also, the length of the fund was limited to one year of funding, to include project set up. That timescale was also shortened,

by the public health situation which emerged early 2020. We think there is scope for further learning to support and engage the hardest to reach, inactive groups.

Recommendation: Going forward, funding to test approaches that engage the harder to reach, inactive women and girls should be prioritised. To be effective, this should be made available beyond one year and evaluation should be built in to capture lessons about “what works”.

Trusted intermediaries

Our evaluation found that one of the most effective methods for reaching disadvantaged women and girls was by working in partnership with organisations already engaging these groups.

Recommendation: For any organisation planning to engage new groups - particularly vulnerable, hard to reach women and girls - a partnership with an experienced, trusted intermediary is recommended. This could be achieved by employing an experienced and dedicated staff member and/or by working with an organisation already working with the target group.

Understanding longer term impact

As part of this evaluation, participants indicated that they would stay active in the future. It would be useful to dedicate some time to exploring whether these positive outcomes are sustained over the medium to long term.

Recommendation: **sportscotland** should follow up with projects after 6 months to a year, to explore the longer term impact of the project. This work should be light touch, and should bear in mind the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and the significant impact this has had on the lives of many.

Learning from online delivery

Some projects moved to online delivery as part of their response to the global pandemic. Some participants responded well to online opportunities. These early tests of online activity demonstrate that this type of delivery works well for some participants (while creating potential barriers for others). This learning could be built into **sportscotland**'s wider support to clubs who may wish to pivot some of their activity from face to face to virtual activity in light of the public health situation.

Recommendation: If **sportscotland** is seeking to develop support to sporting organisations to pivot to digital approaches, it should engage with the funded projects as early adopters of online approaches, to explore further the lessons learned and advice to other projects that could be provided.

Raising awareness

The evaluation adds to the growing evidence bank that sport and physical activity can impact positively not only on physical health, but also wider factors such as mental health, connection to communities, confidence, skills and inclusion. The evaluation also provides evidence about how to achieve this positive impact,

including using female only activities, having fun, introducing a social aspect to activities, building relationships and planning activities to suit the wider lives of participants (in terms of family, work and learning commitments).

Recommendation: sportscotland and organisations across the sector should develop a range of awareness raising activities to ensure that these lessons shared with practitioners and other key stakeholders.