

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

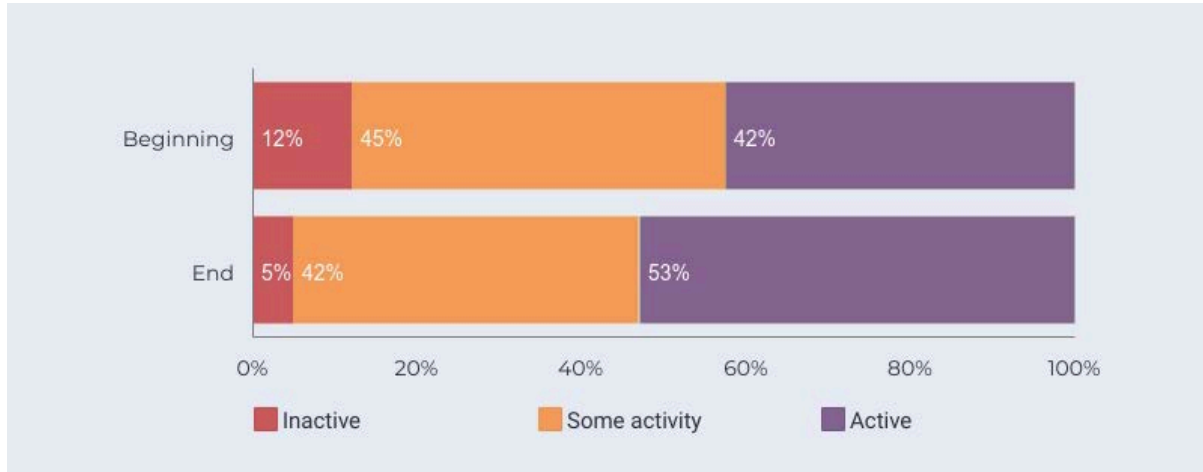
Physical activity

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.





176

minutes per week



217

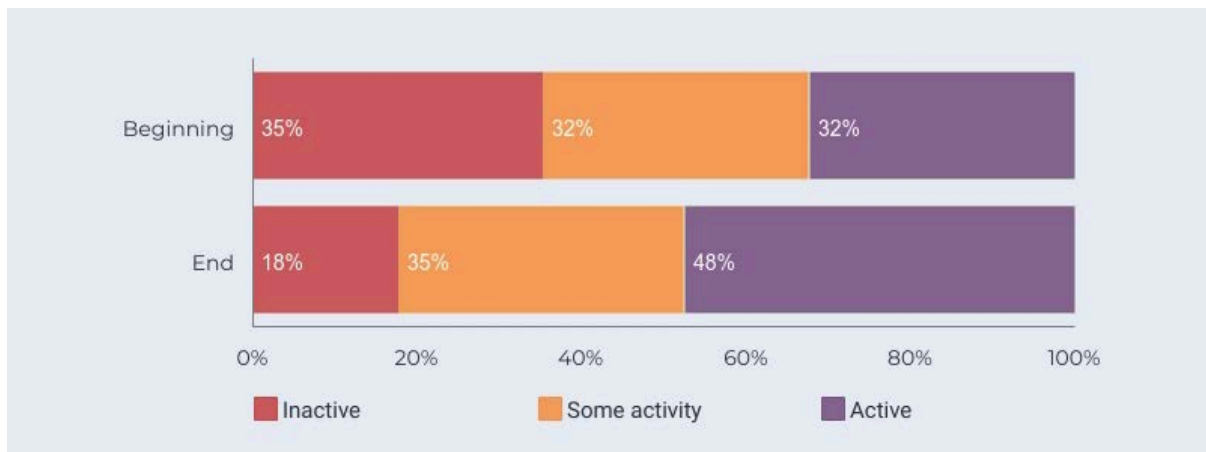
minutes per week

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%.

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 unintimidating 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 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.