



SPRIT OF 2012
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

Sporting Equality Fund Evaluation Report

MARCH 2019

REPORT AUTHORS:

AMY FINCH
HEAD OF IMPACT AND LEARNING

PRISCILLA CHAU
GRANTS AND RESEARCH OFFICER

ALEX JOHNSTON
NATIONAL GRANT AND
LEARNING MANAGER

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



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Evaluation findings at a glance

Headlines

- Over 2,800 girls and young women participated in sport and physical activity through the Fund. Of these, 55% (1,554) took part in regular, sustained activity over several months.
- The Fund reached participants with lower average wellbeing levels than the national average, and wellbeing increased between the start and end of the fund. Average life satisfaction, for example, increased from 6.9 to 8.0.
- Projects that worked with small groups of people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, seem to see the biggest changes in wellbeing.
- From taster sessions to focusing on relationship building, there are a wide variety of ways that projects can reconnect girls and women to sport and physical activity. Participants flourished in projects that took a small-steps approach, gradually increasing activity levels in a safe space.

Learning themes

- Trust and meaningful relationships take time and resource to establish particularly for projects seeking to reach people with complex needs. Whilst there was plenty of good practice in evidence, funders should be aware that this can be challenging over a one-year time scale and may mean projects work more intensely with small numbers.
- Most projects did not offer competitive sport as part of this Fund. Girls and women selected activity focusing on team work and togetherness, for example dancing and cycling.
- Funders should support a more nuanced approach to retention rates, encouraging grantees to reflect on their data and identify patterns. Whilst understanding drop-outs is an important part of the picture, it can also be reductive.
- Working in partnership helped projects take a more holistic view to reconnecting participants with sport and physical activity and also helped them to identify the limits of what they could achieve. There is a hugely important role for non-sports organisations to play in referring women and girls to inspiring and supportive recreational activities.

The Sporting Equality Fund at a glance

The Sporting Equality Fund (the Fund) was set up to provide 1-year grants of up to £25k to projects that increased the number of women and girls participating in sport and physical activity, in line with the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework. We funded fourteen projects across Scotland. The Fund was managed by Spirit of 2012 (Spirit) on behalf of the Scottish Government.

14
PROJECTS

5 PROJECTS WORKING IN SCHOOLS

4 WORKING WITH TEENAGERS IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

5 WORKING WITH YOUNG ADULTS & OLDER WOMEN

MORE THAN 2800 PARTICIPANTS

55% TAKING PART IN REGULAR, SUSTAINED ACTIVITY

8 OUT OF 14 PROJECTS TAUGHT HEALTH, WELLBEING & LIFE SKILLS ALONGSIDE DELIVERING SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



IMPROVED WELLBEING

**12% MORE PARTICIPANTS
WITH HIGH LIFE SATISFACTION**

**11% MORE PARTICIPANTS BELIEVE THE
THINGS THEY DO IN LIFE ARE WORTHWHILE**

**8% INCREASE IN GIRLS WHO SAY THEY
WERE 'HAPPY YESTERDAY'**

**£325,000
FUNDING**

Background

The Fund was designed to deliver the ambitions of the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework and specifically examine the relationship between physical activity and wellbeing.

Active Scotland Outcomes

We encourage and enable the inactive to be more active

We improve our active Infrastructure – people and places

We support wellbeing and resilience in communities through physical activity and sport

We encourage and enable the active to stay active throughout life

We develop physical confidence and competence from the earliest age

We improve opportunities to participate, progress and achieve in sport

Equality: Our commitment to equality underpins everything we do

The Fund set out to achieve the following outcomes:

- More women and girls participate in sport and physical activity
- Women and girls' personal wellbeing increases through participation (in sport and physical activity)
- We encourage and enable the inactive to be more active
- We encourage and enable the inactive to stay active throughout life

Over the last few years Spirit and the Scottish Government have been working closely to support people and communities to become more active and to improve their wellbeing.

We built on Spirit's and the Scottish Government's learning through the Legacy 2014 Physical Activity Fund and Thrive (www.thrivetoolkit.org.uk).

For many people, becoming more active is a journey.

Effective practitioners break this journey into a series of small steps, and acknowledge that progress might not be linear.

Often small changes can make the biggest difference and activities which are fun and social in nature have the greatest chance of success.

This learning was reflected in the design of the Fund and shared with all fourteen funded partners to inform the design and delivery of their projects.

About the projects



Projects for adults

Bike for Good

Pedal Pathways aimed to help more women to be physically active through supportive, peer-led cycling groups. The project had sustainability plans built into it from the very start, encouraging participants to cycle for both leisure and as a healthy way of getting from A to B.

Scottish Women Warriors Wheelchair Basketball Club (SWW)

Partnership Wheelchair Basketball is a volunteer-led project aimed to help the SWW become more sustainable, and reach out to more disabled and non-disabled women. As a result of the SEF funding SWW has been able to establish a second team – the Scottish Women Wildcats.

Street League

Dunbartonshire Dance Fit worked with unemployed young women in Dunbartonshire, following Street League's successful model of using sport as a route to employment. Participants took part in at least three hours of physical activity a week during the project, as well as developing employability skills such as teamwork,

communication and self-management.

The Venture Trust

Next Steps works with women who have been or are at high risk of being involved with the criminal justice system. The project saw two groups of women attend an intensive five-day wilderness programme, in addition to more regular activity.

Projects for young people

Fife Council

Platform worked with two small groups of primary school girls to introduce them to weekly cycling activity. All of the girls taking part had been recommended by their schools because they were not doing any physical activity outside of school. The project concluded with eight of the cohort taking part in a two-day residential in Aviemore, with a mountain biking adventure.

KA Leisure

Active Girls North Ayrshire consisted of two strands. The first, Step Up, was an in-school programme of health and fitness activities for girls who had poor mental health, were isolated or not currently engaging

with extra-curricular activities. Step Up was piloted in two secondary schools. The activity was reinforced by a social media campaign to a wider audience of North Ayrshire's young women called Girls Make Your Move which drew inspiration from Sport England's This Girl Can campaign.

Netball Scotland

Sirens for Success aimed to address the big fall-off in netball participation between primary and secondary school-aged girls. The project delivered netball sessions to girls at school, combining the activity with interactive information sessions on healthy lifestyles and self-esteem.

Scottish Sport Futures

Twilight Basketball combined team sport with educational content about healthy lifestyles. Piloting a girls-only session, including setting up a new BAME girls' session, of their popular evening basketball sessions, the project aimed to reach out to young women with body-confidence issues and build their self-esteem across the project.

The Ripple Project

Girls Friday Night In Café offered a greater choice of physical activities to local girls, particularly those who were put off or uninspired by traditional sport. They consulted regularly with the girls, and combined activities such as dance and dodgeball with sessions on healthy eating and wellbeing.

Scottish Youth Dance

Momentum expanded Scottish Youth Dance's thriving dance and youth leadership programme into deprived areas in North Lanarkshire. Dance specialists worked with teachers to explore how dance could be used as an engaging activity to encourage those who disliked PE to find a new way of keeping fit and healthy.

The Adventure Syndicate

Inspire, Encourage, Enable worked with teenage girls recruited through secondary schools. It combined a light-touch "match the miles" competition that encouraged pupils at eight schools to collectively match the distance travelled of professional cyclists, with a more intensive mountain-bike experience. A group of the most engaged girls successfully completed a 24-hour cycling challenge.

Fighting Chance Project

Fighting Chance used judo in schools to work with girls with additional behavioural and learning needs. It also included activity for adults, with mothers and teenage daughters being encouraged to participate together.

Possibilities for Each & Every Kid (PEEK)

Like a Lassie delivered tennis-based activity in primary schools. PEEK staff supported teenage volunteers to deliver the sessions, encouraging them to develop as young leaders, and deliver sport in an engaging and relatable way.

Girvan Youth Trust, Z1 Girls Group

Girls Getting Active combined a mixture of physical activity sessions with a health and wellbeing programme that aimed to improve girls' nutrition.



About the evaluation

- The Fund's projects looked to encourage and enable the inactive to become more active, supported wellbeing and developed physical confidence and competence from the earliest age. We will explore each of these areas in detail in this evaluation.

- The Fund's partners invested considerable time and effort reflecting on what works, both at an individual project level and collectively through group learning events. The majority of the grantees had no dedicated monitoring and evaluation capacity, and some were volunteer-run. Although all projects had signed up to an overarching set of outcomes, each project had its own monitoring and evaluation framework to make sure staff could collect data in a way that was useful and appropriate for them.

- We used both qualitative and quantitative data collected by the projects, alongside reports submitted as part of their own evaluation process. Evaluation and learning involved considerable time and resources and we are tremendously grateful for the efforts of all our grantees in contributing to this process.

- We recognised the evaluation and learning challenges around capacity,

capability and confidence for many of the Fund's projects. Spirit put in place a programme of learning events to run in tandem with the delivery of the Fund, and engaged the support of Spirit's evaluation partner, the Behavioural Insights Team, to help project partners with the development of their monitoring and evaluation framework, data collection and data analysis. We brought partners together quarterly to upskill their evaluation approach, network and share learning. This approach allowed partners to learn from each other and to make inflight adjustments as a result of evidence-based learning.

- This report explores some of the shared learning from the Fund, particularly in terms of the Women in Sport Board's new work plan: intervention, prevention, reconnection and continuation.

- In the Outcomes section, we set out the extent to which the Fund achieved its intended outcomes.

- In the Learning section we identify common themes for practitioners and funders to consider when setting up and delivering future activities. This section includes four case studies.



Outcomes

- More women and girls participate in sport and physical activity
- We encourage and enable the inactive to be more active
- We encourage and enable the inactive to stay active throughout life

Over 2,800 girls and young women participated in sport and physical activity through the Fund. Of these, 55% (1,554) took part in regular, sustained activity over several months.

Most of the projects sought to work with participants who were not regularly participating in physical activity or meeting the guidelines of the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland.¹

Gathering accurate data on physical activity levels is notoriously difficult, with participants tending to over-estimate how much they do. Our projects used information from several sources, including:

- Recommendations from teachers about pupils who disliked and/or refused to participate in PE lessons;
- Estimates from participants about the number of days they were active per week;
- Questions about attitudes towards physical activity, and stated intentions about whether they would like to exercise more.

Several projects aimed to engage people with very low levels of activity. With **KA Leisure** for example, 80% of the girls taking part were active less than 3 times a week, and almost half (47%) said they did not exercise at all in a typical week (n=70).

By the end of the project, more than 70% of the girls were active at least three times a week and only two girls were not taking part in weekly activity (n = 63).

At **The Ripple Project**, none of the core cohort of 22 girls were active for more than

three days a week, and 59% said they were not active at all during a typical week. By the end of the project, every girl but one had increased their activity levels, and 3 out of 4 girls were taking part in activity on three or more days a week.

Some projects were able to collect qualitative data about increased fitness levels. For example, in their final feedback to **Scottish Youth Dance's** project, the girls' comments included:

“My legs got stronger”

“I feel as if I was a lot more active in Momentum than in normal PE”

“My flexibility improved”

“I became more coordinated and could run around for longer”

“As the weeks went on, I noticed I didn't feel as tired”

Other projects worked with young girls who reported higher initial activity levels, but did not have opportunities to try a wide range of activities.

The activities in the Fund provided a next step for these girls, opening them up to experiences that they would not otherwise have had. For example, girls cycled 35km in a residential adventure with the Fife Council's project and 13 girls gained an accredited Arts Award qualification through **Scottish Youth Dance**.

¹ 150 minutes moderate activity / 75 minutes high intensity activity a week for adults, 60 minutes per day for children

■ Women and girls' personal wellbeing increases through participation in sport and physical activity

All of the projects in the Fund also aimed to improve wellbeing. We asked the projects to use the same set of questions – Office for National Statistics (ONS) subjective wellbeing measures – to find out if there was any difference between the average wellbeing levels of the cohort at the beginning and end of the project. They asked:

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

A small number of projects also asked a fourth question, "How anxious were you yesterday?" ONS includes this question in its subjective wellbeing measure for over-16s.

We know that wellbeing is complex, and affected by circumstances and events beyond the scope of this project. However, by looking at whether the cohort as a whole improved over the life cycle of this project, we can start to understand whether the activities contributed to happier lives. Projects supported their quantitative data with observations, interviews and other surveys.

There is strong evidence that participant wellbeing improved during the course of the Fund. The Fund's projects were able to reach participants with wellbeing levels significantly below the national average. The UK average life satisfaction score is 7.7 out of 10, whereas the baseline average from the participants in the Fund was 6.8 out of

10.² This varies considerably from project to project, with **The Venture Trust** and **Street League** in particular reaching participants with significantly lower wellbeing levels still (5.6 and 5.4 respectively).

For the Fund as a whole, 62% of the participants had high satisfaction levels at the beginning (n=966), 63% felt the things that they do in their lives were worthwhile and 58% were happy yesterday.³ This gives us considerable confidence that the project was reaching people who were likely to benefit from regular activity.

By the end of the project, 74% had high life satisfaction levels, 74% reported that the things they did in their life were worthwhile and 66% said that they were happy yesterday. Average wellbeing levels increased to 8.0 (life satisfaction), 8.2 (life worthwhile) and 7.9 (happiness). Of the 13 projects that provided us with data, all but two saw an increase in at least two of the three measures. Those that did not see wellbeing increases tended to have high starting points, so there was less room for improvement. Some projects reported very large changes in wellbeing, for example **The Venture Trust** where only 38% of the cohort had high life satisfaction levels at the beginning, while 79% had high wellbeing levels at the end. Those projects that worked with small groups of people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, seem to see the biggest changes in wellbeing.

There is also some evidence to suggest that those projects who had additional health and wellbeing activity saw bigger gains than those without it. However, this is not clear cut because grantees were not asked for detailed records about the balance between physical and educational activity, and some projects delivered this more informally than others. It would be worth exploring more systematically in future funds whether some types of content increased wellbeing more than others.

Overall however, this data is a powerful testament to the potential of regular, sustained activity to make a profound difference to people's lives.

2 We calculated this by taking the mean of project averages. 13 of the 14 projects submitted this data.
3 These show the proportion of participants who answered 7 out of 10 or above

■ Developing confidence and competence through participation

Half of the fourteen projects explicitly looked at confidence in participants as an outcome. Grantees saw increasing their participants' confidence as a necessary step to help them sustain their activity, and as an important goal in itself.

It would be wrong to assume that all of the girls and women were low in confidence; for some the lack of time, money and interesting opportunities were far more important.

Nonetheless, the idea of "increased confidence" was a recurring theme for many projects, although the single term can actually be broken down into three quite distinct concepts:

- 1) Personal confidence associated with self-esteem, knowledge and body confidence.
- 2) Social confidence, the lack of which inhibits people from taking up opportunities and expressing their needs and ideas in a social setting.
- 3) Physical confidence directly associated with the activity itself, and the belief that you have the skills and aptitude to take part.

Some projects attempted to measure confidence quantitatively by using standardised confidence scales. However, there were minimal changes between base and endline data using these measures. Most measures did not distinguish between the different types of confidence outlined or above, or allow practitioners to consider how they might relate to each other.

Street League, The Ripple Project and **KA Leisure** all observed that weight and body image was a debilitating issue that held many of the girls and women back from engaging with sports. **The Ripple Project** gave an example of one participant who opened up about family members



who were verbally abusive, and made cruel comments about her body. For her, participating in multiple activities at **The Ripple Project** offered an escape from this challenging home situation, and the chance to repair fragile self-esteem.

For Katie at **KA Leisure**, Girls Make Your Move had increased her social confidence, supporting her to join clubs. She explained "Before I wouldn't go to any.... I would be shy and not talk. I wouldn't do any physical activity."

Other projects focused more on developing the physical aptitude to give confidence.

Bike for Good explained that one participant had come from another country and she was apprehensive that there might be different rules for road cycling. For this participant, the key was developing the confidence that she had the physical skills, via supportive tuition and feedback.

Grantees looking to "increase confidence" with their project should be aware that it is multi-dimensional concept, and if appropriate be more explicit about the specific types of confidence they believe their programme will improve.

Learning

This section is structured around the four themes in the workplan of **Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board**, set up by the Scottish Government:

- **Intervention:** what is needed to get more women and girls physically active or into sports
- **Prevention:** what measures will ensure women and girls don't drop out of physical activity or sport and have opportunities to continue
- **Reconnection:** how women and girls can get back into physical activity or sport when a major change to their life happens
- **Continuation:** helping women and girls continue with physical activity or sport throughout their lives

Whilst these priorities were set in September 2018, when the Fund was in its final stages, the common themes and best practice that emerged throughout 2018 can make a valuable contribution to these discussions.

Intervention

Case study on page 19

1. Integrate health and wellbeing education alongside physical activity

Eight of the 14 projects integrated health and wellbeing learning content into their delivery, as well as delivering physical activity sessions.

Some projects, like **Netball Scotland**, believed that this dual approach helped to engage girls, and make it more likely that they would be willing to try physical activities, as well as seeing benefits specifically from the health and wellbeing content.

Some of the topics explicitly focused on body image and the perceived barriers that prevented girls getting involved in physical activity. Practitioners felt that providing time and space for participants to openly discuss these barriers was just as important as the activity itself. These more general discussions allowed the girls to open up about other unhealthy behaviours – as well as in themselves providing an alternative

to those behaviours, as the **Scottish Sports Futures** practitioner explained:

“During our Alcohol ETO one of our Wellhouse girls said that she comes to the session as it keeps her out of trouble especially from drinking on the streets or at a gaff on a Friday night”

We do not have a way of isolating the impact of the educational content to see how far it enhanced the aims of the Fund. Funders and policy makers should consider investing resources into systematically investigating the difference in impact between those projects that focus solely on physical activities and those that integrate wellbeing classes in their agenda. It would be interesting to see what participants themselves value the most and how that affects their desire to engage with sports.

2. Understand the value of trusted relationships

The building of positive and meaningful relationships between participants and project workers is essential for creating trust. Ensuring that sufficient time is built into project design means that girls and women

are more likely, and able, to be open and comfortable discussing aspirations, ambitions and issues that are impacting their ability to be active, or impacting their lives in other ways. This is much more difficult to achieve in a purely active environment.

Scottish Sports Futures reported that trust was an important part of engaging with their target audience of girls from some black and ethnic minority (BAME) communities. Both parents and participants were reassured that the project would offer a girls-only space that was sensitive to their cultural practices.

Positive and strong relationships built with project workers inspired some members to continue their physical activities beyond the scope of the project, through joining local sport classes or taking on responsibility to develop skills learnt from their teachers so that they could go on to achieve more.

The numerous complex issues experienced by the women from The Venture Trust created significant challenges initially for people to open up but after spending time together and learning about one another, participants finished the project feeling inspired and connected. One participant explained: "I hadn't put my trust in anyone before – it's a big thing for me."

"Women who have participated in the Next Steps programme are given hope that they can learn to live a new/better way of life and feel they are given a second chance to feel like a person without a label."

Projects need to be open-minded that the amount of time needed by different participants to start properly engaging with sports and physical activity. With a large cohort, staff may find it difficult to engage deeply with every individual so adapting these sessions – for example with inclusive group discussions – is important in allowing connections to develop.

Taster sessions helped introduce the activity and also gave some time for participants to

settle in before committing. Additionally, it allowed parents to get a feel for the project that would help to reinforce their trust. Trust and meaningful relationships take time to build and resources to facilitate, particularly for projects seeking to reach people with complex needs. This can be challenging over a one-year time scale.

3. Consider the role of a competitive environment

It is significant that the majority of projects did not offer competitive sport as part of this Fund. Girls and women selected activity focusing on team work and togetherness, for example dancing and cycling. While there were some more competitive activities on offer (tennis, netball, dodgeball), they were often broken down into small games rather than full matches.

Even when there were stretch and challenge activities, such as the "Match the Miles" scheme through **The Adventure Syndicate**, the emphasis was on collaborative endeavour rather than winning/losing.

Practitioners focused on embracing an environment of inclusivity and creating a non-judgmental culture so that girls would feel welcome to join. The Fighting Chance Project taught this explicitly through the values of Judo so girls would learn to embody friendship, courage, modesty, self-confidence, self-control and respect when engaging with one another.

We would be interested to find out more systemically what proportion of girls and women are attracted to competition as part of their physical activity offer, or whether this inhibits their enjoyment.

Prevention

Case study on page 19

Most of the projects funded through the Fund worked with girls who had already disengaged with sport and physical activity. However, the lessons from working with



these girls demonstrate what could have been done to prevent them dropping out in the first place.

1. Give participants a choice in the activities they do

Many of the funded projects did not deliver a single type of activity, but consulted with their beneficiaries about what sorts of thing would interest them most. Community organisations with access to small groups of girls can take time talking to girls to find out where their interests lie, and design activities or seek providers that offer activities that interest them.

Those who coordinate provision can play an important role by showcasing as many different sorts of activity to girls as possible. Some of the projects in this fund provided specific types of activity – for example tennis (PEEK), dance (Scottish Youth Dance) and judo (The Fighting Chance Project). The role of well-run taster sessions was very important with these projects. Tasters can break down some of the myths about a particular type of activity, including things people might have discounted in the past. However, funders and practitioners both need to be comfortable with participants expressing their personal tastes and opting into and out of activities that aren't a good fit for them.

2. Consider the impact of increased self-consciousness during teenage years

Several of the girls taking part in the Fund explained that they had previously liked sport and physical activity, but that 'something happened' during their teenage years which had meant they stopped taking part. This builds on existing literature that suggests teenage girls become increasingly self-conscious about their appearance, and this affects how they exercise.

The Fund's projects addressed this in several ways. KA Leisure was originally advertising its classes with stock images of girls exercising. Recruitment was low. Through consultation, they discovered that

potential participants were put off by the skinny beauty of the images in the flyers – they didn't identify with the girls in the pictures, and had sub-consciously assumed the class was not for people like them. The project found that switching to photographs that showed local girls taking part in the actual classes was much more effective.

Other projects also thought carefully about how they could remove some of the barriers that put girls off participating. These included having the chance to do hair and beauty as well as the class, having a girls' only space or being able to exercise in whatever clothes they felt comfortable in. Examples such as these need to come from conversations with the proposed participants. It could be for some girls beauty classes are more of a deterrent than an attraction which is why consultation is key.

Many of the projects reflected on whether they should open up their activity to girls with different fitness levels or concentrate on those who were not currently exercising much at home. Kelly from Scottish Youth Dance explained:

"I think that the most important thing is for those inactive girls to feel comfortable enough to be able to try out a physical activity without being the minority in a class, i.e. if the majority of the class is very active and competent in a certain activity, this would surely be more off-putting to the inactive cohort and highlight their lower experience level/fitness levels in comparison. That being said, I think that if there are a small number of slightly more active/experienced participants in the group, that lends itself to more peer encouragement/support. Having this type of mix can really help with the motivation levels of the young people involved."

During the course of the Fund several of the projects contributed to our research about the benefits and disadvantages of open access and targeted interventions. Findings from this research will be published in February 2019.

3. Turn participants – and those close to them – into advocates for your approach

Preventing a drop-off in participation during the teenage years is also about providing inspiration: the out-of-the-ordinary, next-step opportunities that turn participants into advocates.

The Adventure Syndicate and **Fife Council** both organised biking adventures for small groups that provided an extra challenge and created lifelong memories. Rickie Cotter from **The Adventure Syndicate** explained:

“Seven of the girls who had showed most commitment during our Match the Miles challenge earlier in the year met us in the PE hall after school on a Thursday and we packed up and rode out to Loch Ness... That night we watched in wonder and laughed until it hurt as these girls (usually so shy and retiring) pretended to be forest ninjas, rolling about on a pine needle carpet and hiding behind trees. The value of what we were doing was undeniable when you could see the journey these girls took. From shy, unsure steps into the unknown they came home out with a dash more self-belief, new knowledge and a few memories that might just give them the strength to do things they thought they couldn’t, as they step into this tough world as young women.”

Reconnection

Case study on page 20

1. Let participants know it’s ok to drop in and out of activity

Becoming active is often spoken about as a linear journey, but this can cause participants who miss a session to feel they have failed, and are right back to where they started. The SWW explained that it was important that women felt they could build up to regular attendance without feeling guilty if they were not there every week. The most successful projects created an inclusive atmosphere that helped people

participate when their circumstances allowed, addressed some of the barriers that stop people participating and supported them to continue their active journey. **Bike for Good** even provided a trailer so one participant could join with her 8-month old baby. Funders can support a more nuanced approach to retention rates, encouraging grantees to reflect on their data and identify patterns, without putting people into groups. While understanding drop-outs is an important part of the picture, it can also be reductive.

All of the projects in the Fund also struggled to capture post-participation data about sustained changes in physical activity levels. Participants are inevitably less likely to reply to surveys once their engagement with a project is finished. If we want to capture follow-up data more accurately, we need to provide structures (and funding) to help, from incentivising participants to complete surveys to centralising data collection.

2. Social connection is often the driving force for change, not an added bonus

For people who been through transitions, or disruptive life events, it becomes even more difficult to prioritise physical activity. Teenage girls engaged in the projects spoke about bullying, loneliness or difficulties at home and school. Not all had parents who could support them to attend the activities, either through physically getting them to things or through encouragement.

Girls without strong pre-existing social networks appear to be less likely to attend after-school activities, as they feel uncomfortable without peer support. **Scottish Youth Dance** and **KA Leisure** shifted their delivery to in-curriculum time at least initially to reach girls for whom extra-curricular activity was too big a step.

Many of these girls made new friendships as a result. Hannah who took part in **Girls Make Your Move** explained: “A big part of why I joined GMYM and kept going was the social aspect. Not only did you meet other

people but you got to create bonds with other people.”

KA Leisure have expanded their original programme to work with Syrian refugees. This tailored programme provides a safe space for recent arrivals to swim, dance and keep fit in a way that is sensitive to both cultural differences and to the trauma that many of the girls have experienced.

The experiences of the Fund's grantees reinforced the message of the Thrive toolkit that opportunities for socialising should be explicitly be built into the provision.

3. People have complex lives – and organisations can cater for them best by working in partnership

Most of the projects in the Fund worked in partnership with other organisations to find people who wanted or needed to reconnect with physical activity. **The Venture Trust** and **Street League** for example, both had pre-existing partners who helped them to reach their defined target audience. Several projects took referrals from schools.

The best partnerships were able to reinforce the positive messages of the physical activity provider, helping the girls and women know what to expect. Many also gave useful background information about participants to the project teams, identifying additional needs or preferences.

Some projects explained that they would have preferred to get more detailed information from partners, as their participants had more complex needs than they expected. Working in partnership helped projects take a more holistic view on reconnecting participants with physical activity and also helped them to identify the limits of what a single project could achieve. As well as getting referrals, many grantees were also able to refer people to other organisations and activities that helped meet their needs. The Changing Lives through Sport and Physical Activity Fund will explore partnership working in more

depth, as all projects have both a sport and community partner.

Continuation

Case study on page 21

1. Provide skills that participants can integrate into their daily lives

To really see the benefits of engaging with physical activity, girls and women need to be able to continue their participation outside the projects and incorporate it into their daily lives.

This was an important feature of the cycling projects in the Fund. Participants were taught bike maintenance workshops, as well as being supported to practice road cycling so that they could use their bikes as a mode of transport as well as a leisure activity.

Bike for Good explained that one participant had been annoyed to find roads “getting smaller” to make way for cycle lanes, but since learning to cycle she had found a new appreciation for them, and would rather be cycling than driving.

2. Think through signposting and progression pathways throughout the project, not just at the end

Another method to ensure that participants’ engagement with physical activity and wellbeing carries on past project is to offer the girls and women progression pathways, knowledge of available services, and referral to places they can continue to practice.

Projects from the Fund have achieved this by signposting participants onto other regular groups. **Z1 Girls Group** for example were able to direct girls from this project to their existing clubs such as **Z1 Dance** and **That Friday Thing**. Participants from **The Venture Trust** had a dedicated outreach staff to help them engage with services

in the local community. By the end of the project, 50% of participants had increased their use of services.

Grantees referred girls and women to partner programmes which could offer additional support or next steps. **Bike for Good** for example, had referred a participant with cerebral palsy to a specialist organisation called Free Wheel North, which supports disabled people to cycle.

Some projects offered progression pathways such as leadership training that could lead onto sustainable opportunities where participants could use their new skills. Ten girls from **Z1 Girls Group** completed either the dance or handball leadership training, meaning that they could now be involved in delivering these physical activities within schools themselves.

3. Reduce financial burdens for participants to allow continuation with physical activities

Engaging in sport and physical activity can be expensive if there are no free clubs or financial subsidies to support girls and

women from low income backgrounds. Many projects in this Fund were working in areas of deprivation. **Street League**, which worked with unemployed women, and **Bike for Good** which worked with refugees, had to be particularly aware of the hidden costs of physical activity (transport, kit, equipment).

Bike for Good gave participants the opportunity to purchase bikes at a low cost as well as a selection of free rental options through the NextBike scheme and local community hub. **Street League** provided free kit and discounted memberships to the Clydebank Leisure Centre.

As **Street League** explained: “We offer discounted gym membership through Clydebank Leisure Centre for participants once they have finished a Street League programme. For the 11 participants working at Together Energy, they have private healthcare through the Vitality scheme, which offers cashback rewards and incentives for physical activity. Participants can purchase a discounted Apple Watch to track their steps and this is encouraged around the office.”



Case Study

Intervention

The Ripple Project

The Ripple Project is a community organisation set up by local people to support the people of Restalrig, Lochend and Craightinny in Edinburgh

The project had a slow start, as it was even more challenging to get the girls interested in physical activity than the team had envisaged. Partly this was the branding of the project – the name Girls Get Fit Get Fed – as well as the original time slot of Saturday morning. Following consultation with Spirit and other funded projects, as well as looking at the Thrive toolkit, the project was relaunched as Girls' Friday Night Café Drop-In. The team removed the explicit focus on physical activity to concentrate on building relationships between the girls. Each drop-in involved a coached sport session supporting a group of 15-20 girls each week.

Combining youth work with a gradual introduction to physical activity has helped the girls become more comfortable with exercise.

The Ripple Project give the example of Maia, who has a difficult home life and low attendance at school.

She was low in confidence and reluctant to participate in PE. Maia is now attending five groups a week at The Ripple Project, including acting as a volunteer in the physical activity sessions for younger children.

Maia explains: "I come to the group to spend time with my friends and dance or play sports – I like cooking, football and just chilling. I like coming to the group because I can speak to the workers when I'm having a rubbish day, and playing football and other stuff helps me calm down... I go to 5 groups a week due to being allowed to volunteer at the younger group which means I'm never just bored in the house. I try to walk or play football every day as it helps when I get stressed."

⁴ All names given in these case studies have been changed

The Ripple Project's Girls Sports and Wellbeing worker developed a close relationship with Maia, and organised a meeting to speak to the school.⁴ Over the course of the project, Maia's attendance at school and participation in PE improved.

The team had hoped to see more changes to the girls' eating habits alongside their increased activity. The girls have reported that they have used their new-found cooking skills to cook healthier meals for their families, but ready access to affordable convenience foods in the area makes this issue more intractable.

Nonetheless, the wider emphasis on healthy lifestyles was something the girls reflected positively on at the end of the project:

"I now know more about how what I put into my body can make a difference on having a healthy brain. I now exercise more and try to eat better, but I know some sweets are ok as a treat too".

Perhaps most profoundly, now the girls are more confident in the space, and this has helped them engage in more of the activities that The Ripple Project has to offer: girls now make up 50% of the attendees at mixed group sessions, up from 15% at the start of the project. As staff explained:

"Not only did the fund increase participation in sport and physical activity, and the general health and wellbeing of girls and young women, but it also contributed to solidifying a change where girls were no longer a small part of open access groups at the Ripple, but they are now central to the policy, planning and delivery of the youth service which is a great legacy to be part of."

Case Study

KA Leisure

Prevention

KA Leisure offered a menu of different physical activities, wellbeing support and outdoor pursuits as part of their Girl Make Your Move project

Many of the girls who took part in the Fund hadn't always disliked sport and physical activity. One of the key audiences for the project was girls who had been physically active at primary school, then started to decrease their activity – or stop it altogether – as teenagers.

KA Leisure's project was piloted in two secondary schools. It offered a menu of physical activities, wellbeing support and outdoor pursuits including walking clubs, gym sessions, dance, mindfulness, yoga, cycling, park runs and boot camps. Most of the girls who took part in the programme wanted to become more physically active, and had ideas about the sorts of activities they would like to try.

56% of the girls were participating in at least weekly activity through the programme, to the surprise of some of the teachers. One of the schools has decided to implement weekly lunch-time drop in sessions on health and wellbeing as a result of taking part.

The qualitative feedback from the programme suggests that trusted relationships between the participants and the Active Schools Coordinators was absolutely vital to its success: once trust was established, the girls were more likely to show up and to attend after school activities.

One of the participants explained:

"About a year ago I stopped playing football and stopped working out and spent all my time on my iPad. I lost my passion for sport. Then Nikki came and introduced Girls Make Your Move... I started all the courses and I went to every one of them. They were

the highlight of my week... I have really enjoyed having an organised sports club to go to, during and after school, where girls can meet up and play a variety of sports. Sometimes at lunch I would feel really lonely, but because of Girls Make Your Move I am so much happier in school and feel more accepted."



Case Study

Reconnection

The Venture Trust

The Venture Trust works with people who have experienced challenging circumstances, such as homelessness, addiction or time in the criminal justice system



For many people on the programme, life has not been easy. Self-care, including finding time to be physically active, has often taken a back seat. The wilderness journeys give participants a huge sense of personal achievement, as well as acting as a catalyst for wider change.

The Venture Trust explains that their participants all want to make a change in their lives. Projects which seek to reconnect women with physical activity after life challenges should bear in mind that for some participants health and wellbeing goals will be a driving force behind their involvement, for others they would be of secondary importance.

The women who took part in **The Venture Trust** project had wellbeing levels significantly below the UK average – the average life satisfaction of the group before taking part was 5.6 out of 10. This rose to 7.5 out of 10 after the wilderness journey. The programme effectively reached out to and supported people with low wellbeing where an intervention such as this could make a meaningful difference.

“I was a heroin addict and I got the opportunity through the criminal justice system to go and do this. I even got support before I started from Venture Trust. When you want to do something, and you feel like

life is not giving you a good hand, and you get that opportunity, **The Venture Trust** gives you that drive.”

85% (29 of 34) of the women were referred to the programme from partner agencies, such as social workers, Women’s Aid and Access to Industry. There is a hugely important role for non-sports organisations to play in referring women to inspiring and supportive recreational activities. One participant explained:

“It has made me enjoy the outdoors again. I was previously very introverted and unable to get out and about. Now I attend a climbing group and do a lot more walking and attend spin classes.”

Another participant has begun a mentoring qualification, which she puts down to the increased confidence she gained from taking part.

“I’ve changed my life, but they gave me the support and the drive, and they gave me the belief. It really is a chance for change.”

The Venture Trust had a highly successful established programme before getting involved in the Fund. However, they have used the opportunity to capture powerful data on wellbeing:

“The wellbeing outcomes are really strong at the post-journey monitoring phase. This is an area where we know we make a difference but have not specifically measured. This was introduced specifically for the Spirit-funded courses but has been really valuable and we will look to include in future monitoring for Next Steps – and potentially other programmes.”

Case Study

Bike for Good

Continuation

Bike for Good focused on supporting women from underrepresented groups into cycling, including BAME women

By the end of the 8-week course, participants were inspired and confident to continue with their cycling journey with friends and family.

“How has it changed my life? Increased confidence cycling. Got my bike serviced and bought equipment to allow cycling to and from work. I regularly go to parks and am able to cycle independently. I have encouraged a few friends to receive lessons. [I’ve] been actively telling my community about benefits of cycling!”

In total 131 women attended a session with **Bike for Good**, of which 39 were regulars. 75% of the participants had never cycled before. The small steps approach was vital here. Recognising that this was a new experience for many of the participants, Pedal Pathways tailored an opportunity for 64 of the women to learn in a one-to-one or small group session which was particularly helpful for those who didn’t feel comfortable or confident enough to navigate on roads.

For those who had previous experience with cycling, financial constraints and caring responsibilities made it difficult for the women to take part as often as they would have liked. Pedal Pathways offered free or low-cost options. Eleven women from the project took advantage of the free membership to the City Bike Hire scheme, and all participants had the chance to purchase very low-cost bikes at the Pedal Pathways Celebration event. Thirty-five women bought or joined partner schemes such as Bike for Refugees to continue their new-found passion for cycling. Bike ownership increased from 19% to 48%.

Bike for Good made it clear that babies were welcome, with participants taking it in

turns to watch each other’s children whilst they had 1.1 tuition. One mother had a trailer fitted to the bike so she could join the longer expedition. This family-friendly approach demonstrated how cycling could be something women could enjoy together with their partners and children. Five families took part in the celebration trip to Millport, encouraging a wider cohort to develop healthy habits through active recreation.

“Since the sessions, Shaheen has been out cycling with her husband, and encourages her children to cycle more, bringing them to some of our Bike for Good family events. She has also said that she has been walking more and is taking care of her diet too. Giving advice and inspiring others, she even said she was persuading her friends and family in Pakistan to cycle! She says she feels fitter and healthier and has lost a lot of weight, she feels happy and confident.”

With the combination of accessibility, on-road experience and bike maintenance knowledge, the majority of the women now have the confidence to cycle as their main mode of transport. The women’s testimony emphasised the freedom that learning to cycle had brought them, opening up the city and allowing them to get to other activities. One participant who was supported to apply for a free bike from Bikes for Refugees explained that she was able to access more services post-project: bus tickets were not always affordable, but she was now confident to more around Glasgow by bike.

The signposting and progression pathways offered by **Bike for Good** are a good example of how projects from the Fund have provided opportunities for people to (re)integrate with society and to lead a more active life.

What's next?



For the projects

Many of the projects supported by the Sporting Equality Fund are looking to continue their work to get women and girls more active.

For some, this requires more funding and they are currently seeking opportunities for further funding. The detailed evaluation work they have begun as part of the Fund will help this process.

Others have looked to make their activities sustainable by passing on skills and ideas to partners: for example, helping teachers to consider how to adapt their PE sessions to engage less physically confident girls, or offer a wider range of activities to appeal to different personalities.

Some have focused on increasing the confidence and skills of participants, so that the activities can be sustainable on an individual basis even if the sessions have ceased.

For funders

A one-year small grants programme is a challenge to deliver and administer. Projects take time to set up, recruit staff and build relationships with partners and participants. Funding tends to focus on direct delivery,

and this limits resource for thorough evaluation and reflection.

Nonetheless, this Fund has added to the growing evidence that a small-steps, personalised approach to physical activity and active recreation can have a profound impact on women and girls, particularly those from vulnerable and underserved groups.

There are several areas that we think there is potential to explore in more detail with focused research. For example:

- Do projects which have complementary educational content about healthy lifestyles have a greater effect on increasing activity levels?
- How much do girls' initial personal preferences (and stereotypes) about an activity affect whether they stick with it in the medium and long term?
- How can we structure funding to allow grantees to analyse the long-term effects of their interventions?

We are excited to continue to grow this body of learning with the Changing Lives through Sport and Physical Activity Fund.

If you have questions about the data and stories in this report, please write to amy.finch@spiritof2012.org.uk.

Thank you

Spirit of 2012 thanks the Scottish Government for their continued support in working together to make Scotland more active. We thank the fourteen funded partners who took part in the Sporting Equality Fund for their hard work and commitment to learning throughout the life of the Fund.

