



Insight guide

Tackling Inactivity programmes

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You can find out more information about our research [on our website](#).

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Introduction

What's in this guide?

This guide, extracted from the full evaluation report developed by CFE Research, summarises the key insights from CFE's evaluation of two of Sport England's Tackling Inactivity programmes. It includes learning that has been co-developed and produced with projects. Our aim is to share the approaches taken by projects across these Tackling Inactivity programmes and provide inspiration, ideas, actions and tips that organisations can draw on to help the people they work with to become more active.

This guide summarises the learning from each stage of project lifecycle – from designing and setting up the programme, through to engaging participants, delivering sessions, and sustaining a project legacy.

We've included top tips, illustrations and case studies shared by the projects during learning conversations to show this insight being put into practice. We know this isn't a definitive guide, and no theme or section stands alone, with each being dependent on another.

We hope this can be a starting point and valuable guide for those wishing to know more about delivering positive, inclusive physical activity experiences that are relevant, achievable and enjoyable for your community.

About the programmes

In 2016 Sport England published its strategy 'Towards an Active Nation' which set out plans to encourage inactive people to become active. To support the strategy, Sport England invested in dedicated programmes, designed to find new ways to reach underrepresented groups, and create happier and healthier communities by engaging them in physical activity. Two of these programmes, each focusing on a different target audience, are the focus of this report:

- The **£10 million Active Ageing programme** was designed to support inactive people aged 55 and over into activity, providing investment and support for 25 projects.
- The **£4.5 million Tackling Inactivity and Economic Disadvantage programme** was designed to support individuals and communities from low socio-economic groups to become more active, and supported 35 projects.

Sport England has worked collaboratively with these projects and partners over the past five years to test new approaches and capture learning on how to provide positive, inclusive physical activity experiences for their target audiences that are relevant, achievable and enjoyable and support them to integrate more sport and physical activity into their daily lives.

The projects were diverse in terms of the range of models and approaches they were testing and the types of organisations and partnerships delivering them. Many of the delivery partners had not previously received funding from Sport England, nor had they previously offered sport and physical activity opportunities to their communities.

About the projects

All projects aimed to help participants become more active and sustain this behaviour change. They provided a wide variety of activities, ranging from aerial hooping, Zumba, Boccia, walking football and chair-based exercises, to boxing, cycling, ultimate frisbee and coastal rowing.

The activities were co-designed with participants to respond to their motivations, needs and physical capabilities.

Activities were delivered in a range of convenient and accessible settings and locations, including residential care homes, parks, hospitals, housing estates, museums, hostels for homeless people, sports clubs, stadia, canal sides, community centres and libraries, as well as local gyms and leisure centres.

Physical activity was not always the central premise for bringing people together. Many projects sought to offer a supportive space for people to create social connections first and foremost and then introduced participants to physical activity over time. For example, a walking befriending service to help participants cope with bereavement and loss, and a session for people with dementia that combined physical activity with reminiscence activities.

Funded organisations varied greatly in size and capacity, ranging from large charities that operate on a national scale to very small hyper-local community organisations.

About this document

The following pages are sectioned into the principle stages of project delivery in sequence and illustrate the learning from these programmes, including top tips, case studies and illustrations created during learning conversations between projects.

Project design

Setting up your project

- **Identify gaps in local provision.** Work with partners to map the physical activity landscape in your local area so you are aware of the existing offer for your target audience and can ensure new activities add value to current provision.
- **Engage your target audience from the outset and throughout the project.** Work with members of your target audience to explore how they can be enabled to become more physically active. Find out what is important to them and use this to address barriers that prevent activity. Insights from the evaluation suggest that these barriers include:
 - **Situational factors** such as work and shift patterns, family and caring commitments, and cost/affordability.
 - **Health-related factors** such as lack of physical mobility, low fitness levels and anxiety about pain or making conditions worse.
 - **Infrastructure**, such as lack of transport/poor transport links and a lack of suitable places to get active within walking distance of a participant's home or workplace.
 - **Personal factors** such as lack of confidence and perceived ability.
 - **Cultural factors** such as lack of female only activities/facilities or perceptions about what physical activity involves.
- **Co-design the activity with your target group** to ensure it is appealing, meets their needs and, as far as possible, addresses identified barriers.
- **Build flexibility into your programme.** Some target audiences may be unwilling or unable to commit to an activity on a very regular basis (e.g. weekly), so it is important to offer the flexibility for participants to 'dip in and out'.
- **Adapt activities according to ability.** Participants' fitness levels and physical capabilities are likely to vary so it is important to think about how an activity can be adapted for those with more limited mobility as well as those seeking more of a challenge. Individual participants' needs are likely to change over time, so it is also important to ensure activities are flexible enough to evolve in response.
- **Resources and equipment.** Some activities may require certain equipment or a specific type of venue. Collaborating with other groups and sharing resources and facilities reduces the need to purchase additional equipment and helps budgets to go further.
- **Group size and composition.** It can be challenging to deliver some activities to large groups and/or to participants with a wide range of abilities. It is therefore important to consider the composition as well as the size of the group.
- **Changing attitudes and behaviour takes time.** To achieve lasting change, it is important to consider the length of the programme and how participants can be supported to continue on their physical activity journey from the outset to post programme provision.



Top tip: Engage participants from the outset, in programme design

Co-designing activities with participants helps to provide a better overall experience. Involving potential participants in activity design can help to ensure that the activity fits their interests, needs and requirements.

Top tip: Adapt activities for different capabilities across your participants

For example, Dance-based activities were adapted for those who need to remain seated, those who can stand but have limited mobility and those who can move comfortably around a room.

Case Study: the value of co-production

Sporting Memories Network CIC uses the hook of sport to engage isolated older people living with long-term conditions like dementia, Parkinson's disease, depression or loneliness. Weekly volunteer-led group activities take place at a range of community locations and use archive images of sport to trigger memories of playing or watching sports. The clubs incorporate age-appropriate physical activity and stimulate competition within the groups through playing accessible sports.

Participants are at the heart of developing and running activities. Everyone is encouraged to become involved to any extent they wish by contributing content, designing and delivering activities, determining the initial and ongoing location, timings and composition of the club. This process helps make the activities themselves more relevant and valuable to the participants who helped create them.

By getting involved participants build confidence, agency and interpersonal skills that have a wider impact outside of the clubs. This enables them to take more control of their lives and how they interact with statutory agencies and other service providers.

Audience engagement

Reaching and recruiting your target audience

- **Community organisations could collaborate with partners at the national level.** Local groups have credibility with the communities they work with, as well as an in-depth understanding of local culture and the issues and challenges residents face. Collaboration with national organisations is an effective way for community organisations to engage larger organisations, who could scale up projects, with these communities.
- **Create referral routes between local partners.** Working together at a local level to identify and engage potential participants supports recruitment. It can also help to establish progression pathways for participants who want to try something different or move on to something more challenging.
- **Create a range of routes into an activity.** Some participants may be apprehensive about signing up to an activity, particularly if it involves a long-term commitment. Consider offering taster sessions to give prospective participants a sense of what the activity will be like. Engage community volunteers and past participants to act as programme ambassadors and to accompany those attending an activity for the first time.
- **Use a range of communication channels.** Electronic methods of communication, such as websites, email and social media, are an efficient and cost-effective way to reach out to large numbers of potential participants and to deal with questions and inquiries. However, not all audiences have access to the technology or the necessary digital skills to engage with information in this way. It is important to communicate with your communities in an appropriate way, including through leaflets and posters, which can be produced in alternative formats (such as large print and Braille) and community languages.

Top tip: consider using trusted local venues

“The club is well known within the local community and is part of the fabric of the area. When I heard about these sessions, and that they were being run by the club, I thought they must be good otherwise the club would not be doing it.”

EFL Trust Extra Time Hubs participant

- **Tailor your messaging to your target audience.** Choose the language and imagery you use in promotional materials carefully. Use images of people that participants can identify with. Provide an accurate description of the activity so that participants understand what is involved as well as what they can expect to achieve as a result of taking part. Focus the messages on the features of the activity that are likely to hook people in – the opportunity to have fun, meet new people and share common interests – not just the health benefits.
- **Think about the whole journey and the information that participants need at each stage** from inquiring about the activities, registering to take part, attending and completing the sessions. This includes information on transport links to the venue/location, signage within the venue/location to the activity and the facilities available, such as toilets and changing rooms, crèche and a place to get refreshments.

Top tip: Make physical activity relevant and achievable to people

Many of us love sport and can think everyone else does, but this isn't always the case. Reframing what it means to be physically active, that it's not just about joining an organised activity, that it can be active travel or everyday activities such as gardening, climbing the stairs or walking a little more briskly is important to help people find ways to get active that work for them.



Project delivery

Providing a great experience for everyone

- **Ensure the venue/location is safe, welcoming and accessible.** Delivering activities in familiar venues and locations can help engage and retain participants. Venues and locations must be easy to get to and accessible for wheelchair users and those with limited mobility. Some venues, such as those that serve alcohol or without a private space to change and exercise, will be unsuitable for some groups.
- **Provide facilities for those with caring responsibilities,** such as a crèche or respite care, ideally onsite and free of charge or at a reduced cost.
- **Ensure activities are enjoyable and engaging.** Opportunities to have fun and socialise – before, during or after an activity – can help attract participants initially and motivate them to keep coming back.
- **Consider your target audience when timetabling activities.** Different audiences may prefer to engage in activities at different times of day or night. While some will prefer early morning sessions (e.g. before work) others will prefer daytime sessions (e.g. while children or dependents are in school or day care). Some may prefer or only have the opportunity to engage in activities at night, such as shift workers or those observing Ramadan.
- **Support your staff to be empathetic and adaptable to people's needs and capabilities.** This is particularly important when engaging with less mobile groups such as care home residents or people with limiting health conditions or individuals with complex needs.
- **Volunteers play a critical role in the success of a project.** Volunteers fulfil a range of important roles – both formal and informal – that support delivery. They can act as programme ambassadors and positive role models for those who have further to go on their physical activity journey, helping to encourage members of their community to engage and sustain their involvement. They can also take responsibility for designing and delivering whole activities. The case study and graphic opposite, created during the learning conversations between projects, illustrate the benefits and advantages of volunteer-led programmes.

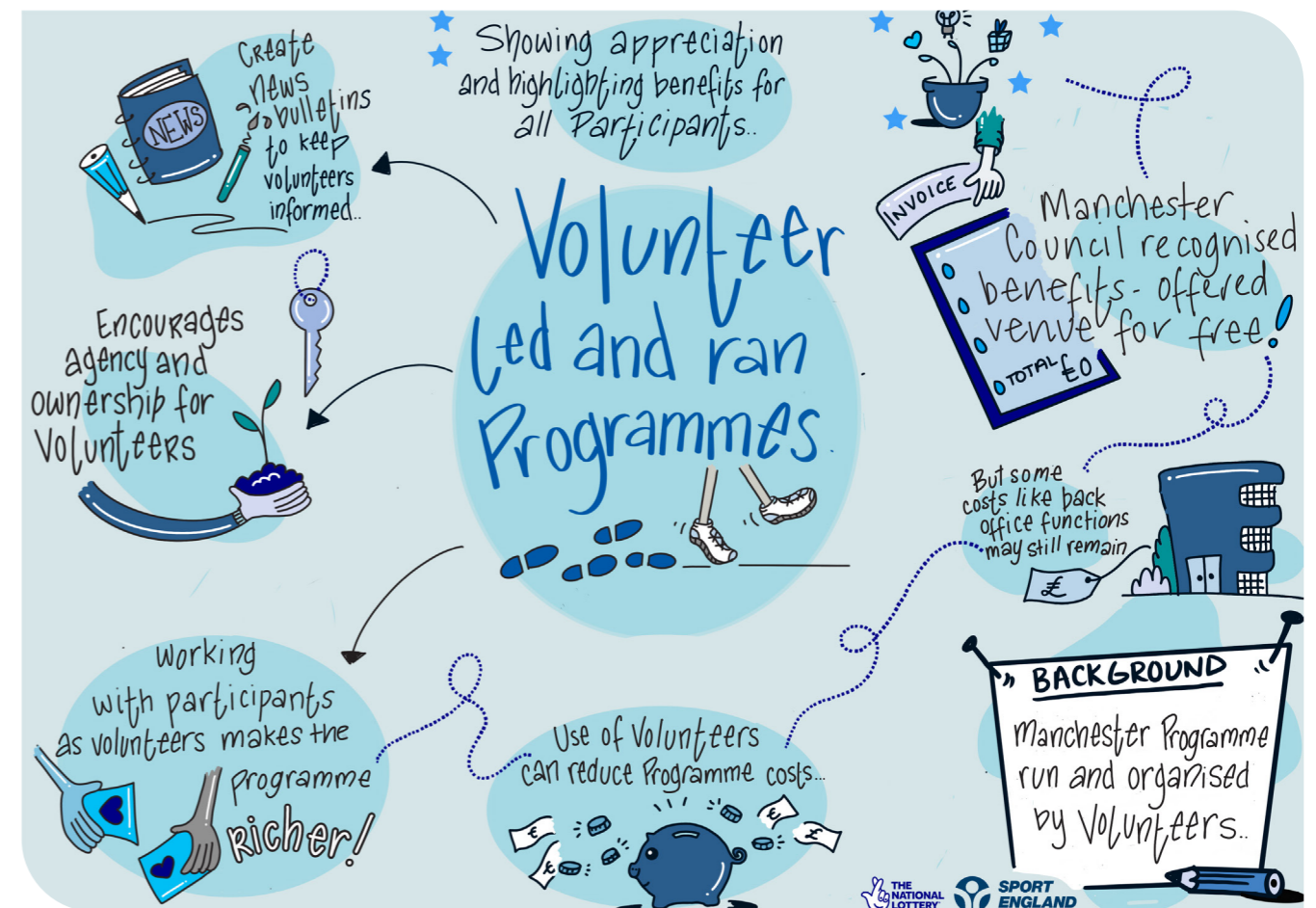
“A lot of the hostel staff will be chasing clients for their rent arrears and things like that. Clients see us as the people coming to provide sport, fun activities [...] You can see a differences between our relationship with them and the hostel staff's relationship with them.”

Crisis

Case Study: the value of volunteering

Bury, Manchester and Stockport Metropolitan Borough Councils (MBCs) used their funding as part of the Greater Manchester Active Ageing programme to support activities led by volunteers or champions. Volunteers supported the running of activities or mentored their peers to encourage those less confident to attend sessions. Volunteers highlight a range of benefits from the programme, including improved confidence, a greater sense of self-worth and improved life satisfaction. The below illustration was produced as part of the learning conversations between projects to reflect some of the benefits arising from volunteer led project/programme design.

Stockport MBC focused on over-65s who had experienced a life-changing event such as retirement or bereavement. Working in partnership with a range of statutory and non-statutory local organisations they developed a referral pathway. This was based on a peer support volunteer programme for those needing additional support into physical activity, through chair-based sessions and walk and talk programmes.



Sustaining participant engagement

Keeping your audience active in the long run

- **Ensuring community ownership of your activity encourages active and sustained engagement.** Empowering participants to shape sessions means that activities don't go 'stale' and can be changed in response to their needs and preferences, for example, if participants simply don't like or enjoy an activity or want more challenge as they get physically fitter and increase their skill level.
- **Consider the potential use of rewards and incentives.** Discuss with your group whether they would value being rewarded for their attendance or as an incentive to help them stay motivated. Some participants may benefit from a reward for achieving a personal milestone.
- **Work with your group to identify opportunities for people who want to progress.** Signpost participants to other activities and put progression pathways in place to ensure individuals are able to remain active.
- **Maintain contact with participants between sessions.** Programme retention can be challenging, particularly if the target audience has multiple or complex needs. Keeping in touch with participants between sessions can help to keep them motivated and sustain their engagement.

“Every time a client attends a session they get a stamp on a loyalty card and then they receive a personalised reward. Some people have chosen sports clothing... another wanted a blender for food and nutrition.”

Single Homeless Project

Progression routes: participants to volunteers

One project noted that there was an appetite among some of their participants to undertake a formal fitness training qualification. Working with a local partner, the project provided instructors to help participants achieve this goal. Some of the participants who successfully completed their qualifications have gone on to run sessions. Not only have these people become ambassadors for the programme, they have also contributed to its sustainability beyond the Sport England funding.



Sustaining the project

Continuing your service and impact beyond initial funding

- **Develop a sustainability plan:** It is important to consider how a project can be sustained in the long term from the outset. Potential funding models and sources of funding (including the potential to charge for activities) should be explored and form the basis of a plan that also sets out how requirements such as staffing, equipment, venue/ location and outreach to new communities and groups will be met.
- **Understand participation demographics.** It is important to capture the number and characteristics of participants to establish whether a project is reaching its target audience and in sufficient numbers to ensure its viability. It is also important to understand the true cost of delivery to inform future delivery plans.
- **Support and develop the volunteer workforce.** Volunteers can feel undervalued if they are not supported and recognised for their contribution. Formal and informal training and/or mentoring helps to build confidence as well as develop volunteers' skills to ensure they are effective and remain in their role. Articulating the value and intrinsic benefits of volunteering helps to recruit volunteers who are primarily motivated by a desire to help others. Former participants can make effective volunteers because they can draw on their experience of the programme and can relate to potential participants.
- **Understand your learning and outcomes to improve and sustain delivery.** Building evaluation in from the outset enables providers to understand how effectively their project is being delivered (and where it could be improved) and measure its impact. This evidence can be used in funding applications to support the long-term sustainability of a project. Tackling Inactivity projects captured learning and insight to inform delivery in a number of ways (see image overleaf). These methods were often designed to enable participants to share their perceptions and experiences in a way that worked for them.
- **Secure buy-in to monitoring and evaluation from the outset.** Ensuring staff, volunteers and participants understand the rationale for collecting information and the purpose of evaluation helps to shift mindsets from 'evaluation is a burden' to 'learning as an asset' which encourages buy-in. It is important to make it as easy as possible for stakeholders to engage with monitoring and evaluation processes. Collecting data once and ensuring permission is in place for all potential uses (including monitoring and evaluation purposes) helps to reduce burden and sustain engagement.

"I think when it was free, it allowed people to come... [Not charging] allowed us to develop a sense of community in the first few weeks... This made it easier for us to find the money when they started charging because we can see that it is helping us all."

Outta School participant



Wider benefits for delivery providers

Additional outcomes you might consider

Tackling Inactivity has delivered a range of benefits for the stakeholders involved in the delivery of the projects:

- **Improved organisational profile.** The projects have helped to increase the visibility of providers in their local communities as well as with local and national stakeholders.
- **Strengthened organisational offer:** The activities have created additional pathways for clients who were already engaging in core services. This has helped to sustain client engagement as well as deliver wider benefits, such as a reduction in instances of anti-social behaviour in hostels.
- **Increased awareness of the importance of sport and physical activity.** Project staff increasingly recognise the role that sport and physical activity can play in enhancing the experience of service users. As a result, some organisations have introduced new strategic objectives for physical activity within their business plans.

- **Collaboration and partnership** is the golden thread that runs through this programme and is integral to its success. Both the Active Ageing and TIED projects engaged with a diverse range of partners when developing and delivering their programmes, including other service providers, community centres, faith groups, charities, sports clubs and schools. Partnerships can take time and resources to establish, but once in place, deliver a range of benefits for projects, partner organisations and of course participants, as illustrated below.

“Working with partners has allowed us to share best practice, increase resources across sectors and co-design sessions to achieve multiple objectives. All these factors contribute towards project sustainability and legacy.”

Cotman Housing Group



