



Core Market Life Changes Fund Report

July 2020

ECORYS 

Life Changes Fund Report (July 2020)

Executive summary

This report summarises the key learnings and impacts to date from 19 projects that are being implemented by 17 partners under Sport England's Core Market Life Changes Fund. The Life Changes Fund was launched to learn more about the impact of major life changes on active people's patterns of physical activity and to understand the types of interventions that work well in responding to life changes. The 19 Life Changes projects encompass several different life changes themes including disability, pregnancy, becoming a carer, older age and retirement, transitioning from education to work etc

The evidence has been largely gathered through a standardised data collection template that is used for regular six-monthly reporting on KPIs and learning. The analysis is also based on additional reports and case studies provided by the projects as part of their evaluation outputs.

Drawing on the learning reported on by partners, key findings are summarised below under four different project stages: set-up, recruitment, delivery, sustainability.

Project set-up

- Projects incorporating digital platforms need to factor in enough time for these elements to be procured, developed and made fit-for-purpose.
- To avoid delays to the start of delivery, sufficient time to gain ethical approval should be built into project setup times.
- Initial consultation work with potential service users allows their needs to be fully understood and projects to be co-designed/tailored to meet these needs.
- Partnership work can help with project setup, as organisations are able to provide projects with local knowledge, insight and contacts.

Recruitment

- Referral partners can be a great help with recruitment. However, when referral pathways are not functioning as planned, it is important to find out why this is and implement strategies to overcome any challenges.
- Regular contact with referral partners is important. Participant stories are an effective way of reminding organisations of the benefits of the project.
- Events and taster sessions can act as a way of engaging with potential participants (and referral organisations) and showcase what the project offers.
- Word-of-mouth can raise awareness of projects and prompt people to take part, though this method of recruitment takes time to evolve.
- Research and insight work can help identify successful referral routes, as well as inform future recruitment strategies.

Delivery

- Participants may need extra support, especially at the beginning. 1:1 support can increase confidence and encourage participation.
- Flexible delivery can help ensure that sessions are meeting the target audience's needs and help improve attendance rates.
- Fun and social elements can be important for some participants, so delivery should cover this as well as physical activity aspects.
- Participant feedback can help ensure that activities are meeting needs and also help shape future content if adaptations to delivery are needed.

Sustainability

- Identifying and signposting participants to post-programme activities is a way of sustaining physical activity levels beyond the project itself.
- Buddying and mentoring systems can provide support to participants at the post-project stage and encourage them to attend other activities/sessions.
- Communicating the positive impacts of physical activity on mental wellbeing could act as a driver to encourage sustained activity in the long-term.
- Elements of sustainability can be incorporated from the start, including using familiar and accessible venues and working with community members to develop and deliver the project itself.

Based on the learnings so far, suggestions for future work with the Life Changes Fund projects include:

- **Monitoring reports** – the template is predominantly quantitative in nature (i.e. targets and supporting indicators tab), with limited space to detail impact/include qualitative findings in the narrative reporting tab. Some projects are already sending additional evidence (such as interim/annual reports and case studies) to Ecorys. To understand more about the impact of projects' work, especially as further data collection takes place, projects could be encouraged to continue submitting these additional documents.
- **Shared project learning** – from the monitoring reports. So far, it is clear that there is a lot of learning which could be shared between projects. This could be in the form of online webinars focusing on particular life changes themes/ learning areas.
- **Shared evaluation learning** – there is also scope to share learning about carrying out evaluation work generally, for example, across different data collection methods. Sport in Mind may be well-placed to do this, having worked hard to facilitate inclusive focus groups and also having trained staff to carry out data collection sensitively and appropriately. Active Norfolk have also been working to develop data collection tools suitable to their target audience (On the Move) and could share their learning in this area.
- **Covid-19 specific learning** – whilst the impacts of Covid-19 are only just beginning to be reported on by projects, this could be a further area of focus. Capturing how projects have dealt with the issues/challenges this has presented and sharing these solutions with other projects in similar situations could be a beneficial future piece of work.

Introduction

This report provides a summary of key learnings to date from the Core Market Life Changes Fund projects. It begins with an overview of the Life Changes Fund work that has been carried out, before providing details of the projects and the themes they explore. It then goes on to outline key learnings across four different areas: project set-up, recruitment, delivery and sustainability. Next, it looks at the impact of this work that projects have identified to date, which is predominantly at an individual participant level. The report finishes with conclusions about the learning so far and recommendations for further work with this funded group.

About the Life Changes Fund evaluation

The Life Changes Fund was launched to learn more about the impact of major life changes on active people's patterns of physical activity. Ecorys has been providing ongoing advice and support to 17 partners who are delivering 19 Life Changes Fund projects. Ecorys has helped each partner to develop their evaluation plans, all of which are now signed off and in progress. It is apparent that the scope of the evaluations may need to change in light of Covid-19 and Ecorys can help projects to adapt their plans where required.

A standardised data collection template, which facilitates regular reporting on KPIs and learning is being used for the six-monthly reporting process. Data from the monitoring reports, along with additional evidence and case studies provided by projects has been used to inform the content of this report. As the majority of reports and supporting material were submitted before Covid-19, this report focuses on learning prior to this period. It is anticipated that future project learning will incorporate more details of the challenges faced and how projects have responded to these and this is something that could be reported on by Ecorys at a later date.

Life Changes projects and themes

The 19 Life Changes projects encompass several different life change themes. These can broadly be categorised as:

Disability

- Neuro Therapy Centre (Access and Exercise)
- Active Norfolk (On the Move)
- Leonard Cheshire Disability (Road to Me)
- Foresight NE Lincolnshire

Pregnancy and New Mums

- UKActive (This Mum Can)
- Nuvo Wellbeing CIC (Bump to Buggy)
- Buump Ltd (Buump Active)

Being a Carer

- London Borough of Lambeth (Friends4Fitness)
- Cotman Housing Association (Still Me)

Retirement

- Silverfit (Silver Saturdays)
- Norfolk Active (Physical Activity and Retirement Transitions)

Other

- Sport in Mind (Sport in Mind) – Mental illness
- Leeds City Council (Run Leeds Run) – Bereavement
- Age UK (Active Age) – Change in physical health
- Living Sport (Active New Communities) – New community residents
- Cystic Fibrosis Trust – Young people with Cystic Fibrosis
- Greater Sport (Moving Forces) – Veteran community during and after transition to civilian life
- Cotman Housing Association (Still Moving) – Low income households
- Good Gym – Women finishing university

Key learnings to date

Drawing on the learning reported on by partners, key findings are presented below under four different project stages: set-up, recruitment, delivery, sustainability.

Project set-up

Project set-up learning focused around four areas:

1. Time needed for digital work

For some projects, such as Buump Active and Run Leeds Run, digital platforms are a key part of their offer. They have found that more time than anticipated was needed to develop these. Buump Active underestimated the time required to fully build, test, refine and polish their app. The app connects women with others nearby and encourages them to be active, removing barriers to physical activity as a new mum. Following consultations with their target audience, revisions were also needed to ensure it best met user needs. Due to these factors, their initial launch was delayed as they felt it was better to have a market ready product than to launch before the app was fit for purpose. For Run Leeds Run, the procurement process for the development of their website (to support regularly active runners when they experience life changes) was time consuming and took longer than expected. They recommend allowing 6-7 months for website development and launch.

The key learning for projects incorporating digital platforms into their work is to factor in enough time for these elements to be procured, developed and fit for purpose.

2. Time needed to gain ethical approval for research

Projects including Bump to Buggy, the Cystic Fibrosis Trust and This Mum Moves noted that the ethical approval process had taken far longer than expected to complete. This was often the case when working with the NHS or other partners such as universities, and especially when data sharing agreements needed to be put in place. This Mum Moves recommends that future projects requiring Health

Research Authority (HRA) approval, allocate a significant amount of time during the project set-up phase to preparing and submitting the application. Similarly, the Cystic Fibrosis trust suggests a one year lead-in time for multi-site projects that require partnerships to be established and ethical application processes to be completed.

The key learning for other projects is that sufficient time to gain ethical approval should be factored into lead-in/project setup times to avoid delays to the start of delivery.

3. Value of initial consultations

Many projects have found it beneficial to carry out research with potential service users in order to inform project design. Buump Active used focus groups to understand the needs of their audience which led to changes to their app design, including removing features on the news feed, changing the home page, changing the app buttons, and reviewing how users connect with each other. Run Leeds Run tested the user experience of their website in order to make sure it was engaging, had high retention levels and was suitable for their target audience.

GoodGym carried out a survey to understand which benefits of taking part resonate most with students and graduates to ensure that these were highlighted in the testing phase of their work. A survey was also used by Silverfit to understand how and why the life change of retirement affects physical activity attitudes and behaviour in order to design a programme which addressed the needs of this group. Similarly, Bump To Buggy used focus groups to understand more about suitable timings of classes as well as what a suitable venue needs to be like (a clean and tidy large hall, baby changing facilities, pram access, must be warm heated, have kitchen facilities to warm bottles, and time to spare before and after the class so mothers and babies do not feel rushed).

Sport in Mind have used multiple methods including focus groups, interviews and feedback forms to help build and strengthen the service they offer. Through this process they have learned that it is *"imperative to take time to fully get to know your target audience and work closely with them to understand what they want and need"*.

The key learning for projects is that carrying out initial consultation work allows target audiences to be fully understood and projects to be co-designed/tailored to meet their specific needs.

4. Value of partners and networks

Support from other organisations, has helped to provide local knowledge as well as engage local residents in the initial consultations. At Sport in Mind for example, their relationships with NHS Trusts have been important to identify the key areas and audiences to target as well as help engage patients in initial focus groups and co-design of the project. Conversely, not being able to connect with the correct person within an organisation has made set-up more difficult. For example, at GoodGym, at times it was difficult to connect with the right person at a university or college to recruit students to speak with and they found that they were not able to access mailing lists, which would have allowed them to contact large numbers of potential participants in one go. Instead, they had to work more closely with a smaller group of universities in order to complete the research.

The key learning from this is that the development of strong partnership relationships can help set-up the project, by providing local knowledge, insight and contacts.

Recruitment

Recruitment learning focused around the following five areas:

1. Developing relationships with referral partners

Identifying and working with organisations and individuals that can refer people to projects is considered a key way of recruiting participants. This has not always been easy, with some projects having to work hard to remove barriers to this process.

Referral partners vary depending on the project and service being delivered, but include: GPs and other related healthcare teams (Access2Exercise, Active Age, Road To Me, This Mum Moves), housing associations/organisations (Make Your

Move), sector related charities (Moving Forces, Road To Me), community connectors/groups that can link service users to other external groups and services in the area (Active New Communities) and through contacts in steering groups (Bump to Buggy).

Ways in which working with partners has been challenging include not being able to obtain the details of the correct contact to speak to in a referral organisation, as well as hesitancy from potential partners to refer participants. For example, at This Mum Moves, there were concerns over the amount of time staff would have to spend recruiting pregnant women. In order to minimise burden on healthcare professionals, participants were asked by the project to complete consent to contact forms with potential participants during their appointments as opposed to fully informed consent, which would have taken much longer.

Access2Exercise also experienced challenges with a key referral organisation. Interviews with staff there revealed that healthcare professionals felt they did not have time to introduce the project during consultations and there were concerns that they were referring to a private service that the patient would have to pay for (which was not the case). As a result, they have developed strategies to increase referrals from the organisation including creating communication material which explicitly states that all organisations involved in the project are not-for-profit charitable and/or social enterprises and having a slot at the monthly information sessions for staff at the organisation.

The key learning from this is that partners can be a great way of recruiting participants to projects. However, when these pathways are not functioning as successfully as hoped, it is important to find out why and implement strategies to overcome this.

2. Providing updates/participant stories

It is important to keep in regular contact with referral partners. Providing information, particularly about the benefits of the project, its successes and participant case studies has been helpful.

At Make Your Move for example, they have found sending project information, including a profile of the project and participants' stories has been really useful in generating referrals from a referral organisation they work with. They regularly 'check back in' with referring organisations to re-promote their project and share outcomes of the project so that referrers can understand the benefits of the programme.

Similarly, at Moving Forces, they are looking to build and strengthen relationships with specific larger organisations during the second year of delivery. They offer to frequently visit these partner organisations to deliver presentations and updates on growth, share success stories and communicate the quantitative and qualitative evidence of improved mental and physical wellbeing among Moving Forces members.

The key learning for projects has shown that it is important to stay in regular contact with referral partners, with participant stories being an effective way of reminding them of the benefits of the projects to individuals they could be referring.

3. Events/taster days

These have been used to good effect to raise awareness of projects, engage with local communities, allow potential participants to 'have a go' and build relationships with stakeholders.

At Moving Forces, many veterans have indicated that a major barrier to them being active is that they have limited spare time (time poverty) and prefer to spend that time with their families. As well as providing some activities that veterans can bring partners and children to, they recently held a family sports day to create further awareness of the programme. Over 250 members of the armed forces community attended and it was well received by both veterans and partner organisations.

Run Leeds Run have also been holding local events as a way of engaging with the running community. For example, the Leeds Dock Running Relay event acted as a way of engaging with local runners across the city to help showcase their new

branding. It also helped to identify individuals in the community to help promote the brand, engaging with 250 regular runners across the city from local running clubs and local businesses.

Friends4Carers attend community events with information stalls and talk to carers about their services and sign them up to their mailing list. They also offer complementary therapies at events to attract carers to their stall, with longstanding participants assisting with such outreach events. Finally, at Silverfit, taster sessions have acted as a way of allowing potential participants to 'have a go' at activities before joining in more formally.

The key learning from this is that special events and sessions can act as a way of engaging with potential participants by raising awareness of the project and showcasing what it offers (to both participants and referral organisations).

4. Word of mouth

Personal recommendations are proving to be a powerful recruitment tool. As projects become more established and develop a reputation, word of mouth increases and trust in the service grows.

At Silverfit, many participants had heard about the sessions from their friends before they joined and hold the belief that personal recommendation is the most effective way to generate interest in the project.

At Sport in Mind, many of the service user advocates of the project have come from the focus groups, which were established as part of the learning goal element of the project. The primary aim of these groups was to learn about the key barriers and enablers to physical activity for people experiencing mental illness. However, an unexpected outcome is that these individuals have become the best advocates for the project, championing the organisation's work in meetings with other service users, to healthcare professionals and housing associations. The organisation predicts that in the last six months, they have received over 100 referrals directly through the promotional work focus groups members have engaged in.

The key learning from this is that word-of-mouth can be an effective way of raising awareness amongst others (individuals and organisations), though this method of recruitment does take time to evolve.

5. Carrying out insight work

Research has been carried out by some projects to understand what messages appeal to their target audience (so communications can be developed accordingly) and to understand what the main referral pathways are and how these can be built upon.

Goodgym have carried out insight work to inform their marketing and advertising. As a result of this, they found that members want to see authentic photos of women of different shapes and sizes and who are red-faced and sweaty as real women are less intimidating. They have also identified participants' perceived main benefits of taking part in the project allowing them to develop the most suitable communications possible to recruit participants from their target audience.

At Foresight, they are gathering data to identify the most common referral routes. This is to see if there is a trend in terms of how they recruit more people with a specific life change or from a particular location or method of referral.

The key learning from this is that taking time to understand what works in terms of recruitment can help ensure information and efforts are targeted appropriately, improving engagement in the activity over time.

Delivery

Perhaps reflecting the diversity and differences between types of project and participant needs, learnings from the delivery stage were varied but those identified by projects can be categorised into 4 areas:

1. 1:1 support can help encourage participation

A number of projects are offering 1:1 support, particularly at the initial stages of delivery to motivate and encourage participants to take part in physical activity.

At Active Age, participants are offered a 'guided conversation' to help them understand which services and activities would be most suitable for them, as well as identifying the barriers they wish to overcome. So far, the people assessed have tended to want to engage in activities they have done before, but feel they are unable to. The focus therefore is finding similar activities that have been adapted to their needs where they are happy to continue in these classes or work back towards what they have previously enjoyed. An example of this is older men who wanted to access walking football, but felt that the competitive nature and going into an established group was too much of a jump for them. The project setup walking football skills to allow people to brush up on skills, build up confidence and increase their fitness before moving into a full match-based session.

Make Your Move have discovered that many participants needed extra support when first attending a leisure centre. They have found that as a result of the project officers meeting participants at the leisure centre and helping them sign up, they are more likely to be more comfortable returning to the leisure centres on their own. Participants are also offered a tour of the leisure centre and a gym induction to familiarise them with facilities and encourage regular attendance. At Friends4Carers, key workers work with participants to motivate them to take part in sessions, as well as hold them accountable to their physical activity.

The key learning from this is that some participants may need extra individual support, particularly in the early stages, to increase their confidence and encourage them to take part in sessions.

2. Flexibility needs to be considered

The requirements of the target group need to be embedded into delivery to ensure sessions are suitable. For example, carers need to be able to take part at a variety of times, as they have to fit activity around their caring responsibilities. Similarly, for classes aimed at pregnant women, not everyone will be able to attend during the daytime, so a mixture of day and evening classes need to be provided.

At Friends4Carers, plans to launch an online service (to add flexibility to the programme for carers unable to physically attend their services) were brought forward due to Covid-19. Within two weeks of lockdown, they delivered their first online class as a trial to the 12-week programme for participants. Numbers have grown from 13 at this initial session to 30 carers regularly taking part in the online fitness classes. This shows the potential of this type of delivery as well as how flexibility can help encourage attendance.

The key learning from this is that delivery timing and style needs to be suitable to the target audience and when tailored suitably, can help increase attendance levels.

3. Fun and social elements are popular

Projects mentioned that sessions focused on these elements were popular with participants, with the instructor often playing an important role in ensuring this.

At On the Move, for example, they have found that making activities fun and not too serious has proven to be a great way of engaging people taking part. Their participants want to have fun without feeling they are in a lesson-type environment. The socialising part of sessions is also important as it gives participants time to engage in an activity together, which differs from their normal day to day experiences.

The key learning from this is that for some participants, fun and social elements are an important part of the session and as such, delivery should cover these aspects as well as physical activity ones.

4. Feedback can help to ensure sessions are meeting needs

Participant feedback is being used to shape delivery, which means that content can be tailored to meet audience needs. For example, at Foresight, participant steering group feedback has led to the introduction of new indoor activities during the cold and wet winter months. Croquet and indoor curling are now both being offered for the first time at the centre. The steering group are also contributing to discussions about new activities and courses for other times of the year, too.

The key learning from this is that participant input is useful at delivery (as well as initial set-up stage) to ensure that activities are meeting the needs of service users. If they are not, then there is a mechanism for making suggestions to adapt them.

Sustainability

Whilst not all projects are at this stage, some (particularly those with short delivery periods per cohort of participants) have begun to identify ways that participants' physical activity can be sustained. The four main approaches include:

1. Signposting to other opportunities

To encourage sustained physical activity beyond the project itself, participants are being given information about similar opportunities available in the local community, such as activities at leisure centres or being run by other organisations.

At On the Move, for example, upon completion of the 10-week programme at a centre, participants will be given information about surrounding sport/leisure facilities, where clients can access additional sessions in the community. Similarly, at Friends4Fitness, key workers will help participants search for external physical activity opportunities to help them continue exercising beyond the 12 week programme it offers. Road To Me has also identified several organisations that participants can be signposted to following completion of their six month programme including an accessible gym, another exercise programme and a local leisure centre.

The key learning from this is that it is important to identify post-programme activities and share information about these opportunities with participants so they can progress onto these once they have finished a project.

2. Buddying/mentoring systems

The use of buddies and mentors can help participants continue to be active by providing an extra layer of support where needed to help participants progress into other physical activity opportunities.

At Friends4Carers key workers help by pairing-up or grouping carers who have similar needs and face similar barriers, to support each other in pursuing sustainable physical activity beyond the programme. This buddy system is designed to both provide companionship as well as accountability, with the idea being that buddies will encourage each other to maintain activity levels.

At Sport in Mind, the aim of the project is for participants to be able to re-engage with mainstream physical activity sessions. This can be daunting for participants, particularly if the session takes place in an unfamiliar setting. To help with this, a pool of peer supporters (volunteers with lived experience of mental health problems) who act as buddies has been created. These volunteers research what venues and mainstreams sessions are like and relay this information to participants who are worried about re-engaging with mainstream sessions alone. This helps reduce people's anxiety and catastrophic thinking and supports them in accessing sessions in new venues after they have left the programme itself.

The key learning for projects is that it is important to consider what extra support participants may need to continue activity beyond the programme itself and implement systems, such as peer mentoring, which could support this.

3. Explaining benefits to promote behavioural change

To promote long-term behavioural change, Moving Forces are focusing on improving participants' understanding of the impact of physical activity on mental wellbeing. By explaining the theory whilst the participants are actually experiencing the positive effects, they will be able to increase the amount of real, long-lasting behaviour change. This new strand of the project will include physical activity sessions delivered jointly by professional sports coaches alongside mental health and wellbeing experts. It will focus on helping veterans to improve their mental resilience and understanding of how physical activity can help to improve and maintain their mental health. The sessions will also provide a chance to identify veterans who may need more specialist support for their mental health. In these cases, veterans will be encouraged to engage with appropriate services provided by some of the project's close partners, including Walking With the Wounded, Combat Stress and military veteran-specific NHS services.

The key learning is that a greater understanding of the positive impacts of physical activity on wellbeing could help to promote sustained activity once participants have exited a project.

4. Building sustainability into project design

Elements of sustainability can be built into projects from the outset, which can help to maintain physical activity levels of participants as well as the activities themselves.

At Sport in Mind, where possible, the project have tried to use venues which are accessible to their target audience and where mainstream sessions are also delivered. This helps build clients' confidence in a particular environment. When they reach the point in their recovery when they are looking to reengage in mainstream activity, it is not such a daunting process to attend a new session if it is taking place at a venue they are familiar with. They have found that familiarity is vital for participants. If they are in a familiar and comfortable situation, then they will thrive. Conversely, if familiarity is removed, then people will feel anxious and show avoidance and this is when disengagement will occur.

At Active New Communities, they have found that supporting residents to set up informal groups is proving more popular than parachuting in external deliverers, especially where numbers and facilities are limited. Residents also have the added incentive of wanting to strengthen their communities and provide sustainable opportunities for people living there. An example of this is in Alconbury Weald, where a group of residents set up a football club and self-organised. Initially, they were not interested in a formal setup, but are now requesting support to promote the sessions and are keen to expand to offer female and junior sessions. The project recognises that identifying people to lead activities takes time and some are not willing to commit to this until they have settled into the community.

The key learning for projects here is that sustainability can be built into projects from the outset and that understanding participants needs, as well as those of the community, is key to this.

Impact

Impact on individuals

Whilst projects began at different times and are at different stages of delivery, there are some early signs of impact. The examples below are drawn predominantly from the supporting evidence projects have submitted alongside their monitoring reports. These include interim reports, insight reports and case studies and at this stage, which focus mainly on outcomes for participants. Some early examples of impact from the different projects include:

- **Sport in Mind** – at baseline 12% of their client group were engaging in mainstream sports provision, rising to 48% at six months.. There have also been improvements in mental wellbeing and physical activity levels at three-month and six-month follow-ups. For example, 86% of participants showing an improvement in two or more wellbeing measures (of satisfaction, happiness, anxiety and worthwhileness) at 3 months and 89% at 6 months.
- **Road to Me** – following participation in the six-month programme, there were improvements across a range of indicators. For example, at exit: 84% felt confident about becoming active again compared to 39% at baseline; 98% had done sport, fitness activity or dance in the past 7 days compared to 22% at baseline; 78% felt able to achieve the goals they set themselves compared to 26% at baseline; 62% felt more optimistic about the future compared to 36% at baseline and 98% felt happy compared to 42% at baseline. The 12-month follow-up with 44 participants from cohort one revealed 91% continue to be active.
- **Make Your Move** – there have been improvements in mental health, life satisfaction and capability scores (using Sport England question bank measures) between baseline and follow-ups. In terms of life satisfaction, 41% registered an improvement at the three-month follow-up and 50% at six-months, for mental health 31% and 50% respectively and capability 43% and 57%.

As well as providing quantitative data, several projects have provided more qualitative examples of impact. For example:

- **This Mum Moves** – midwives and health visitors now feel more knowledgeable and confident in advising pregnant women about physical activity. Feedback on the training they received and the resources that have been developed includes: *“It has given me the confidence to advise pregnant women about physical activity; looking at risks and types of activity at different time scales”, “It has increased my knowledge of benefits and de-bunked myths” and “the leaflets for the mums, they were good. I have actually used them as a leaflet primarily in our PBB (preparation for birth and beyond) training sessions. So, they were really useful and the mums in particular liked those”.*
- **Friends4Fitness** – participants are benefiting in terms of physical activity, as well as increased social interaction. It noted that *“the combination here of enjoying lots of sports, but also doing it in a social setting is really great”* and that *“if this programme didn’t run, I might go to the gym, but you have to have the self-determination to do that and sometimes I don’t feel like it. But here, I have my peers. We have a chat, we have a cup of tea, we have a laugh”.*
- **On the Move** – found that the greatest impact on individuals has been their increase in physical activity. One centre staff member states, *“people are enthusiastic about doing more activities that get them moving”* and another member explains, *“a lot of customers now join in activities that the hub is continuing, and they are asking about different activities.”* They also found that customers really enjoy the sessions and engage with each other more. One carer reports that *“they all got involved in the activities together which was amazing to see”* and another states, *“their social skills have improved as the different activities brought fantastic team spirit.”* They also feel it gives customers more opportunities to try something new, increase their self-esteem, and learn about the benefits of being healthy.

Others projects have developed case studies, which demonstrate the impact of projects on individual participants. Three examples of these can be seen below.

Bump to Buggy



CASE STUDY

KELLY, AGED 36

I began Nuvo Wellbeing's Bump to Buggy Programme at the beginning of February 2020. I saw the programme on facebook and was instantly interested, as I has been looking for a form of exercise which was child friendly so that I could bring my new baby along to class with me. After giving birth I was fearful of returning to exercise as my activity levels had dropped during pregnancy. Attending Nuvo's weekly sessions has already helped me overcome that fear in a very short amount of time.

Instead of being fearful of exercise I now always feel energised after taking part in my weekly session. Attending each week has positively impacted my mental wellbeing as it helps clear my mind if I've had a difficult morning at home with the baby. I feel much happier from attending the programme and I always really look forward to the next one.

I enjoy all the activities we take part in each week. The classes have motivated me to push myself, exercise more, and improve my fitness levels both in and outside of the sessions.

BUMP TO BUGGY PROGRAMME



1.



Active New Communities

Impact

Active New Communities is supporting local people to design and build their own physical activity offers based on demand from residents - in Hauxton we have supported one particular, resident Marlee Beasley, to set up a new running group and Rabble fitness sessions.

Marlee attended the Leadership in Running Fitness course and became a qualified Run Leader, but she didn't stop there....she also attended a Rabble Fitness course and set up a new fitness course and running group in Hauxton all within a few months!

The Active New Communities project is providing funding and support for people like Marlee to attend training courses so they can get the appropriate qualifications to provide safe and enjoyable opportunities for their local community.

Meet Marlee . . . hear how Marlee a mum of three young children living in Hauxton has developed her skills and set up more opportunities for people in Hauxton to get active!

*"Receiving training via Living Sport has opened up a career direction I never saw possible. I enjoyed exercise myself but never thought I would ever be an instructor. When I was offered the training through Living Sport and via Active New Communities for one I had never heard of Rabble and on looking it up I could see from the start it looked really fun but I wasn't the sporty run around kind of child so was unsure how I was going to get on. I went along and met 10 others that were also doing the training that day. First off we all introduced ourselves and what line of work we were all in, **everybody else but me worked in sports or fitness and I was just me.** I did find this a bit daunting, but shouldn't have worried as I had an absolute blast! Every one was so nice and we all got stuck in learning and playing these Rabble games, laughed lots and supported each other in learning the rules of the games - **I fell in love with the Rabble motto 'it is for all abilities'!** As someone whom is short and not very fast, we all learnt to play tactically using all our teams' strengths to try and win the games.*



*As a mum who helped out at my children's Primary School running club the opportunity arose to receive funding to become a Run Leader and set up a running group for Hauxton, this seemed a great opportunity as there isn't much on offer in our village, especially for new people moving into the village to meet one another. Myself and another mum were very keen to get this up and running providing a service to the village that was a perfect way to meet new people and it was free! **The Run Leaders course led by England Athletics was great,** it was such an in-depth training day, and I gained really useful warm up, cool down training information I hadn't even thought of before but was really important as a leader. It was a lovely day meeting new people the leaders were great and allowed us time to ask lots of questions. Since my training I have gone on to run two Rabble sessions per week (one focused on adults and the other for parents and children), school holiday sessions and an after school club. We have set up Hauxton Runners which have started running once per week and we are hoping to grow this as each beginners course starts. I am also **working with Cambridge City Council running family Rabble sessions to get families out and active together, having fun and playing games.***

***I can't believe how much my confidence has grown in the last 6 months.** Prior to getting involved in these sports leadership roles I have also been chair of my Children's school PTA and when I had to do public speaking I would shake and the thought of doing it filled me with dread, but now with the training that I have received I am confident that I can instruct and lead Rabble sessions and Running courses and this has developed my confidence in so many ways."*

Between April-July 2019 Marlee has supported the following activities in Hauxton

- > Rabble sessions - adult, children & family sessions, 78 participants (46 adults, 32 children). Family Rabble sessions have been the most popular.
- > New Hauxton Runners Group launched in July - 11 adults (2 male, 9 female) attended the first 2 weeks on Thursday evenings. Maggie Pratt has also attended the LIRF course.
- > Hauxton Primary School running club - 20 pupils (Year 1-6) run 1.5 miles on Friday mornings

Sport in Mind

"At the beginning of the year, a lady with bipolar disorder, anxiety and agoraphobia joined our service. She had learnt about the sessions four months earlier, but didn't have the confidence to join the sessions. However, the fact that the sessions were in operation did give her the motivation to push herself to try and get out of the house. Four months after learning about Sport in Mind's sessions, she managed to join our table tennis group for the first time. For 10 weeks, she came to the sessions, but didn't take part. She just stood and watched as a result of feeling too anxious. Despite not taking part, she did, however, feel like she had reconnected with the outside world and said "I felt like I was part of something for the first time in years!"

She slowly began to take part in the session, 5-10 minutes each week. She did this for a couple of months and then started taking part in the sessions for 15 minutes, then 20 minutes, then 30. After six months, she was engaging for the whole one-hour session, plus a couple of our other sessions. She made new friends at the group, began socialising with them away from the sessions and has been planning on joining a local mainstream table tennis group. This lady is a huge success story and what the project is all about – she has gone from being completely socially isolated and only engaging in exercise on a treadmill in her house, to socialising with people and playing three hours of sport with us in leisure centres each week."

Project level impact

Some early examples of project level impact include: developing relationships with partner and referral organisations, gaining experience in ethical approval applications and increasing capacity to carry out monitoring and evaluation work. For example, carrying out data collection with participants and using this to shape project design.

Conclusions

Key learnings

These can be split into four project stages and are summarised as:

Project set-up

- Projects incorporating digital platforms need to factor in enough time for these elements to be procured, developed and made fit-for-purpose.
- To avoid delays to the start of delivery, sufficient time to gain ethical approval should be built into project setup times, particularly for those working with multi-partners, NHS services or sharing data.
- Initial consultation work with potential service users allows their needs to be fully understood and projects to be co-designed/tailored to meet these needs.
- Partnership work can help with project setup, as organisations are able to provide projects with local knowledge, insight and contacts.

Recruitment

- Referral partners can be a great help with recruitment. However, when referral pathways are not functioning as planned, it is important to find out why this is and implement strategies to overcome any challenges.
- Regular contact with referral partners is important. Participant stories are an effective way of reminding organisations of the benefits of the project.
- Events and taster sessions can act as a way of engaging with potential participants (and referral organisations) and showcase what the project offers.
- Word-of-mouth can raise awareness of projects and prompt people to take part, though this method of recruitment takes time to evolve.
- Research and insight work can help identify successful referral routes, as well as inform future recruitment strategies.

Delivery

- Participants may need extra support, especially at the beginning. 1:1 support can increase confidence and encourage participation.
- Flexible delivery can help ensure that sessions are meeting the target audience's needs and help improve attendance rates.
- Fun and social elements can be important for some participants, so delivery should cover this as well as physical activity aspects.
- Participant feedback can help ensure that activities are meeting needs and also help shape future content if adaptations to delivery are needed.

Sustainability

- Identifying and signposting participants to post-programme activities is a way of sustaining physical activity levels beyond the project itself.
- Buddying and mentoring systems can provide support to participants at the post-project stage and encourage them to attend other activities/sessions.
- Communicating the positive impacts of physical activity on mental wellbeing could act as a driver to encourage sustained activity in the long-term.
- Elements of sustainability can be incorporated from the start, including using familiar and accessible venues and working with community members to develop and deliver the project itself.

Impact

Projects are being asked to provide evidence of the impact they are having.

Examples of impact seen so far include:

Individual level

- Increases in physical activity levels (and motivation to exercise more)
- Improvements in mental wellbeing
- Increased confidence, happiness, optimism about the future, life satisfaction and ability to achieve goals
- Increased levels of social interaction and improvement in social skills
- Increased levels of knowledge and understanding of physical activity
- Increased engagement with mainstream sports provision

Project level

- Developing and strengthening of relationships with partner and referral organisations (and key individuals)
- Experience in applying for high-level ethical approval
- Increased knowledge and capacity for carrying out evaluation work and using this to inform project delivery

Recommendations

Based on the learnings so far, suggestions for future work with the Life Changes Fund projects include:

- **Monitoring reports** – the template is predominantly quantitative in nature (i.e. targets and supporting indicators tab), with limited space to detail impact/include qualitative findings in the narrative reporting tab. Some projects are already sending additional evidence (such as interim/annual reports and case studies) to Ecorys. To understand more about the impact of projects' work, especially as further data collection takes place, projects could be encouraged to continue submitting these additional documents
- **Shared project learning** – from the monitoring reports. So far, it is clear that there is a lot of learning which could be shared between projects. This could be in the form of online webinars and be thematic by project type or by specific area of learning
- **Shared evaluation learning** – there is also scope to share learning about carrying out evaluation work generally, for example, across different data collection methods. Sport in Mind may be well-placed to do this, having worked hard to facilitate inclusive focus groups and also having trained staff to carry out data collection sensitively and appropriately. Active Norfolk have also been working to develop data collection tools suitable to their target audience (On the Move) and could share their learning in this area
- **Covid-19 specific learning** – whilst the impacts of Covid-19 are only just beginning to be reported on by projects, this could be a further area of focus. Capturing how projects have dealt with the issues/challenges this has presented and sharing these solutions with other projects in similar situations could be a beneficial future piece of work