

Big Lottery Fund Research

Community Sport: evaluation update



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Key findings

This update details key findings from the first year of the Community Sport evaluation. The evaluation covers the programmes that are being delivered through the Community Sport Initiative in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Active Lifestyles and Community Sport, Northern Ireland

- ▶ Projects have strong links with local policies and strategies.
- ▶ There is a heavy reliance on volunteers to deliver some projects.
- ▶ A range of partners are involved in delivering projects.
- ▶ Projects are using a range of methods to recruit beneficiaries.
- ▶ There is evidence for emerging good practice for training, self-evaluation and using physical activity to complement other activities such as drama and art.

Active Futures, Scotland

- ▶ Partnerships are key to delivering projects.

- ▶ Projects are using a variety of approaches to targeting and engaging beneficiaries.
- ▶ Projects are mainly linked to local policy and strategies, but links to national strategies are less clear.
- ▶ Some projects have reported early indications of increased confidence and motivation among beneficiaries.
- ▶ There is emerging good practice for improving awareness of projects among disabled people, innovative ways of recruiting staff and involving participants in decision-making.

Mentor Allan, Wales

- ▶ The timetable for the programme in Wales means that projects are starting later than in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The evaluation has mainly focused on the work of the national partnership in year one.
- ▶ The National Partnership has facilitated the opportunity to bring together key stakeholders and has created links between some organisations that have not worked together in the past.

Key findings

This has helped to enable effective partnership working at a local and regional level.

- ▶ Some stakeholders are concerned that activities delivered by some projects will be seasonal, meaning that they may not leave a sustained benefit.



The Community Sport Initiative

This section provides background information about each of the programmes that are being delivered across the UK.

England

Active England is a jointly funded programme between the Big Lottery Fund (£77.5million) and Sport England (£31million) which aims to encourage creative approaches that will help to increase physical activity levels and sports participation rates in all sections of society and in particular for those who do not currently participate. It seeks to create sustainable innovative multi-activity environments in areas of social, sport and health deprivation in England. The programme is being evaluated separately by Sport England. We intend to merge the findings from the Active England and Community Sport evaluations at the end of the programmes.

Scotland

We have committed £5.5 million

towards the Active Futures programme in Scotland that aims to encourage inactive 17-24 year olds to become active by getting them to participate in sport and physical activity. It also aims to prevent people who are currently active from giving up physical activity.

Active Futures is funding partnerships to open up existing facilities and activities, or to introduce new activity programmes for the target group of 17-24 year olds.

Northern Ireland

The programme in Northern Ireland is worth a total of £4.5 million and is split into two strands. £2.4 million has been allocated to the Sports Council for Northern Ireland to deliver Strand One of the programme, which is called Community Sport. This strand aims to initiate community sport development projects in disadvantaged communities that will improve the well-being of individuals and increase participation among groups that are under-represented in

The Community Sport Initiative

sport and physical activity.

The second strand of the programme is called Active Lifestyles and is worth £2.1 million and is being delivered by BIG. Active Lifestyles aims to increase grassroots participation in physical activity among groups that are currently inactive. Increased participation in physical activity should contribute to the delivery of broader health and well-being objectives.

Organisations were able to apply for either small grants of up to £1,000 to pay for local small-scale projects, medium grants of between £6,000 and £30,000 to fund projects of up to three years or large grants of between £30,000 and £100,000 to fund strategic Northern Ireland-wide partnership projects.

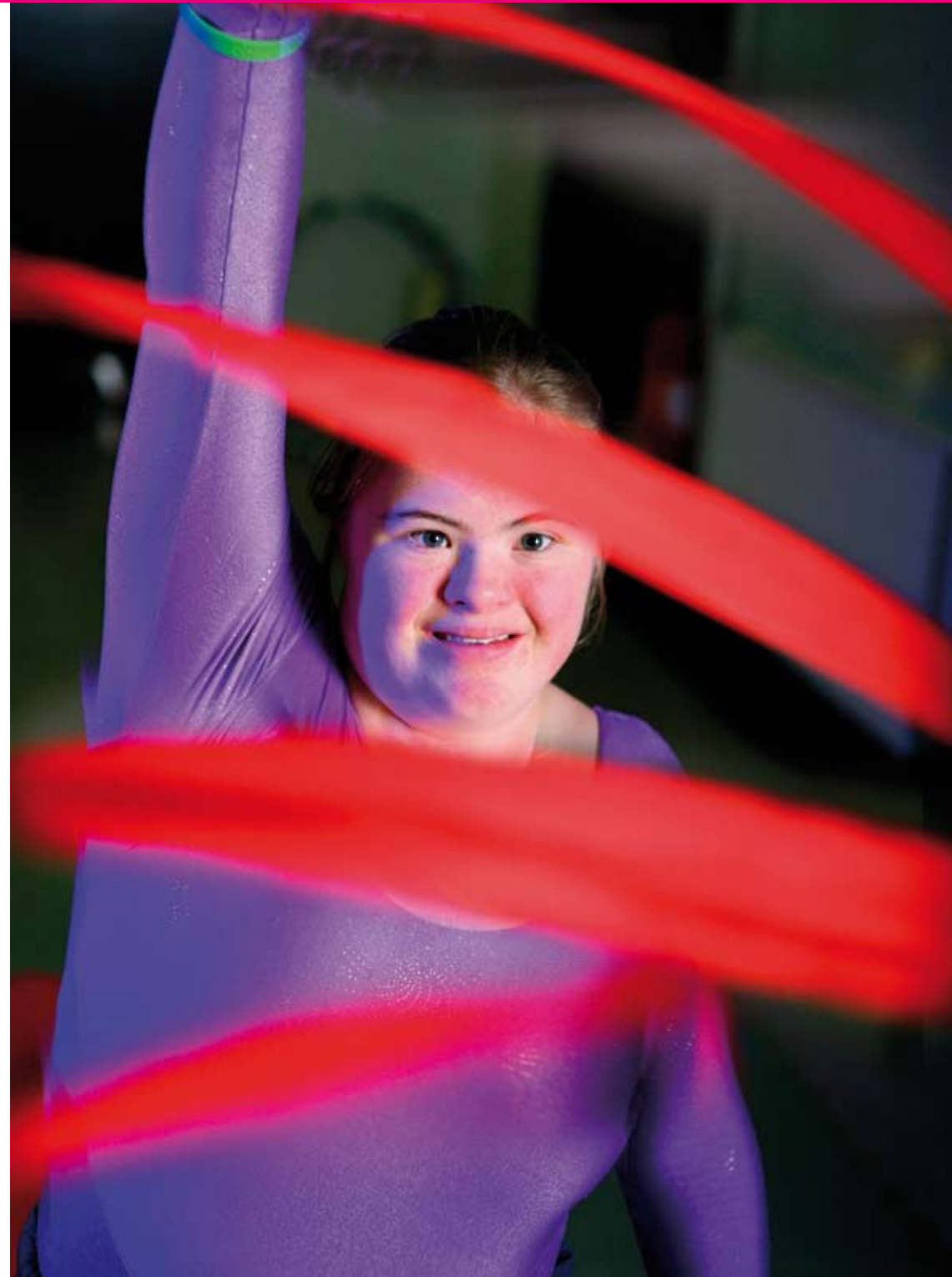
Wales

We have committed £6.5 million to the Mentro Allan programme in Wales which aims to increase activity levels among the 'hard to reach' sedentary population by increasing

the recreational use of the natural environment of Wales. The programme seeks to support the national strategic direction for physical activity in Wales. It will increase activity among the sedentary population and provide integrated and co-ordinated schemes that remove the barriers to activity experienced by certain sectors of society.

A National Partnership was funded in Wales to help organisations develop and deliver projects. The National Partnership is conducting its own evaluation of the Mentro Allan programme and the findings will link into the overall evaluation of the Community Sport Initiative. The Community Sport evaluation will conduct case study visits to projects in Wales to complement the National Partnership's evaluation.

Further information about the National Partnership's evaluation is available at www.mentroallan.co.uk.



The Evaluation

We commissioned Hall Aitken to evaluate the programmes in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales from November 2005 to November 2010.

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the impact of the programmes in meeting their aims and our core values and to examine 'what works' in increasing physical activity among



The Evaluation

people who experience barriers to participation.

The objectives of the evaluation are:

- to determine the programmes' impact in relation to their aims and to BIG's mission and values, in particular those regarding strategic working, supporting partnership, and promoting social inclusion, equality and diversity
- to add to the evidence base and develop the theory of 'what works' in meeting the aims of the programmes and increasing participation in physical activity among the target groups
- to highlight and disseminate evidence of good practice and innovative approaches in delivering and sustaining projects
- to assess the impact of partnership working on meeting the programme aims
- to assess how projects have linked with other local and national strategies and how these have complemented the delivery of the

programmes

- to highlight lessons learned in order to inform future policy development, in particular with regard to the various delivery mechanisms being applied
- to compare the impact of the programmes in increasing physical activity among the different target groups in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Hall Aitken are using a variety of methods to evaluate the programmes including stakeholder interviews, case study visits to projects and capturing data through our monitoring forms.

A website (www.bigcsi.com) has also been developed to provide tools for projects and a series of workshops will be held to provide support for projects.

Main findings in Scotland

This section outlines early findings from case study visits in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Scotland

The evaluators have completed initial visits to seven case study projects in Scotland. The purpose of the visits was to discuss the aspirations of projects and examine the progress that they have made to date.

Project delivery

We have funded a broad range of projects in Scotland. Some projects are an extension of existing activities and others are providing new services. The size and scale of projects also varies significantly in relation to both funding and staffing.

The evaluators found that some projects are providing ongoing activities and support to beneficiaries, while others provide short-term or periodic activities. Projects are operating at certain times specifically to overcome known barriers to participation, such as access to childcare facilities.

Projects are using a variety of methods to attract and engage beneficiaries. These range from traditional marketing and promotion techniques to more formal referrals from health professionals and social services.

All case study projects highlighted the importance of partnerships to deliver activities. In some cases projects work with operational partners who provide free access to facilities. Projects also work with strategic partners, which has led to a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for tackling inactivity and has helped projects to benefit from expert advice and guidance.

Most projects are linked with partners who are leading on the delivery of their local physical activity strategy. All projects identified links with other local providers and agencies. Projects' links with the wider physical activity context appear to be through partnership working with other local organisations.

Main findings in Scotland

Impact on target groups

Although it is too early to draw definite conclusions about wider impacts of activities, some projects have identified a number of areas where they are making a positive impact on increasing confidence, motivation, basic skills and health. One project also highlighted that it expects to impact positively on community cohesion through bringing together participants that are from different faiths and religious communities.

A project targeting young women from black and minority ethnic populations highlighted examples of how to address cultural sensitivities. These included making sure that the facilities were appropriate for the beneficiaries and ensuring that female staff and instructors lead the sessions.

Projects working with beneficiaries with mental health issues have identified a number of barriers to participation. These include the need to take medication during sessions

and the impact of a change in medication. One project stated that additional resources are needed to provide opportunities for people with mental health issues. In contrast, another project targeting beneficiaries with mental health issues stated that it is important to involve them in decision-making. This can help to empower beneficiaries because it presents them with choices.

Providing transport was a difficult issue for a project targeting disabled beneficiaries who often need to travel substantial distances to attend specific sessions. A number of projects confirmed that providing transport is an ongoing issue for disabled beneficiaries.

Several projects are encouraging participants to evaluate their own involvement in activities through self-completed diaries. These are an effective means of measuring softer outcomes such as increases in self-confidence and can help to measure the positive impact of

Main findings in Scotland

physical activity in changing attitudes and improving social skills.

One project that engages wheelchair users is providing advice to other leisure centres on access. Beneficiaries have been involved in undertaking access surveys, developing a map of the facility layout and access points and helping to identify sources of funding to address accessibility issues at the facility.

Sustainability

Although most projects have only just started, a number are already planning for financial sustainability for when their grant ends. Several projects are already examining mainstreaming options rather than waiting for other funding streams to emerge. Projects are identifying existing initiatives, which could adapt some of the good practice and delivery models that have been developed. Projects are also aware of the need to develop a robust evidence base as a means of attracting future funding.



Main findings in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland

The evaluators visited seven case study projects in Northern Ireland and conducted four telephone interviews to projects that were awarded under the small grants strand of the Active Lifestyles programme.

Project delivery

We have funded a wide range of projects across both strands of the programme in Northern Ireland. Projects differ in their size and scale and are being delivered in a variety of settings.

Volunteers are involved in most of the case study projects. Volunteers help to deliver activities and are also represented on the steering committees for projects.

Projects did not report any problems with recruiting staff. Several case study projects are using existing staff from partner organisations to deliver activities. This has led to creating joined-up services and increased co-operation between

partner organisations.

The evaluators found that targeting and attracting beneficiaries varies significantly across projects. Some projects are using traditional advertising and recruiting techniques, including use of the local media. Projects working with more specific target groups are using referral routes from social services and other organisations to identify beneficiaries.

Most of the larger projects are delivered through formal partnerships. Some partnerships have enabled access to free training and support while others have provided access to facilities and equipment.

Several projects have identified and established links with the local, regional or national infrastructure for delivering physical activity. This shows that projects are relevant and serving a strategic purpose and that some agencies are increasingly supportive of physical activity within

Main findings in Northern Ireland

their strategies. Smaller projects have identified mainly with local networks and initiatives including the community sports development officers.

A number of projects indicated that their impact could be greater if they received additional funding. This is because their activities are more popular than they had originally anticipated at the application stage. The projects have a higher level of demand than they can accommodate within their existing budgets.

Two projects highlighted cultural issues in setting up activities. In one case this involved previous antagonism and historical differences with an identified partner. This has slightly reduced the scope of the project but is not likely to affect the overall impact.

Impact on target groups

The presentation of the activities delivered by projects is an important factor in engaging beneficiaries. Two projects delivering activities for older

people have integrated physical activity sessions within their wider social, recreation and well-being activities. This has proved to be an effective method of engaging beneficiaries.

Taster sessions are a key feature of a number of projects. A positive introduction to physical activity and removal of common barriers can help generate longer-term participation.

The low level of motivation among inactive people was an issue for one project. Surprisingly, this was not an issue for the other case study projects. Engaging participants in this case relied on selling the social benefits of involvement and building opportunities for social interaction into the project.

A project targeting participants with learning disabilities was initially concerned that its activities would be too repetitive and not continue to engage beneficiaries. However, the participants responded positively to the repetitive activities as it gave

Main findings in Northern Ireland

them control and certainty over what they were doing.

A project working with children with autism balances physical activity with a number of quieter activities such as drama and art. This helps to ensure that the children do not get over excited and provides useful breaks in sessions. The project also found that children with autism respond better to pictures than words and used photographs to describe activities.

Training and increasing awareness appears to work well in improving access to existing sports facilities. A number of the case study projects use existing sports facilities to deliver activities. This helps to introduce new beneficiaries to leisure centres.

Case study projects reported some early evidence that engagement in physical activity has led to some social and educational benefits for beneficiaries, including increased confidence and self-esteem.

Some projects are involving their participants in monitoring and evaluation. This has helped them to realise the benefits of being involved in activities and enabled the project to collect some qualitative data. A project targeting older people found that keeping self-evaluation diaries helps keep participants both physically and mentally motivated.

Several case studies provided anecdotal evidence that the setting for activities is critical to their impact. This is particularly important with specific target groups including older people and people with disabilities.

Sustainability

A number of projects are already exploring options for continuing the project after the grant ends and are examining how activities could be mainstreamed rather than relying on other external funding sources to emerge.

Main findings in Wales

Wales

The focus of the evaluation in year one has been on the work of the National Partnership in Wales. This is because the timetable for the

programme means that projects are starting later than in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The evaluators will begin case study visits to projects in spring 2007.



Main findings in Wales

The National Partnership includes the Countryside Council for Wales, the National Public Health Service, the Sports Council for Wales, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) and the Welsh Local Government Association. The Sports Council for Wales is the lead partner and appointed a Mentro Allan National Project Manager in December 2005.

The case study of the National Partnership will allow the evaluators to explore its role as an effective model for supporting projects and facilitating an increase in physical activity.

The partnership approach has connected people and organisations that may not have previously worked together. For example, local voluntary groups and Assembly agencies such as the Countryside Council and Sports Council for Wales are working together formally through national or local partnerships.

The programme is already providing new networking opportunities at cross-departmental, national, sub regional and local levels.

There were some early operational challenges for the partnership. Some stakeholders were frustrated with the length of time between the launch of the programme in 2005 and the decision to award applications in 2006.

The time between the launch of the programme and the decision on grant awards was necessary because partnerships had to be formed to develop the applications that were submitted to BIG for approval.

Stakeholders reported that some local partnerships are concerned that the activities delivered through the programme will be seasonal and question whether this will be enough to change activity habits. This will be explored in more detail when the visits to case study projects start in spring 2007.

Next steps

The evaluators will continue case study visits to projects in 2007 and ask all projects for quantitative data. Evaluation seminars will also be held in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The national partnership will be arranging its own seminars in Wales.

Further information

To download a copy of the full evaluation report please visit:
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

To find out more about the evaluation and to download tools please visit: www.bigcsi.com



