



CHANGING LIVES

THROUGH
SPORT AND
PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY

RESEARCH SCOTLAND
robust. inquisitive. research and support.



SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE CHANGING LIVES FUND?

This report sets out findings from an evaluation of the Changing Lives through Sport and Physical Activity Fund.

This was a £1 million Fund which sat within the wider Changing Lives through Sport and Physical Activity Programme and involved national partners Scottish Government, **sportscotland**, The Robertson Trust and Spirit of 2012. Spirit of 2012 managed the Fund on behalf of partners.

The Changing Lives Fund aimed to change lives through sport and physical activity. It aimed to address wider individual and community needs through sport and physical activity, and to support people to become and stay active. The focus was on individual or societal change, not on increasing participation or providing pathways to a particular sport.

The Fund supported 17 partnerships, providing short-term additional resource to enable sport and community organisations to intentionally change lives through sport and physical activity. It aimed to bring about change in relation to health and wellbeing, inclusion, skills and community connections.

Funded partnerships involved collaboration between sport and physical activity focused organisations, and a wide mix of other organisations including community, equality, youth work and health organisations.

The Fund was intended to run for two years, from early 2019 to late 2020. For many projects, the first six months focused on project set up, with delivery commencing mid-2019. In early 2020, the context changed substantially with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Projects were paused for some time, moved to crisis support to assist communities and had to significantly change the way they were delivered. The Fund was therefore extended through to autumn 2021.

This evaluation covers the Fund from early 2019 to late 2021, exploring project delivery, participants, outcomes and learning. It is supported by a detailed interim report which covers Year One of the Fund (pre-pandemic) which was produced in spring 2020.



WHO IS TAKING PART IN CHANGING LIVES ACTIVITY?

The Changing Lives Fund involved 2,860 people in sustained activity (Level 2), and more than 10,300 in low level, taster, introductory or mass participation activity (Level 1). Level 2 is the stage at which it is expected that change could take place for the individual. Level 1 is about engaging people in activity, with the aim of moving them on to Level 2 over time.

Across the programme, there were a much higher number of Level 1 (low level/taster) participants than expected, and a slightly lower number of Level 2 (sustained activity). This is likely to have been affected by the pandemic.

There was a strong focus on young people in the Fund, with almost half of all participants being under 16. There was a broadly equal split, with slightly more female participants than male and a good proportion of participants were minority ethnic – at 25%. Just over one in ten participants was disabled, which was below target and below average for the Scottish population.

Some projects also targeted specific groups, such as people from areas of high deprivation, young people with care experience, people with experience of substance misuse, people recently liberated from prison and people not in employment or education.

To engage participants, projects found that it was helpful to support participants to lead and drive activity themselves, and combine physical activity with social opportunities. Delivery staff who could inspire participants as role models or had lived experience also helped to engage participants. A key aspect of reaching target groups effectively was working in partnership, across sectors, to make the most of the contacts, networks and trust that each partner organisation had built up.

As the pandemic emerged, projects found that the relationships they had built up with participants helped to maintain engagement with participants, to support them through the pandemic. It was harder, however, to build new relationships in the context of restrictions and uncertainty. Projects experienced challenges planning and re-planning activity to meet changing guidelines, running sessions at a distance due to restrictions on face to face and group work, and finding suitable venues for activity once restrictions eased.

While online approaches were used, and a few projects felt they engaged some new participants in this way, projects found that there was a high level of fatigue about online activity, as well as challenges accessing devices and connectivity, and finding space to be physically active at home.

THE CHANGING LIVES FUND INVOLVED MORE THAN
13,000 people

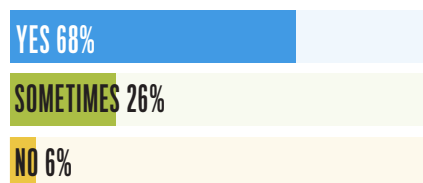
ARE WE CHANGING LIVES?



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

The Changing Lives Fund highlighted the real potential for strengthening communities through sport and physical activity. In Year 1, pre-pandemic, there was good evidence from a sample of those involved in a sustained way in the Fund that most felt their project helped them to become more involved in their community.

Has the project helped you feel involved in your community?



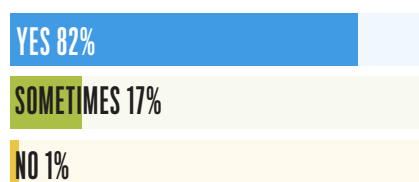
Total number N = 120

In Year 2, for many projects, building strong communities became a key focus. Projects worked to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families, and help people connect, talk about anxieties and communicate. Projects helped participants feel included and connected during the pandemic and feel part of something in their community. Some projects found that they widened their focus to work with families, rather than individuals.

INCLUSION THROUGH SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

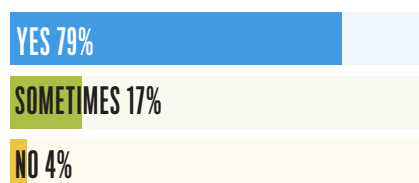
Pre-pandemic, evidence from a small sample of those involved in a sustained way highlighted that the Changing Lives Fund had a clear impact on how included and close to other people project participants feel. Almost all felt the project helped them to feel more included and closer to people, with group activity helping individuals to bond with one another and create a sense of belonging.

Has the project helped you feel included?



Total number N = 153

Has the project helped you feel closer to people?



Total number N = 151

In Year 2, while the pandemic made it challenging to build connections and bring people together, some projects gave evidence about how their work had supported people to build friendships, connect, foster a sense of belonging, and support people to socialise more and reduce isolation.

“

I TALK TO PEOPLE A LOT MORE – IT’S GOOD THAT WAY. IT’S ALL ABOUT JUST HELPING EACH OTHER OUT.”

Participant



“

**IT DOESN'T MATTER
WHAT LEVEL YOU'RE
AT, IT'S INCLUSIVE
FOR EVERYBODY.”**

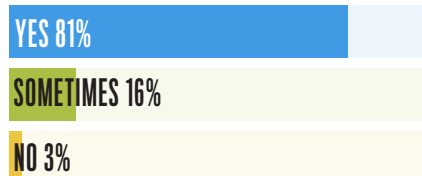
Participant

“ I LOVE TO SEE MY MOTHER SO ANIMATED AND LIVELY...”
Family member

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

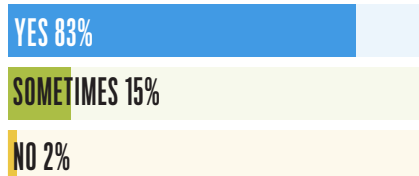
Evidence from the first year of the Fund, pre-pandemic, shows that projects helped most people to feel healthy, useful, relaxed and optimistic.

Has the project helped you feel healthy?



Total number N = 159

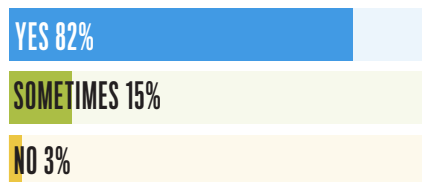
Has the project helped you feel useful?



Total number N = 126

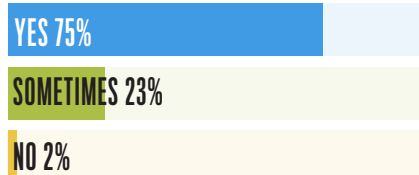
These measures were not used in Year 2, during the pandemic and the evidence is therefore more varied. However, many projects were still able to demonstrate that they were supporting physical health, strength and balance and mental health.

Has the project helped you feel relaxed?



Total number N = 126

Has the project helped you feel optimistic?



Total number N = 161

“IT’S LIFTED MY FEELING OF WELLBEING.”

Participant

INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

Pre-pandemic, there was clear evidence that Changing Lives projects supported a clear shift away from participants being inactive, through to doing some activity or being active.

Physical activity level	Inactive	Some activity	Active	Total number
Baseline	27%	38%	35%	N = 78
End year 1	10%	39%	51%	N = 70

“I’M PROUD OF MYSELF AND IT GOT ME A LOT MORE ACTIVE.”

Young person

In Year 2, projects measured change in a different way in the context of the pandemic. Some projects found that it was hard for participants to maintain physical activity levels during the pandemic. However, some found that most participants were still reporting being more active as a result of the project, and some participants reported feeling more included and welcome in sport and physical activity.

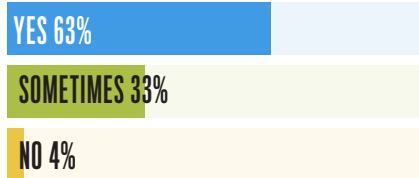
“IT HAS ENCOURAGED ME TO DO MORE EXERCISE.”

Older person

SKILLS

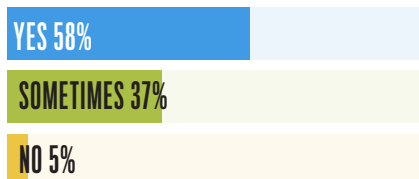
Evidence from Year 1, pre-pandemic, showed that most participants felt that projects had helped with their skills in terms of decision making, thinking clearly and dealing with problems well. There was also good wider evidence that participants developed their confidence, leadership, teamwork, independence and skills for learning, volunteering and employment.

Has the project helped you feel able to make your mind up?



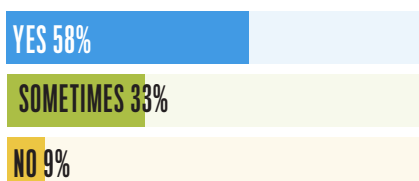
N = 123

Has the project helped you feel able to think clearly?



N = 127

Has the project helped you feel able to deal with problems?



N = 126

In Year 2, the shape of projects shifted considerably. However, projects were still able to ensure that participants had opportunities to develop their skills through awards, qualifications, leadership roles, supporting independent travel, building positive routines, supporting family relationships and building employability skills. A few projects also specifically built the skills of people to deliver sport and physical activity in an inclusive and engaging way, including young people, care home workers and sports coaches.

“THEY ARE PLAYING FOOTBALL, DANCING AND RUNNING ABOUT FOR AN HOUR OR TWO A COUPLE OF DAYS A WEEK WHICH THEY COULDN’T DO BEFORE.”

Parent



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in spring 2020, in the middle of the Changing Lives Fund period, was extremely challenging. However, the response of the funded projects, and associated evaluation, also uncovered important learning.

INTENTIONALITY

The Changing Lives Fund has demonstrated that using sport and physical activity intentionally to bring about change can be a powerful tool. Projects have achieved outcomes around strengthening communities, inclusion, health and wellbeing, increasing engagement in physical activity and skills. To achieve these changes, projects found that it was important that activity focused on using sport and physical activity intentionally to bring about change, and delivering activity in a way which focuses on relationships with participants, person-centred approaches and social activity and fun.

PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Changing Lives Fund brought together sporting and community partners to share skills and resources and achieve positive impact for individuals and communities. The partnership approach has largely worked well, and built projects with different skills, expertise and contacts. Where this has worked well, the partnership had added value and built knowledgeable, supportive teams able to deliver in their communities. Working in partnership was a key element of engaging participants effectively.

However, there remains some work to be done to ensure that partners across different sectors can work together within the Changing Lives ethos. A few projects experienced challenges around the ethos and approach of sports organisations (clubs and hubs) involved in Changing Lives projects, and reflected that perhaps further work needed done to engage sports organisations in the ethos of the Changing Lives approach, to support coaches and volunteers to understand why Changing Lives work is important and how it fits with their wider activities.

ENGAGING PARTICIPANTS

The evaluation highlighted that most projects reported engaging successfully with their target groups. To engage people in sustained activity (Level 2), projects had to work with a higher number of participants on a low level, taster or introductory level (Level 1) than anticipated. This balance may have been affected by the pandemic. The balance of participants was broadly equal for males and females and a good proportion were ethnic minority participants (25%).

Around one in ten participants was disabled, lower than expected for the Fund. Projects experienced some challenges gathering monitoring data, and further work will need to be done to build confidence asking about disability and additional support needs in a meaningful way. However, wider evidence suggests this is a real gap for the Changing Lives Fund – not just related to monitoring challenges – and an important area of focus for future work.

FUNDER APPROACH

Many projects indicated that the flexibility of Spirit of 2012 in managing the funding, and The Robertson Trust, **sportscotland** and Scottish Government more broadly, helped them to continue to achieve positive outcomes for their participants during the pandemic. Partners felt that Spirit of 2012 staff were supportive, realistic, flexible and good at communicating.

EVIDENCING CHANGE

The standard health and wellbeing and physical activity measures were suspended for Year Two of the Fund. However, in Year One the health and wellbeing measures worked very well for demonstrating outcomes. The physical activity measures provided consistency in the way in which information about physical activity levels was gathered, but if using these measures again, processes should be in place to gather the raw data centrally to allow for consistent analysis.

The standard measures worked well because they were as simple as possible and accompanied by a strong focus on qualitative, creative methods for gathering evidence about impact. Projects very much welcomed the focus on real change in people's lives, for a targeted group of people and based on an in-depth understanding of their needs, rather than a focus on numbers and participation.

CULTURE CHANGE

The Changing Lives Fund, within the context of the wider Changing Lives Programme, has contributed to a significant impact on how people think about sport and physical activity, and the impact it can have. National partners felt that the Fund was very valuable in demonstrating how, practically, sport and physical activity can be used to build stronger communities and bring about change for individuals. This shift has meant that the Changing Lives approach is influencing national approaches to strategies, plans, funds, support and communications, across a wide range of policy priorities.

In some instances, the Changing Lives Fund has also influenced how participating partners approach their delivery of sport and physical activity and adopt a Changing Lives approach. Most of the funded projects are continuing their work or have accessed funding for specific aspects of the work piloted during the Changing Lives Fund.

“This has given Changing Lives leverage that it hasn't had before. People really understand the Changing Lives approach, and the intentionality.”

National partner

AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Changing Lives Fund demonstrated that sport and physical activity can play a powerful role in supporting people to become more active, feel healthier, improve their mental wellbeing, feel included, develop skills and strengthen their community links. There are important messages for others within this, including:

- **For funders** – Sport and physical activity can be a powerful conduit for bringing about a wide range of positive outcomes. In managing this process it is important to be flexible, outcomes focused and take time to work with funded organisations to articulate the change they can bring about through their work. It is important to recognise that this may change or develop along the way. The emphasis should be on real change, perhaps for a smaller or more focused group of people over a sustained period of time, rather than concentrating on targets around the number of people taking part or activities taking place.
- **For all deliverers** – Key components of the Changing Lives approach were the social aspect of activity and participants being involved in designing and delivering activity. Sustained, regular and in-depth activity was needed to bring about significant change. This learning should be built in to future approaches.
- **For sports organisations** – Activity can be adapted to maximise benefits for participants, beyond taking part to really making a major difference to people's lives. Intentionality and working with partners in other sectors is key, aiming to deliberately use sport and physical activity to achieve particular outcomes for people and communities, based on community needs. Using this approach can help to build sport and physical activity as an integral part of communities, enhance understanding of the value of sport and physical activity and open new opportunities. However, this approach requires a clear culture shift and needs clear commitment, vision and time to ensure that coaches and volunteers understand the ethos of the approach and how it fits with their wider activities.
- **For wider sectors** – Working with sport and physical activity organisations can be a powerful way to bring about change for individuals and communities, across many different areas including strengthening communities, equality and inclusion, health and wellbeing and skills development. Working in partnership brings many benefits, and draws on the skills across sectors.
- **For all** – The Changing Lives Fund successfully engaged a wide range of target groups. However, numbers of disabled people or people with additional support needs were relatively small. This is an important area and may require further exploration and targeted work in the future, including profiling the success of some projects which have successfully engaged with people with additional support needs through the Changing Lives approach.



“

**IT IS EXCITING AND
POSITIVE TO SEE THE
CHANGING LIVES
APPROACH TAKE
SHAPE AND BECOME
A REALITY IN
SCOTLAND.”**

Changing Lives Evaluation Report



WE ARE CHANGING LIVES.

Changing Lives Through Sport & Physical Activity partners:

