



# The Together Fund

## Programme Evaluation

Sport England

2024



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## Foreword



At a time when there was huge uncertainty in a world that had been instructed to stay at home, like every responsible organisation we knew we needed to act quickly and decisively to keep some of the most vulnerable communities in society engaged and active. It was incumbent upon us to work with our partners, new and old, to help reach people who we know needed our support the most – and still do. It was for these reasons that the Together Fund was established.

Creating the Together Fund was our attempt to reach those people who had been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, to help them stay connected and be active, and to help reduce the widening of existing inequalities. Using a delegated approach to investing, we were able to shift the dynamics of the decisions needed locally, to get money into lots of different communities, and where it was needed the most. We operated in a culture where we prioritised regular dialogue, employed co-creation to help iterate the programme as the external situation changed, and collaborated with our Together Fund partners to capture outcomes and life changing stories. This all helped to improve the equity in our funding processes, getting more investment to more people across the country.

It was such a proud moment to jointly lead this work with my colleague Adam Rigarsford. Colleagues from across the organisation were so positive about what we needed to achieve and how we would go about doing it. As a collective we remained focused on achieving our objective in the most collaborative way possible. Nothing we achieved could have been successful if it had not been for the whole organisation recognising the challenge and allowing us to trust in our partners to help us to get further and deeper into communities.

I believe that the Together Fund has been one of the most successfully pieces of work I have been involved in at Sport England. We know both anecdotally and from the contents of the report that we achieved our objectives along with some unintended consequences too, leaving a better and more connected sector that is helping us build on a way of working which has changed so many lives for the better. It's also reassuring to know that we have created the movement that our strategy intended - a movement that we continue to build as we capitalise on the learning to implement what we know works best.

Viveen Taylor, Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion,  
Sport England

## Introduction

Between December 2022 and September 2023, Sport England worked together with a network of Partners across the country to deliver the Together Fund, a continuation of the Tackling Inequalities Fund, originally set up at the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Building on the Tackling Inequalities Fund's focus on community organisation survival and physical activity provision during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Together Fund aimed to support organisational resilience and sustainability as society moved out of the pandemic and towards recovery.

The Together Fund maintained a focus on the four priority audiences<sup>1</sup> who were identified as being disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and faced barriers to accessing physical activity:

- Culturally diverse communities
- Lower socio-economic groups
- People with long-term health conditions
- Disabled people

Through the Together Fund, over 3000 community organisations received funding to deliver almost 3800 projects, supporting physical activity provision targeting communities falling into the four priority audiences. Projects funded an array of activities, from chair yoga to community walks, horse riding sessions, and boxing sessions. For many of the organisations involved, the activities funded through the Together Fund represented the first time they had introduced physical activity into their sessions.

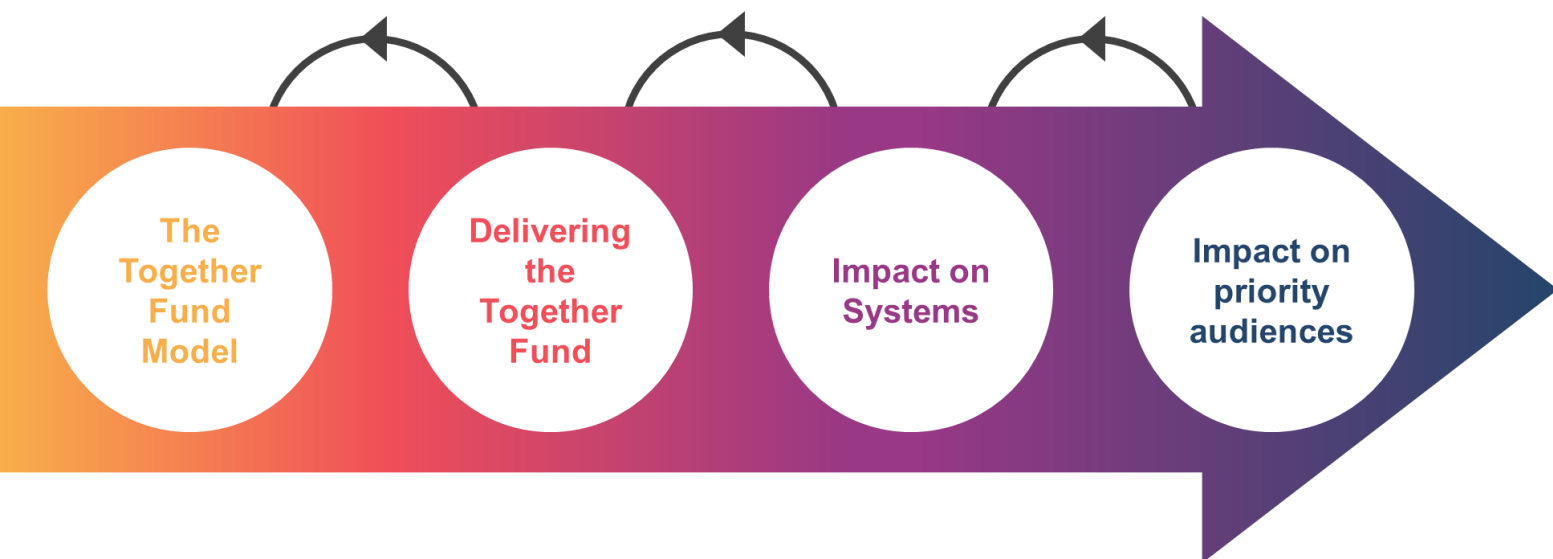
The delivery of the Together Fund was led by a network of **81 Partners** across the country, including Active Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, and specialist charities. Working with these Partners, Sport England trialled a new model of funding delivery – based on onwards distribution – to reach organisations directly supporting communities in its four priority audiences.

This report presents Renaisi's evaluation of the Together Fund, drawing on a range of data gathered over the lifetime of the Fund: case studies, end of programme reports, interviews, and surveys of participants and community organisations. It opens with key learnings and considerations drawn from the data and stories shared by Partners, community organisations, and individual participants. The subsequent sections of the report then expand on our findings in more detail, moving through the different levels of the Together Fund – from experiences of delivery to changing systems and impacting organisations and individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Sport England's monitoring sources, including application forms and Community Organisation surveys, did not clearly define these target audience groups, leaving them somewhat subjective to each partner or community organisation to define. This makes the survey data referenced in this report less robust, as we cannot guarantee consistency in how each target audience was recorded.

## Moving through different levels of the Together Fund



The Together Fund represented a systems approach to supporting communities to access physical activity opportunities across the country. This requires us to take a different approach to understanding the impact of the Fund, to recognise the connections between the approach taken, ways of working fostered, and the changes achieved at different levels of the Together Fund – from networks to organisations and individual participants.

To reflect and recognise this complexity, we have structured this evaluation report using the diagram above. As the report progresses, we move through different levels of the Together Fund, from delivery to impacts achieved on individual participants. While each section focuses on a different element in this chain, the case studies we use to illustrate the story of the Together Fund also highlight the overlapping links and sections. By doing so, we recognise that the impacts achieved are closely connected to the specific forms of delivery and ways of working associated with the Together Fund.

## Key Learnings and Future Considerations

Our evaluation of the Together Fund highlighted a range of key learnings at different levels. These learnings could inform the design of future funding programmes, within Sport England and across the wider funding sector, and offer insights for organisations working with communities who experience systemic barriers to accessing physical activity.

### For innovative, systemic, and equity-oriented funding approaches:

- **Relational, collaborative and low-burden application processes can be an effective mechanism for enabling small grassroots community organisations to access national funding pots**, in turn helping reach a greater diversity of participants. This takes significant resource at the national funder and intermediary partner levels, but our findings indicate that this pays off in reaching previously excluded people to tackle systemic inequalities.
- **Intermediate partners have a significant role to play in supporting small community organisations to access funding**, providing grant writing capability and capacity that is harder to find at the grassroots level. Our findings indicate a negative relationship between organisational capacity to apply for funding and whether they are more likely to serve marginalised and minoritised people. Therefore, this kind of funding design is crucial for tackling inequalities and reducing marginalisation.
- The process of **devolving investment from a national funder through intermediate partner organisations can be an effective mechanism for building trust** between these levels of the system. In turn, this is an enabler for intermediate partners to use their expertise and networks to provide responsive local support.
- Funders often have an interest in considering how to help grantee organisations build sustainability through diversifying their funding streams. **The extent to which grassroots community organisations can diversify their funding will depend somewhat on the diversity of the funding ecosystem. It may therefore be worth national funders and intermediary funders having a clear map of the funding ecosystem for their sector.** This may help build a more concrete and realistic understanding around what pathways to funding sustainability might look like for small organisations.
- **Funders should closely reflect on whether they want to fund innovative approaches or innovate their funding approaches** – interrogating the difference

between these is important. When funders prioritise funding innovative approaches, they hold more of the power in the funding relationship. It can become difficult for grassroots community organisations to access funding for activities that they know can help them reach marginalised groups and tackle inequalities. The Together Fund is an example of an *innovative funding approach* that shared power with grassroots community organisations by trusting their expertise around community needs. In turn, this helped meet community organisations where they were at, helping them build resilient operations and tackle inequalities in sport and physical activity.

## For national funders supporting intermediary partner networks:

- Creating **structures and spaces to enable collaboration and networking between a national funder and intermediate partners enables stronger relationships, closer coordination, shared learning and greater responsiveness to emerging need in the system**. While Together Fund's Open Calls were tied to the funding programme, there's significant appetite for the network to continue, which raises questions around how networks of this kind could be decoupled from funding opportunities to support greater continuity beyond funding cycles.
- More relational funding approaches, and those embedding onward distribution approaches, will necessitate a high volume of communications. A key challenge to navigate is **identifying appropriate structures and spaces to facilitate open communication**, without causing confusion or overwhelm.
- For national funders bringing together intermediary funders into a collaborative network, it's important to **consider the diversity of organisation types represented in this network (e.g., governing bodies, national charities), their distinct needs, and what might help unlock the potential benefits** of being part of a wider network.
- **It may be difficult to facilitate novel relationships between different kinds of intermediary partner (e.g., a national governing body and a regional organisation) as there are not established ways of working between these organisation types**. More resource and exploration in this area could help realise the potential of these novel kinds of system relationship.
- Some intermediary partners will be better resourced than others for making the most of opportunities to network with each other; this appears more likely to be a challenge for smaller partners. **What role might a national funder play in more directly supporting the capacity of partners to access these kinds of networking opportunities**.

## For supporting grassroots community organisations and communities:

- **A supportive and relational grant application process**—where intermediary partners connect up with regional infrastructure organisations and work closely with community organisations to apply for funding—can be a **mechanism for developing stronger local networks**. Stronger networks enable new relationships with previously un-reached communities and strengthen the flow of information.
- Intermediary partners have a powerful potential role to play in **helping foster networks between local community organisations**. This can be a **mechanism for communities to unlock the strengths that exist in their local area and connect more community members to their provision**, supporting the sustainability of their work.
- To unlock the potential for creating sustainable change in communities, it will be valuable to consider how a more devolved and relational funding approach can be paired with **longer-term funding periods that enable community organisations the time to develop their programming and build greater sustainability**.

## For addressing structural barriers preventing participation in physical activity:

- Perceptions of sports and exercise as “not for someone like me” represented a key barrier for marginalised communities. By **reframing sport and exercise in communications, resources and delivery**, organisations **highlighted the everyday forms of physical activity that participants were already doing** as part of their daily life, from lifting objects to walking to work. This can help to make physical activity less intimidating, encouraging participation in sessions and activities.
- **Offering activities for free** represented a key mechanism **for engaging communities across the four priority audiences**, increasing engagement and participation. However, introducing payment for activities at a later date as funding ends can cause further disengagement, highlighting the need for sustained funding or a gradual shift from free to paid provision.
- Across communities, delivery of activities was most effective when it was held in a **familiar, safe and accessible setting, and led by community members or participants**. Hosting activities in places where communities are already attending, such as Warm Hubs, libraries, and religious institutions, can help to embed physical activity into existing routines and everyday life.
- **Virtual social support structures**, such as WhatsApp groups, played a vital role in **maintaining ongoing connections** among participants in between activities, positively contributing towards their overall **well-being**. This was particularly effective for activities engaging Disabled people, and people with long-term health conditions,



who had often experienced extended periods of isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Engaging Disabled people represented a **significant challenge** for many organisations and Partners. The **diversity and range in level of support needs** among Disabled people may suggest that longer-term funding and support is needed for sustained, impactful support of Disabled people in comparison to other communities.

## **For demonstrating impact and creating learning mechanisms around funding approaches:**

- **A flexible and low-burden approach to evaluation of grassroots activities and participant experience ensures that the evaluation feels proportionate and less extractive.** However, this can come at a cost to the quality of data, and the ways in which a funding programme may be able to claim impact or demonstrate that their approach works.
- A national funder will need to consider how best to balance an **interest in reducing the burden of evaluative activities with an interest in ensuring that intermediate partners have access to clear minimum expectations** around evaluation activities.

# The Together Fund model

An overview of the Together Fund model and the Partners, community organisations and projects involved.

## Summary

- The Together Fund was a continuation of the Tackling Inequalities Fund and aimed to provide further support to communities and organisations impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- A network of **81 Partners** around the country distributed the Together Fund, including Active Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, and specialist charities working with priority communities.
- Overall, Partners funded **3794 projects** delivered by **3320 community organisations**.
- Projects were spread across **all regions of England**. The highest proportions were located in the Southeast (12.6%), Northwest (12.3%), and West Midlands (12%).

This section provides an overview of key features of the Together Fund model. It begins with a summary of the development of the Together Fund, before outlining the Partners and community organisations involved. It concludes by highlighting the approach taken to evaluation and learning, and the data we draw on in this evaluation report.

## Moving from Tackling Inequalities to the Together Fund

In April 2020, Sport England launched the Tackling Inequalities Fund, which aimed to provide immediate support to communities who were disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and support the survival of community organisations. Tackling Inequalities represented a £20 million investment in provision for four priority audiences: lower socio-economic groups, culturally diverse communities, disabled people, and people with long-term health conditions.

The Together Fund was a continuation of the Tackling Inequalities Fund and saw the investment of further funding in sport and physical activity provision for the four priority

audiences. Building on Tackling Inequalities, the Together Fund aimed to continue providing support for community organisations and communities as society emerged from successive periods of lockdown. Alongside funding for physical activity provision, Partners also offered dedicated resilience support as community organisations moved away from immediate crisis response.

The Together Fund also coincided with a period of considerable societal challenge, particularly the cost-of-living crisis, which placed additional pressures on communities and community organisations delivering activities and support. While this heightened the need for the resilience support provided, it also created challenges for both Partners and community organisations in ensuring that activities could be sustained.

This period of considerable change and upheaval contributed to the decision to extend the Together Fund period to September 2023, with Partners providing the dedicated resilience support package towards the end of this period.

## The onward distribution approach: a new way of working with Partners and communities

Through the Tackling Inequalities Fund and Together Fund, Sport England adopted a new approach to distributing funding, which involved close collaboration with a network of Partners around the country. Working with Sport England, Partners were responsible for onward distribution of funding, and given the autonomy to support organisations to develop applications and access funding. Alongside direct support through funding, Partners were given the flexibility to shape local approaches to offering advice, support and delivering resilience and capacity training. This approach aimed to enable Partners to reach community organisations and communities who may not have accessed Sport England funding or offered physical activity provision previously.

## Who were the Partners and community organisations involved?

The Together Fund involved a wide range of Partners, community organisations, projects, and participants, including:

- **81** partners
- **3320** community organisations
- **3794** projects
- **>500,000** expected participants

### Partners

The Together Fund's network of Partners included some **organisations who have worked extensively with Sport England** through other funds, for example System Partners, as well as **some organisations that were had not received Sport England funding previously.**

- **Active Partnerships** – a nationwide physical activity and sport network of 43 local and independent non-profit organisations across England, who take a place-based approach.
  - E.g. Active Dorset, Together Active
- **National Governing Bodies** – organisations that govern and administer a specific sport on a national basis.
  - E.g. British Gymnastics, Rugby Football League
- **Other national or local charities or organisations who also receive other Sport England funding.**
  - E.g. Versus Arthritis, Sustrans
- **Other specialist organisations, some non-physical activity or sports-related,** who have not previously been funded by Sport England, who have links to specific target audiences.
  - E.g. London and Quadrant Housing Trust, Youth Hostels Association

**Partners varied substantially in size and reach**, with some supporting just a handful of community projects, and others having large portfolio – ranging from seven to 103 community organisations. The median number of organisations supported per partner was **46**.

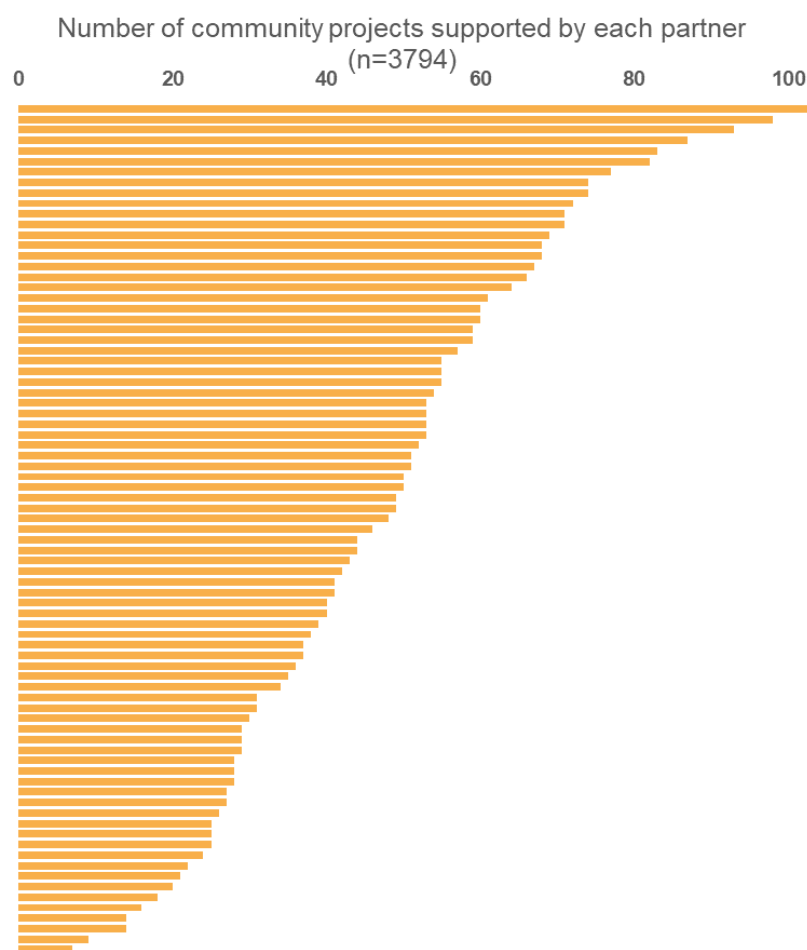


Fig. 1 No. of organisations supported per Partner

## Community organisations and projects

Together Fund funding was accessed by a range of community organisations, of varying size and capacity. The most common type of organisation delivering Together Fund supported projects overall was registered charities, representing **44% of the total projects funded**.

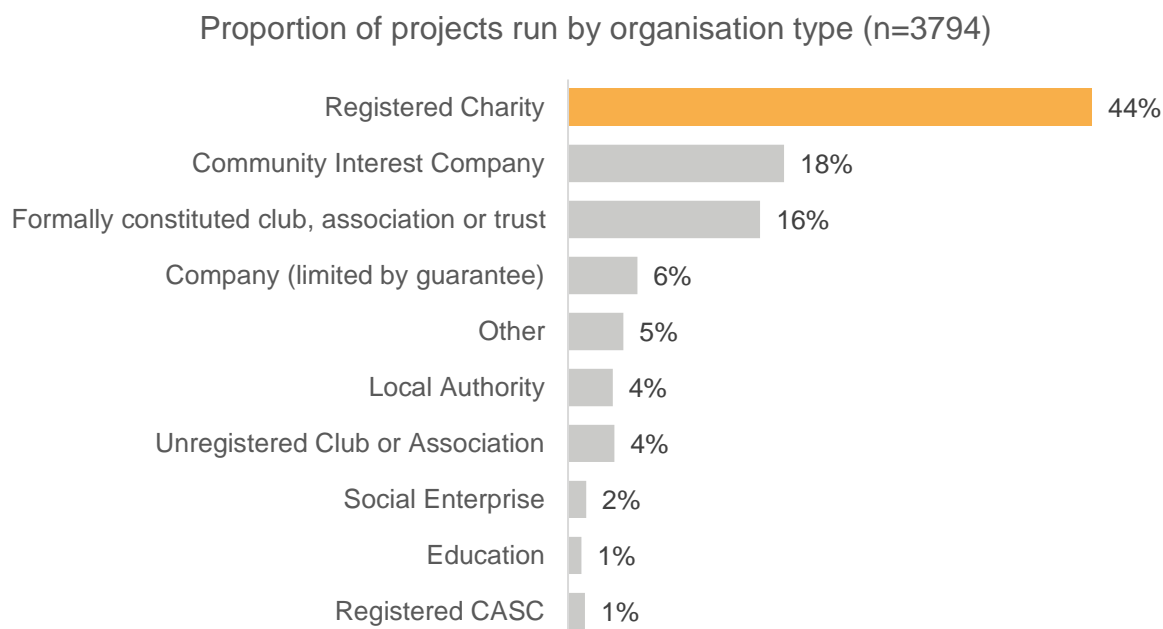


Fig. 2 Proportion of Together Fund projects by organisation type

**11%** (378) of community organisations ran multiple projects through the Together Fund, with the majority of these running two projects (317).

## Delivering across the country

Projects were spread across all regions of England, with the highest proportions located in the South East (12.6%), North West (12.3%), and West Midlands (12%). The lowest proportion were located in the North East (5.4%).

Comparing proportions to estimates of regional population proportions (see Fig. 3) shows projects are underrepresented in London and the South East, and slightly overrepresented for areas such as the West and East Midlands, South West and North East.<sup>2</sup> This could be as a result of the Together Fund attempting to reach areas which have historically had less access to funding.

<sup>2</sup> Based on data from the Office for National Statistics, 2022. Estimates of the population of England and Wales: Regional population estimates for England and Wales 1971 to 2022 edition of this dataset: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/estimatesofthepopulationforenglandandwales>

Proportions of projects per region (n=3794), compared to region population proportions in 2022 (n=57,106,398)

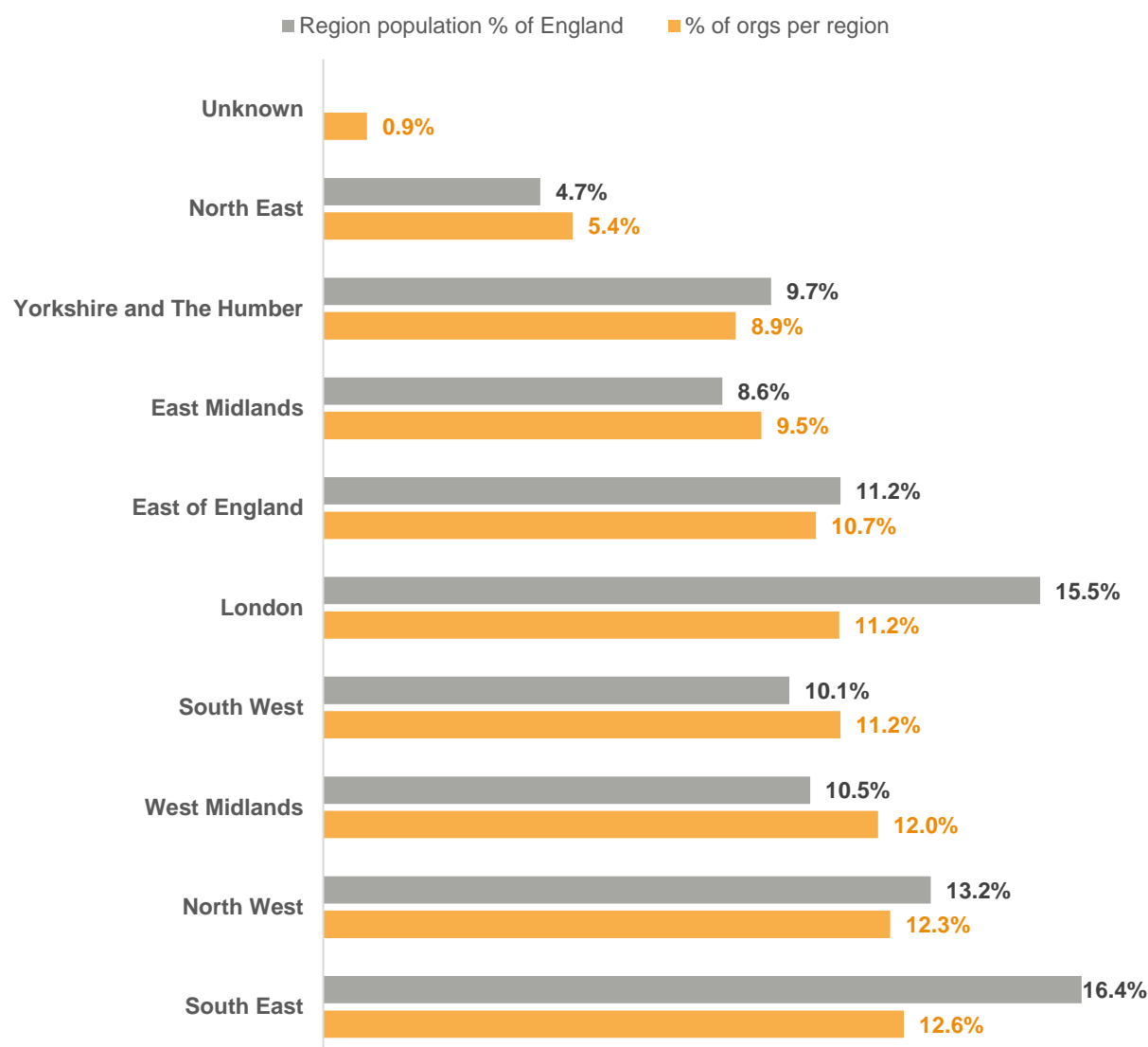


Fig. 3 Regional distribution of Together Fund projects

## Evaluation and Learning across the Together Fund

Renaisi was appointed evaluation and learning partner for the Together Fund, to support Sport England to capture and share learning at a national level on the delivery of the programme and impacts achieved. Our approach combined both evaluation activity with a programme of capacity building support focused on monitoring, evaluation and learning.

### Impact and learning at different levels of the Together Fund

At a local level, Partners were encouraged to develop their own approaches to evaluation and learning, depending on local needs, capacity and priorities.

Over the course of the Together Fund, Partners collected and analysed data from individual participants and community organisations and staff, to prepare their own impact and learning reports.

Across the country, Partners also supported the delivery of two surveys to capture impacts of the programme on key priority areas, including participation in physical activity and organisational sustainability. This included:

- **A participant survey**, completed by **14,044** people, which asked individual project participants a series of Yes / No statements about their enjoyment of activities, participation in physical activity, physical and mental health, and connection to local communities.
- **A community organisation survey**, completed by **1785** organisations, which asked staff or volunteers a series of Yes / No questions about their organisations' connections, ability to deliver physical activity, and sustainability.

Across the Together Fund as a whole, our evaluation drew on the data, reports and case studies that Partners shared to draw out common experiences, impacts and learning. Renaisi was also responsible for analysing the survey data, which Partners shared via Smartsheet or their own Excel sheets.

We supplemented this data with reflections gathered through 12x interviews with Partners, alongside notes gathered from Together Fund Open Calls and other learning and network sessions.

### **Supporting monitoring and evaluation capacity**

In our role as evaluation partner, we also offered capacity building support focused on Partners' monitoring, evaluation and learning practices. These sessions were delivered online and brought Partners together to reflect on key aspects of monitoring, evaluation and learning practice. We also organised troubleshoot sessions which delved deeper into specific aspects of evaluation and learning, such as data visualisation.

# Delivering the Together Fund

The Together Fund's onward distribution model supported Partners to work in different ways with a wider range of community organisations.

## Summary

- In delivering the Together Fund, Sport England worked with its network of Partners to test a new model of funding, based on onward distribution of funding.
- Flexibility and trust were core features of this model, developed over time and through regular engagements between Sport England and Partners. The Open Calls organised through the Together Fund were a key mechanism for supporting the development of this trust and flexibility.
- As part of the Together Fund model, Partners worked closely with local partners to identify community organisations to fund. This helped Partners build relationships with other organisations locally and engage the Together Fund's priority audiences.
- The Together Fund application process was underpinned by a relational approach, with Partners supporting organisations to develop applications. This enabled smaller organisations to access Sport England funding for the first time.
- The resilience support offered to organisations and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes were areas of the Together Fund which Partners found less successful. This resulted from difficulties engaging community organisations and confusion surrounding monitoring and evaluation expectations.

## Shifting power and building trust: the onward distribution model

Through the delivery of the Together Fund, Sport England aimed to support communities who were disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic to access physical activity. To do this, Sport England adopted an onward distribution model, which enabled the network of Together Fund Partners – Active Partnerships, National Governing Bodies and specialist charitable organisations – to support local community organisations to access Sport England funding.

As part of the onward distribution model, Partners were given autonomy to develop local approaches to supporting community organisations to apply for Together Funding. This



often involved working closely with community organisations to explore and develop their applications.

Completed applications were initially submitted to Partner teams for review. Partners would assess applications against Together Fund criteria shared by Sport England, making recommendations to Sport England on projects that met these criteria. Applications were then shared with the Sport England team for final approval and sign-off, before funding was awarded and distributed by the Partner.

While the exact application and support process varied across the country, as Partners tailored their approach to local context, the underpinning features – initial review by Partners, submission to Sport England for review and confirmation of funding – remained consistent.

In comparison to more traditional models of centrally administered funding, this approach gave Partners greater autonomy to tailor their approach to local needs and priorities – and support onward distribution of funding to organisations working directly with the Together Fund’s priority audiences.

Overall, Partners highlighted two key aspects of this approach that were central to their experiences of the Together Fund, and the successes they achieved in reaching new communities and developing new connections:

- 1) The flexibility to adapt approaches to local need, and learn from both challenges and successes along the way**
- 2) A relationship built on trust** – with Partners empowered to identify and support organisations locally to apply.

At the overall Fund level, this trust and flexibility was built over time and through continued engagement between Partners and Sport England. The monthly Open Calls organised during the Tackling Inequalities and Together Funds were a key mechanism for establishing this relationship of trust. These calls brought together Partners from across the country to share experiences, learn from each other, and collectively troubleshoot key challenges encountered.

*“The opportunity to be part of the open calls were a fantastic opportunity to connect with other partners, but also to witness the difference were making to organisations as their confidence with the funding grew.”*

**Partner**

The regular Open Calls also provided a forum for Partners to share feedback on their experiences with Sport England. Over time, this led to changes in aspects of the Together Fund, such as the criteria for funding sole traders, as Sport England adapted requirements based on feedback from Partners on their experiences engaging community organisations.

These two core characteristics of the Together Fund are explored in more detail in the next section, which moves through the different elements of the approach – from initial identification of community organisations through to evaluation and learning. In doing so, we draw out key reflections on the approach taken, highlighting both key successes and challenges.

## Identifying and building connections with community organisations

A key priority for Partners in building community connections was to reach beyond historic recipients of Sport England funding and engage new community organisations. During the delivery of the Together Fund, Partners adopted a range of practices for identifying and connecting with local community organisations.

Many of the approaches taken, especially by Active Partnerships, were developed and refined during the first phases of the Tackling Inequalities Fund. Recognising that a proactive approach was required, Active Partnerships adopted a solicited or targeted approach, working with local partners to identify community organisations who were already working with key priority audiences locally.

As the onward distribution model gave Partners greater autonomy to respond to local need, Partners could approach identifying organisations in ways that were most relevant to their local context or position within systems. Several Partners first drew on their existing knowledge and available data and information locally to identify key local organisations to approach.

*“Through utilising collective knowledge and insight of the county we were able to identify places with the greatest proportion of individuals within each of the priority groups. This supported the solicited approach to funding distribution by allowing our team to identify organisations working with priority audiences in these locations who were best placed to develop projects which would reflect the needs and interests of these audiences.”*

Partner

Some Partners built on this initial scoping by working with local VCSE infrastructure organisations to identify and map local community organisations.

*“The most common enabler of success was to build relationships and work with existing specialist organisations in the voluntary and community, health and social care, and education sectors to publicise the project to their contacts and clients.”*

Partner

Living Sport, for example, worked with local VCSE infrastructure partners to refer community organisations to Together Fund funding opportunities. This enabled them to build on existing relationships of trust locally, overcoming potential mistrust or unwillingness to engage with a new source of funding. Crucially, this also offered Partners routes into reaching community organisations who they had not previously engaged.

*“Using local partners to identify the community needs and local audiences who most needed support was an effective and new way of approaching grant funding. Ultimately this led to us identifying new and appropriate groups.”*

Partner

Nevertheless, some Partners found it more difficult to identify potential organisations and routes into supporting specific communities or priority audiences. This was particularly the case in places where existing networks and organisations supporting communities were weaker or more nascent, and for Partners operating in more rural and less diverse parts of the country.

At a national level, application data collected over the course of the Together Fund provides an indication of some of the success achieved across the country in reaching new community organisations and addressing key local need.

There is evidence that the approaches taken by Partners to identifying community organisations allowed the Together Fund to reach community organisations working with historically under-engaged groups. Based on the postcode of main beneficiaries provided by community organisations, **the largest proportion of (45%) projects reached the most deprived areas**, with an Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score of 1-3.<sup>3</sup> A significant proportion (31%) also reached areas with an IMD of 4-7, and the lowest proportion (14%) reaching the least deprived areas with an IMD of 8-10.

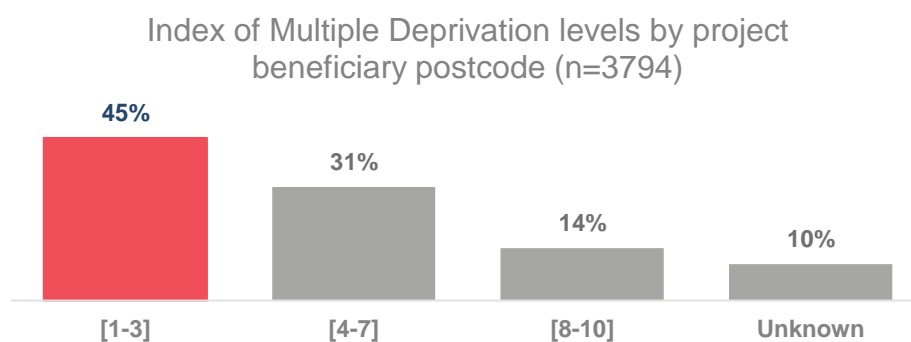


Fig. 4 Index of Multiple Deprivation scores and project postcode

## A relational approach to the application process

After identifying community organisations, Partners adopted a relational approach to engagement, which was grounded in building trust and connections with community organisations over time. Many Partners invested time into building relationships with community organisation teams and volunteers. They found this to be helpful in developing a better understanding of provision on offer locally, as well as giving community organisations to discuss and explore how they could offer physical activity as part of their delivery. At the same time, building connections with community organisations also enabled Partners to support organisations with broader needs beyond funding – training, signposting their offer, or exploring other connections locally.

<sup>3</sup> The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) describe how relatively deprived a small area is by saying whether it falls among the most deprived 10 per cent, 20 per cent or 30 per cent of small areas in England. Deciles are calculated by ranking the 32,844 small areas in England from most deprived to least deprived and dividing them into 10 equal groups. These range from the most deprived 10 per cent of small areas nationally to the least deprived 10 per cent of small areas nationally. More information can be found here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5dfb3d7ce5274a3432700cf3/loD2019\\_FAQ\\_v4.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5dfb3d7ce5274a3432700cf3/loD2019_FAQ_v4.pdf)

*“We identified local organisations and groups who worked with one or more of the priority audiences, and sought to understand their needs. The needs were not always funding related, often connections or information was just as useful. If funding was needed, and the Together Fund was right, the local Partnership Officer supported the organisation to apply.”*

Partner

Crucially, here, the autonomy offered by the onward distribution model enabled Partners to support community organisations in a responsive and tailored way, based on an understanding of the support they required. Partners found that this tailored approach enabled them to better meet the needs of community organisations, developing their connections and relationships further.

In contrast to more traditional funding practices, in which organisations complete an application independently and submit to a central funder, Partners worked closely with organisations through the application process. This often involved staff from Partner teams talking through a project with community organisations and filling out the application form on their behalf.

*“To complete an application, we held discussion meetings with the groups to refine their project idea and ensure it was suitable to fund. Our process was a deliberate personal approach, to begin with it was time intensive but we found it worked and was the best approach for our groups. The approach helped groups apply as we could build their application with them without the barrier of completing a long application form like some grants.”*

Partner

Partners found this approach **particularly effective in supporting smaller community organisations**. As responsibility for completing an application form and associated documentation was shifted from organisations to Partners, the administrative burden placed on community organisations was reduced, lifting a common barrier for grassroots organisations with limited capacity or experience with completing formalised funding processes.

Approaches also developed over time. Here again, the flexible and adaptive ethos of the Together Fund was a key underpinning factor: Partners were empowered to learn from what worked and adapt their approaches accordingly. Some Partners, for example, introduced application processes in earlier phases of the Tackling Inequalities and Together Funds which they found that community organisations were not accessing. This led them to refine and revise their approaches to remove barriers preventing organisations applying for funding – such as complex language in application forms.

Working in this more relational way required more time and capacity across Partner teams to support organisations effectively. Partners found that embedding more relational approaches worked well when responsibility for administering the Together Fund was

spread across teams, or dedicated roles were created to support organisations through the application process.

*“The Trust appointed a dedicated Tackling Inequalities / Together Fund Coordinator to work closely with the applicants whose projects showed promise. The coordinator supported the applicants in refining their project ideas and strengthening governance practices. This involved signposting to additional funding opportunities, aiding risk assessment writing, supporting the project development and embedding of safeguarding policies and procedures.”*

Partner

Another key feature of the Together Fund application process was the flexibility afforded to community organisations in using the funding to apply for a range of support – from staff time to equipment hire. This enabled Partners to work with community organisations to fund a range of activities to directly target need, and to support community organisations to experiment with adding physical activity provision into existing provision.

Nevertheless, Partners did encounter challenges in supporting community organisations through the application, particularly smaller, grassroots organisations that lacked formalised governance or processes. During earlier phases of the Together Fund, a lack of guidance on funding eligibility for sole traders, for example, made it difficult for Partners to determine what they could fund. As sole traders were often embedded individuals delivering activities in their communities, funding them through the Together Fund represented an opportunity to directly reach some of the priority audiences identified.

*“But I think they [funding guidelines] need to be looked at because sole traders could make it so much easier for us to use independent freelance instructors to go and work with a community group. But all the time the application had to come from the community group, and where they weren't easily set up as a constituted group or whatever, it put a barrier in the way.”*

Partner

This challenge was fed back to Sport England by Partners, and led to updated guidance on what could be funded through the Together Fund. Nevertheless, some Partners felt that an inability to fund sole traders without connections to a community organisation represented a barrier to supporting grassroots projects which were closely embedded in local communities.

Some partners felt that their support of grassroots organisations to apply for Sport England funded tested the limits of the flexible and trusting approach. When Partners put forward applications from smaller organisations, some felt the number of queries raised by the Sport England team indicated a lack of trust in Partners' recommendations.

*“At times felt like there wasn't always complete trust between Sport England and Partners because of the number of questions asked via Smartsheet about applications.”*

Partner

*“The parts of projects that had the most impact were the most questioned by Sport England in Smartsheets, which indicates a need to review funding criteria and challenge traditional thinking.”*

Partner

This suggests that more could be done to consider how and where risk is held in similar funding models in the future, so that smaller community organisations are not prevented from accessing funding.

## Supporting organisational sustainability

Moving from the Tackling Inequalities Fund, and immediate Covid-19 crisis response, a core focus of the Together Fund was on supporting organisational resilience after the pandemic.

Reflecting the overall ethos of the onward distribution approach, Partners had the flexibility to use the Together Fund resilience support funding to best meet the needs of organisations they were engaging. Consequently, Partners adopted a range of approaches to this resilience support package, offering a mix of 1-1 support, training sessions, and group workshops.

There were several aspects of the resilience support offered that both Partners and community organisations identified as effective. Firstly, **listening to organisations’ needs** and **offering a range of support opportunities** enabled Partners to tailor their support to individual organisations, recognising that organisations are at different stages and require differing levels of support.

*“We chose to distribute this funding through a variety of internal and external avenues for all funded organisations to access based on their need/interest. This approach allowed each organisation to tailor the opportunities accessed to support in upskilling their staff/volunteers, and strengthening organisational capabilities (e.g. effectively identifying and applying for funding).”*

Partner

Offering tailored 1-1 support was also felt to be effective in engaging community organisations, particularly when this support was focused on producing tailored development plans. Creating space for community organisations to explore their organisational needs in this way enabled community organisations to dedicate time to longer-term planning.

Take-up of group workshops and training sessions, however, was more limited. Several Partners noted that sign-ups for sessions were lower than expected, which led to sessions being adapted or repurposed. In some cases, this was owing to the more general nature of the support provided, which community organisations felt they had already developed, particularly around internal processes and structures (e.g. governance). However, this also pointed to a larger issue faced by many Partners when offering resilience support: the broader time and capacity pressures organisations were experiencing, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis. This was particularly an issue for smaller organisations with more limited resources and capacity to participate in sessions.

Within this broader systemic context, Partners highlighted the importance of **combining resilience support with supporting funding or access to funding opportunities**. Some Partners, for example, offered a smaller cohort of community organisations funding to cover

the costs of involvement in dedicated capacity building sessions, which led to sustained engagement in sessions. For others, offering resilience support as part of a broader package of Together Funding was felt to be most effective in securing engagement.

## Approaches to evaluation and learning

In line with the broader ethos and focus of the onward distribution approach, Sport England also adopted an approach to evaluation which attempted to promote flexibility and collaboration. Partners were invited to adopt an approach that most suited their local needs and priorities, rather than being a mandatory part of their approach. At the broader Together Fund level, Renaisi was commissioned to both draw together an overarching evaluation and offer a programme of capacity building support to Partners around Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning.

Partner engagement with and responses to this approach were mixed and indicate an overall uncertainty around the communication of this flexibility. While some Partners valued the flexibility to adapt approaches to suit their own priorities, others requested further guidance and support from Sport England on their expectations for evaluation data and outputs.

*“Clearer information from Sport England on their expectations and how the research will be used going forward and what it means for our individual organisations.”*

Partner

*“MEL support needed to be integrated far earlier in the programme with more direct communication from Sport England about the monitoring stage to help us prepare better.”*

Partner

## Completing Together Fund surveys

This issue manifested particularly in relation to the two surveys that were introduced as part of the Together Fund, which aimed to collect data on participant and community organisations’ experiences of the programme. **Supporting the completion of these surveys represented one of the central challenges** that both Partners and community organisations faced over the course of the Together Fund.

Community organisations encountered a range of challenges when attempting to support the completion of these surveys. For some community organisations, staff, and volunteer capacity to support participants to complete surveys represented a key barrier.

*“They also said they found it hard to resource the monitoring and data collection requirements, especially in smaller organisations.”*

Partner

The scale and intensity of monitoring and evaluation requirements were also felt to be a potential barrier for smaller organisations. Partners noted that some community organisations were dissuaded from applying for funding owing to the amount of time required to complete monitoring, which was felt to be disproportionate to the size of their grant.

*“We noticed that because the MEL requirements changed quite a lot for this particular round, that did put off some of these smaller organisations.”*

Partner

Other organisations encountered challenges with the format and perception of the surveys provided. Some community organisations, for example, reported that the traditional survey format was viewed with mistrust by some communities, or unsuited to the specific needs of communities being engaged.

*“Data collection with our target demographic can be difficult. Not all participants have capacity to consent. Questionnaires were printed in large font and distributed at sessions with help on hand from volunteers and carers. [Partner] put on some online sessions to talk organisations through the data collection but very few attended.”*

Partner

These challenges resulted in organisations and Partners having to invest considerable time and capacity in supporting the completion of the surveys, placing additional pressures on teams and organisation staff and volunteers.

## **The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning offer**

Partners' experiences with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning support we offered was also mixed. In providing feedback on the four capacity building sessions offered by the Renaisi team, several Partners indicated that they would have preferred for the support to be embedded at an earlier stage of the programme.

*“For us the webinars came a little late, it would have been useful to have this at the start of the work, embedding once the projects were already happening made it difficult to implement for this.”*

Partner

For Partners who had more established internal monitoring and evaluation capacity, the level of the sessions were broadly felt to have been pitched too low. Instead, Partners described their desire for more specific support, diving deeper into specific evaluation and learning practices.

*“Felt the support was pitched too low and offered far too late in the programme. By the time of the troubleshoot sessions we had already worked on our own MEL plan or found support for it elsewhere as we had 3 years of the programme to monitor.”*

Partner

Reflecting on this, some Partners suggested that a more general overview or introduction to monitoring and evaluation could be offered to community organisations. Alongside this, more specialist or tailored support could be provided to Partners with existing capacity and expertise.

The value of offering more tailored support to Partners was reflected in aspects of the capacity building support that Partners identified as being valuable. In particular, some Partners described drawing directly on the data analysis and visualisations sessions in their own work.



*“One session I attended was really useful to visualise data and has changed my approach to report writing and considering data collected.”*

Partner

Overall, the feedback provided on the Together Fund’s evaluation and learning approach points to the value of clear communication around expectations, proportionate requirements, and timely and tailored support. While the flexible approach did enable Partners to take the initiative in shaping their own approaches, a lack of clarity on baseline expectations caused uncertainty around where and what Partners could flex. For the capacity building support, more timely and tailored approaches could enable Partners to build on and deepen existing MEL practices.

## Impact on systems and systemic working

The Together Fund enabled Partners to build new connections with key local stakeholders, support local networks, and develop new links between community organisations.

### Summary

- Through delivering the Together Fund, Partners were able to foster new connections and develop more systemic ways of promoting physical activity.
- At a national level, Open Calls represented a key mechanism for building connections between Partners and a platform for collaboration.
- However, some Partners found it more difficult to connect with others through the Together Fund. It was felt that more could be done to provide information on which organisations were being funded by other Partners, to enable greater collaboration and coordinated working.
- At regional and place levels, Together Fund support enabled Partners to build new relationships with other local organisations, support local networks reaching priority audiences, and develop new approaches to funding physical activity provision locally.
- Capacity within teams, existing local networks, and longer timescales for development of funding applications represented key enablers for working in more systemic ways.

In adopting the onward distribution model as a core feature of the Together Fund, Sport England sought to foster broader shifts in how physical activity is supported and funded across the country, in line with its Uniting the Movement Strategy.<sup>4</sup> In this section of the report, we explore the impact of the Together Fund both across places and at regional and national levels.

### What do we mean by “system”?

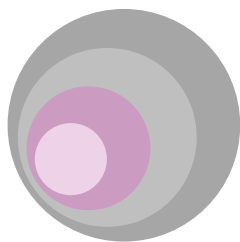
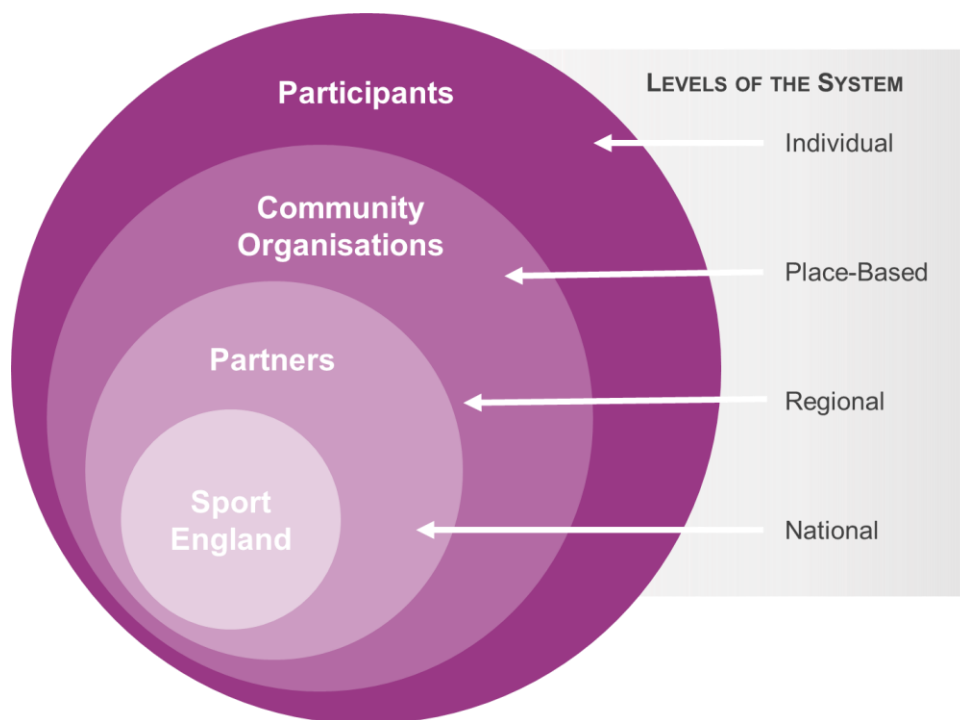
When considering the impact of the Together Fund at more systemic levels, we are referring to the broader system surrounding physical activity. This system can be conceptualised as a series of layers, extending outwards from the Together Fund and Sport England at its core, at a national level, to the more local place-based and individual levels

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/about-us/uniting-movement>

of the physical activity system – community organisations offering physical activity in local areas, and people attending sessions.

Throughout this section, we draw on this model of the system to consider the different layers of the system at which the Together Fund fostered connections and different ways of working, and the impacts achieved as a result.



### Connecting the national and regional: fostering relationships and collaboration between Partners

At the national and regional level, the key stakeholders involved in the broader system of physical activity were Sport England and the network of 81 Partners responsible for coordinating the delivery of the Fund in places.

During the course of its delivery, the Together Fund provided mechanisms for connections to be established between Partners operating at different points in the system, such as National Governing Bodies and Active Partnerships working in places. The Open Calls organised through the Together Fund represented a key mechanism for establishing initial relationships and connections, which were further strengthened through direct interaction and through other Sport England channels, such as System Partner meetings.

Feedback provided by Partners highlighted the value of these sessions in providing a space for Partners to come together and learn more from each other. In some cases, the Open Calls provided initial connections which Partners were able to develop into opportunities for further collaboration, to coordinate physical activity funding nationally and

regionally. One Partner, for example, described how they were able to work with others to coordinate offers with local places.

*“The open calls themselves were fantastic...it gave me immediate connections with Active Partners, and other Partners within the system... We've developed our clubs support team, who've now been going out and making connections with all of those Partners, so that when we start to understand what the need of a club is, and what kind of area they're thinking of working in, we can make the connections for them.”*

Partner

However, some Partners encountered challenges when attempting to form collaborations with others and connect up national and regional funding for physical activity in a more joined up way. This was associated with a lack of overall connectivity between national governing bodies and local Partners, which resulted in Partners being unaware of the funding that had been invested locally by other Partners also involved in the Together Fund.

*“We also proactively engaged with system partners who were funded nationally to distribute the funding and were surprised to see over £50k invested into the county from national partners without our knowledge. We reached out to these national partners to discuss their investments in the future to develop greater collaboration with mixed success.”*

Partner

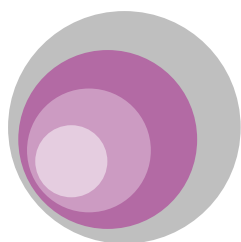
To support more joined up working between Partners, some Partners suggested that information could be made more readily accessible via Smartsheet or other channels so that Partners could easily identify the organisations that had already received funding.

Other Partners also faced challenges that made forming broader connections within the system of physical activity more difficult. Crucially, Partner capacity was identified as a key barrier to working in more systemic ways – especially for Partners that joined the Together Fund at a later stage.

*“We haven't been working closely with that many system partners, purely down to capacity, because we've been so focused on the delivery of the fund, trying to kind of make new connections with other system partners has been quite difficult.”*

Partner

In contrast to Active Partnerships, who often embedded the Together Fund across place-based working teams internally, some of the smaller Partners involved in the Together Fund had an individual staff member responsible for supporting the programme. This made it more difficult for smaller Partners to move beyond supporting delivery to consider how connections could be formed with others.



## Supporting place-based working: connecting Partners and local networks

The next layer of the system is represented by the work of Partners and community organisations in places. In this layer of the system, the delivery of the Together Fund helped to foster new connections and routes into new partnerships and networks, strengthening Partners' place-based working.

Local systems were strengthened in a range of ways, often connected to the specific context of the local places in which Partners operate. However, across the Together Fund, there were common mechanisms connecting Partners, local organisations and broader networks:

- 1) **Bolstering connections through collaborative application processes**
- 2) **Supporting and strengthening local networks through funding**
- 3) **Challenging existing funding paradigms – funding collaborations**

### Bolstering connections through collaborative application processes

In recognition of the need for adopting new ways of working to identify and reach community organisations supporting the Together Fund, several Partners worked closely with key local stakeholders. Some Partners, for example, worked with local infrastructure organisations, such as Civil and Voluntary Services, to build on their existing connections and invite organisations to apply. Other Partners, such as the Canal and Riverside Trust, established meetings which brought together several key stakeholders to develop approaches to supporting community organisations to apply.

Through this engagement with key local organisations, Partners were able to build or strengthen relationships with other local stakeholders with connections across the broader system of physical activity and health. This often represented a foundation which Partners could use to highlight the value of physical activity in contributing to the wider priorities of stakeholders who play a prominent role in local systems, such as local health teams – particularly against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

### Supporting and strengthening local networks with Together Fund funding

Delivering the Together Fund also enabled Partners to connect with and support key local networks which they had not previously engaged. This involved both connecting into local networks, to explore how Together Fund could support their work, and helping to establish new networks locally to support priority audiences.

Several Partners successfully connected into networks locally, building connections and supporting local community organisations to offer new provision for local communities. Below we highlight two examples – Northamptonshire Sport's role in supporting the Black

Communities Moving Together Forum and Active Devon's collaboration with the One North Devon (OND) network.



**Delivering  
the  
Together  
Fund**

**Impact  
on  
systems**

## **The Black Communities Moving Together Forum**

### **Northamptonshire Sport**

In April 2021, Northamptonshire Sport hosted a conversation with local community organisations, 'Sports Can Battle Racism'. This event helped to open **conversations around the systemic inequalities** preventing Black communities from accessing physical activity and provided the foundation for the establishment of the **Black Communities Moving Together Forum**, which launched in October 2022.

To accompany the launch of the Forum, a dedicated, closed pot of Together Fund funding was established to support Black-led community organisations to deliver physical activity locally.

Supporting this local network has helped to **build trusted relationships between Northamptonshire Sport and a network of local community organisations**, supported Black-led community organisations to access funding, and raised awareness of the structural and systemic inequalities experienced by local communities.

*“Without the Together Fund, we may not have reached this point in relationships as trusted partners yet.”*

Delivering  
the  
Together  
Fund

Impact  
on  
systems

## Connecting with local health partners

### Active Devon

One Northern Devon (OND) is a partnership of public and private sector organisations working to address health and wellbeing inequalities locally.

Across North Devon, OND supports seven local partnerships that connect service providers and local residents. During the delivery of the Together Fund, Active Devon built a relationship with the OND partnership. A dedicated Together Fund funding pot was created to support local providers involved in the seven partnerships, connecting physical activity into local initiatives.

Through this collaboration, Active Devon have formed closer connections with the OND partnership. **A member of the Active Devon team now sits on the board of OND, and a shared role has created opportunities for greater alignment around** shared priorities and opportunities.

*“The Together Fund work has enabled a more formal recognition of the value of physical activity being embedded within the health system locally.”*

Partner

## Challenging existing funding paradigms: funding collaboration

The flexibility of the Together Fund delivery model also enabled Partners to test new ways of funding in more collaborative and systemic ways. This allowed Partners to challenge existing funding paradigms, which often lead to community organisations competing over the same, limited resources.

In Berkshire, for example, Get Berkshire Active experimented with using Together Fund funding to address structural issues locally through supporting longer-term change at a system level. This was achieved through funding the development of **Sports Together**, a collaboration of local community organisations who worked together to coordinate provision for young people with Special Education Needs.

Staff from Get Berkshire Active worked closely with organisations to establish their collaborations and build applications through development sessions. Initially, using the **iceberg model facilitated discussions with organisations around the structural issues organisations were facing and the barriers causing them.**

*“[The iceberg model] identified specific groups who were excluded, allowing us to understand the...structural issues within partner organisations or across the network that were influencing this exclusion.”*

Partner

As a result of working collaboratively with the Get Berkshire Active team, local organisations **secured funding to coordinate their provision, share learning and pool resources.** This helped organisations to provide a more coordinated offer locally and better support young people with Special Education Needs to participate in physical activity.

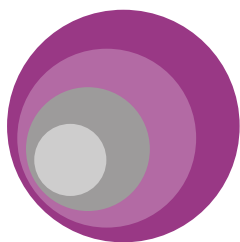
*“This model was beneficial for the clubs as it meant they weren’t competing for hall space or participants and could combine costs, reducing some of the challenges associated with new sessions. It led to collaborative working when planning their own sessions and providing support with staffing/events.”*

Partner

Importantly, this model of funding and support for organisations served as a counterpoint to the structure and availability of other funding streams, which often lead organisations to compete rather than work with each other.

Nevertheless, setting up Sports Together and similar collaborative projects require a longer lead-in time so that organisations can consider the systemic issues they face and develop collaborative applications. Partners including Get Berkshire Active noted that during later phases of the Together Fund, the shorter timescales for applications made it more difficult to invest time in developing similar system-focused projects. This highlights the **value and need for longer-term funding to support organisations to develop new approaches to working together locally.**





## Building resilience and widening reach in hyperlocal contexts: the community organisation level

Strengthened place-based networks and support from partners in turn enabled positive shifts at the community organisation level. This helped strengthen community organisations and broaden their reach in communities. At the same time, our analysis presents a picture of a highly challenging local operating environment with significant constraints on resources.

### Offering physical activity

In addition to the strengthened connections between partners and community organisations, Together Fund support enabled and strengthened connections between community organisations and wider community stakeholders, such as social prescribers, public health professionals and volunteers. This network building enabled organisations already working closely with local communities to offer physical activity for the first time.

*“We are becoming a more important figure in the community.”*  
Community organisation

In response to a survey of community organisations, **89%** of respondents said the Together Fund enabled their organisation to offer **more opportunities for people to be active**. **80%** of respondents said Together Fund funding **supported their organisation to attract new participants**, and **76%** reported an **increased confidence to deliver physical activity**.

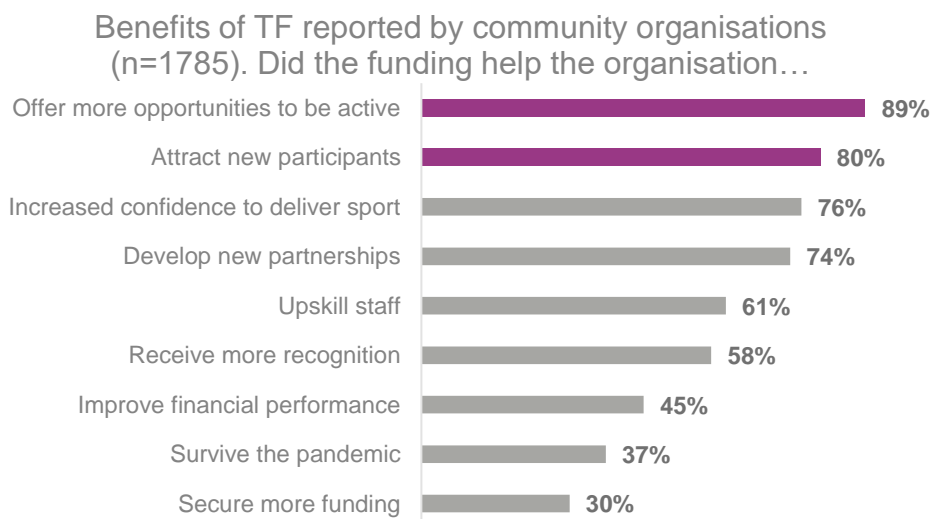


Fig. 5 Community organisation survey responses

Through providing physical activity opportunities for the first time, organisations were able to access new audiences and communities. Together Fund seed funding supported local organisations to buy new equipment and to organise activities at no cost to participants, which opened engagement especially with lower socio-economic groups and intersecting communities. We describe the engagement of participants from priority audiences in the following section.

*“A lot of sports and activity providers were self-employed, and were really, really hit during COVID... [The Together Fund] was a real opportunity to support the local economy, to get self-employed people engaged again.”*

Partner

## Resilience support

Organisational resilience and sustainability was a key focus of Together Fund support. This support was delivered by Partners, shaped to meet the needs of community organisations they were engaging.

A key enabler for resilience-building among community organisations was in-depth engagement by Partners to understand each organisation’s needs and to tailor support accordingly. The opportunity for funding served as a motivating mechanism to engage organisations in these resilience sessions.

Community organisations valued the variety of sessions and engagement formats on offer. For example, some Partners combined one-to-one meetings with group workshops, which also served a useful opportunity to build connections among local organisations. Content targeted key areas of need for community organisations, such as marketing to local communities and use of social media.

Our analysis of the community organisation survey responses demonstrated a mixed picture of the impact on organisations. While **45% of respondents** said that engagement with Together Fund support **improved** their organisation’s **financial performance**, **30%** of respondents said that Together Fund **helped them to secure more funding**. 37% of respondents said it helped their organisation to survive the pandemic. Feedback from Partners corroborated this picture, describing situations in which smaller organisations continued to face multiple challenges.

These figures likely reflect the influence of external socioeconomic and policy-political systems on community organisations, especially those with fewer staff or dependent on voluntary labour. Through our qualitative data collection, we learned how organisations continued to face existential challenges to their day-to-day operations, with the cost-of-living crisis as a central contributing factor. Lack of accessible routes into long-term funding was a key area of need experienced by smaller organisations. As Together Fund funding came to a close, these organisations delivering work in communities were increasingly unable to access the support required. Taken together, our analysis presents a picture of an operating environment which posed a significant challenge to sustaining positive impact beyond the lifecycle of the Together Fund, for both priority audiences and organisations.

Systemic challenges impact the ongoing viability of community organisations. Without funding, or robust support to access and apply for funding, some organisations face closure.

*“Repeating the funding would further enable us to develop more sustainable groups within the community and widen the scope of our service.”*

Community organisation

## Enablers and barriers for systemic and place-based working across the Together Fund

Across the Together Fund as a whole, there were several key enablers and barriers to working systemically, and achieving change in local ways of working and supporting physical activity:

Levels of the system	Enabler for systemic working	Barriers
<b>National: Sport England – Partners</b>	<p><b>Opportunities for Partners to come together and learn from each other</b> – the Together Fund Open Calls created space for Partners to get to know each other and share their experiences of delivering the Together Fund. This network, and other Sport England networks formed connections which enabled some Partners to build connections and explore opportunities to collaborate.</p>	Partners reported challenges in navigating large amounts of via several communication channels. This made it more difficult at points for Partners to engage in more strategic ways.
<b>National and Regional: Partners – Partners</b>	<p><b>The strength and connections of existing networks locally</b> – where local networks were already established, Partners could form connections and utilise funding to support the embedding of physical activity.</p> <p><b>Taking whole team approaches to delivering Together Fund</b> – many Active Partners embedded Together Fund delivery across their internal teams. This spread the responsibility for the Together Fund among a wider network of staff, creating more space and time for Partners to build relationships with local networks and organisations, and other Partners.</p>	<p>In areas where local organisations and infrastructure are less developed, building more networked ways of working proved more difficult.</p> <p><b>Limited capacity</b> among smaller Partners, including those who joined the Together Fund at a later stage, led to a focus on delivery, limiting the ability of some Partners to build connections at different levels.</p> <p><b>Lack of information on organisations funded at different levels</b> – some Partners attempted to form connections with others working at a different level (e.g. Active Partners connecting with an NGB). However, a lack of awareness and information on other Partners that were</p>

		funding local organisations led to missed opportunities for collaboration.
<b>Place: Partners – Community Organisations</b>	<p><b>Supporting local networks</b>, e.g. through the creation of dedicated funding pots, enabled Partners to build new connections and highlight the value of physical activity in contributing to local health priorities.</p> <p><b>Developing collaborative projects in partnership</b> with local community organisations enabled Partners to test new ways of funding physical activity locally, fostering collaboration and shared learning rather than competition between local organisations. In some places, this led to more coordinated local offers for key priority audiences.</p>	<b>Shorter-term funding timescales</b> prevent Partners and organisations from investing the time needed to explore systemic issues and form collaborations. This can lead to a focus on funding established projects that are ready to deliver, rather than more exploratory and complex projects which attempt to foster new forms of working locally.
<b>Hyperlocal: Community organisations in their communities</b>	<b>Building connections between community stakeholders</b> enabled organisations with deep community ties to offer sport and physical activity provision for the first time. This appears to be an effective driver for reaching new participants and encouraging participants to be more active.	<b>The grassroots level is heavily impacted by systemic resource constraints</b> that are contributing to an increasing scarcity of funding. Efforts to widen access to sport and physical activity and develop resilience in community organisations face significant risk due to this.

# Impact on priority audiences

Together Fund led to significant positive impacts across all four priority audiences.

## Summary

- The Together Fund reached a large number of participants across its four priority audiences.
- For all four audiences, engagement in Together Fund activities enabled participants to increase their activity levels, improve their physical fitness, and gain confidence in exercising.
- Together Fund projects empowered participants to develop more general confidence across their lifestyle, with particular impact for children and young people and those from lower socio-economic groups.
- Participation in sport and physical activity provided important opportunities for social connection and community belonging. This was particularly important for Disabled people and people with long-term health conditions who experienced isolation following periods of self-isolation during the pandemic.
- Positive impacts for participants were more likely to be sustained beyond the funding when behavioural change was embedded into the model of the project, for example by training participants in equipment maintenance, and sharing tips for how to integrate physical activity into daily life.

## Who did Together Fund reach?

The Together Fund **reached many participants across the country**. According to community organisation application forms, the total expected number of participants across the **3792** projects was **356,185** people.<sup>5</sup>

**60% of projects expected to reach under 50 participants**, with the average number of expected participants being **94**.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This total excludes two projects with extremely high rates of participation (120,000 and 100,000 expected participants), which would otherwise skew the numbers.

<sup>6</sup> As above, this excludes two projects with very high rates of expected participation so as not to skew the data significantly.

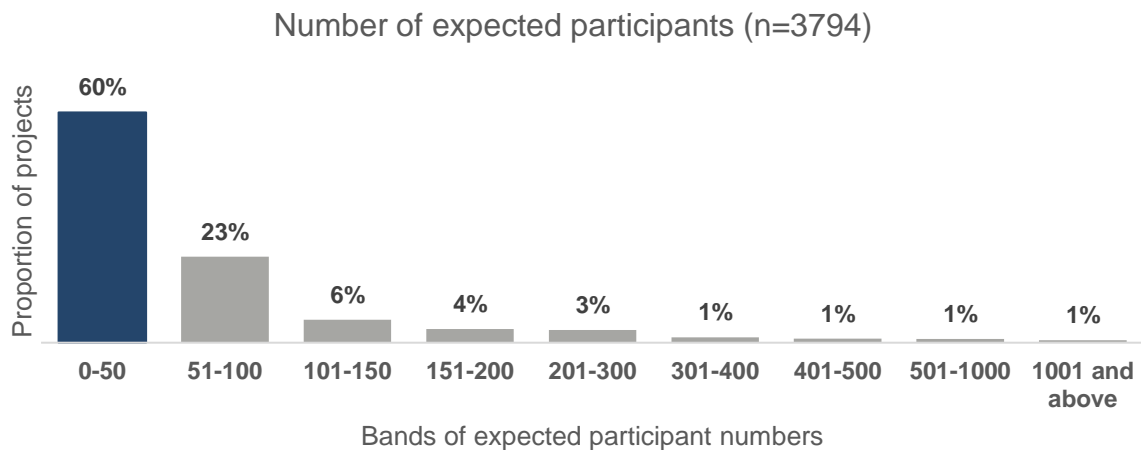


Fig. 6 Proportion of Together Fund projects and expected participant numbers

Many Together Fund projects reached Sport England’s target audiences, with projects generally engaging participants who often face barriers to physical activity. **The largest proportion (45%) of projects reached participants in the most deprived areas**, with an Index of Multiple Deprivation score of 1-3.

According to responses to the community organisation survey, **a high proportion of projects engaged many participants in the Together Fund’s target audiences**. The highest proportion of community organisations reported that at least 75% of project participants were from lower socio-economic communities (35.2% of projects), followed by culturally diverse communities (28.8% of projects), people with long-term health conditions (27.2% of projects), and disabled people (22.5% of projects).

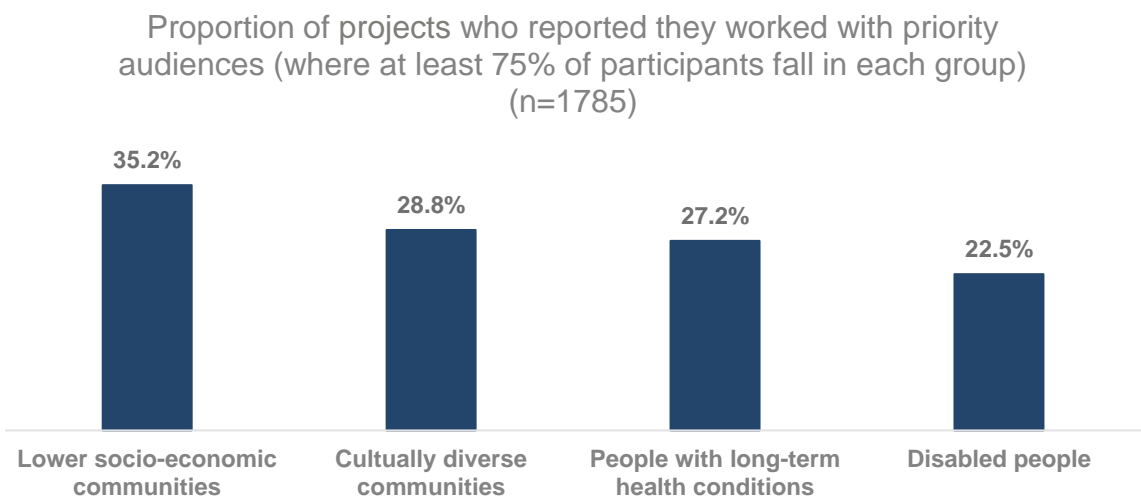


Fig. 7 Proportion of projects working with priority audiences (75% of participants)

Comparing community organisation funding applications with surveys completed at the end of the programme, we see that community organisations reached similar relative proportions of target groups to those they expected to reach. In other words, participants from lower-socio economic groups were the largest expected group of participants, and they were the largest actual group of participants. Participants with long-term health conditions and Disabled people were the smallest expected groups and were the smallest actual groups of participants. This may suggest that community organisations had existing connections with or were already better equipped to work with people from certain target audiences than others.

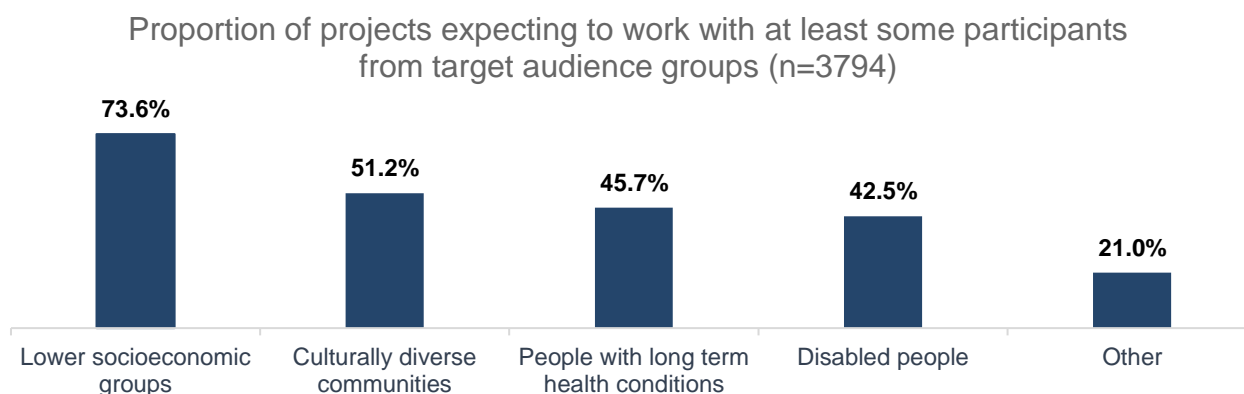


Fig. 8 Proportion of projects expecting to support participants from priority audiences

A significant number of projects also expected to work with other groups, most notably **women and girls** (11.6% of projects), **younger people** (10.9% of projects), **older people** (6.4%), **migrants** (3.1%), **faith communities** (1.9%) and **LGBTQ+ people** (1.8%).

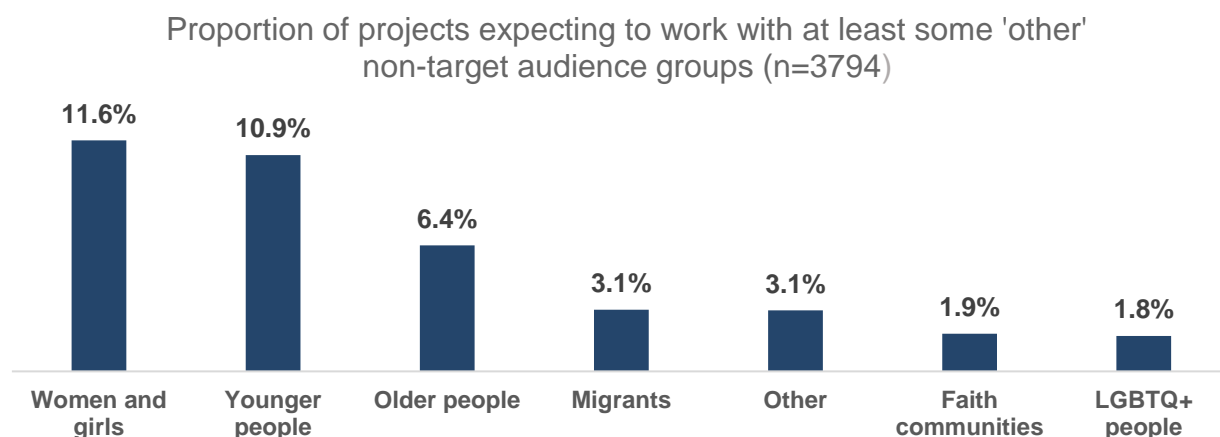


Fig. 9 Proportion of projects working with wider groups

There is some indication that projects expected to work with a wider diversity of participants from target audiences than they were able to engage in practice. The visualisation below (Fig. 9) compares the percentage of projects expecting to work with multiple target audiences, compared with the percentage of projects who reported they did work with

multiple groups.<sup>7</sup> However, our qualitative analysis suggests that many projects succeeded in reaching and engaging with target audience groups in meaningful ways.

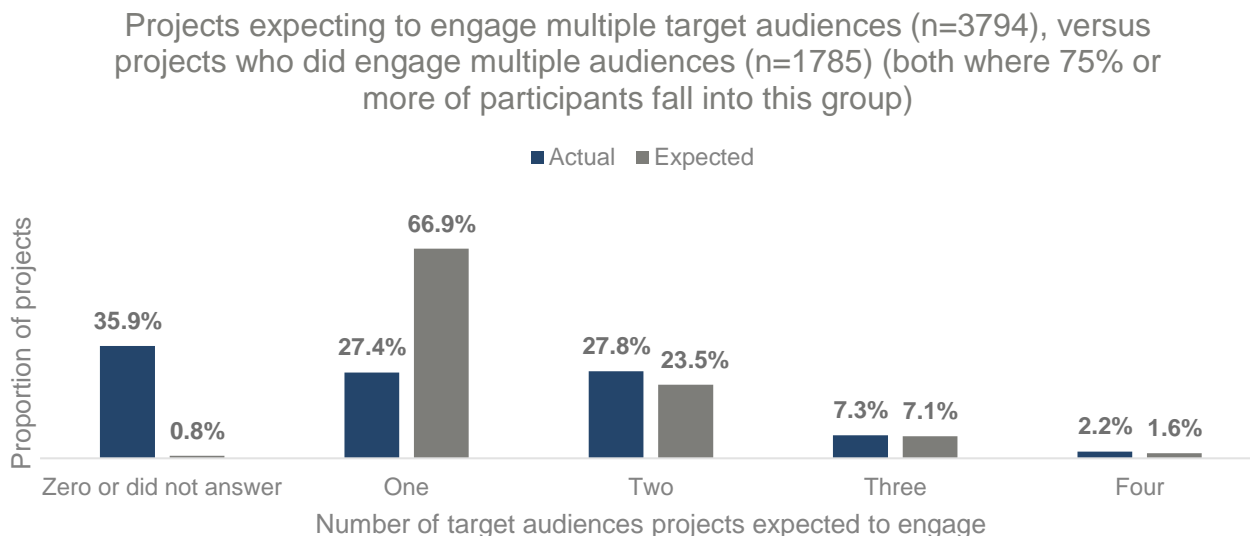


Fig. 10 Expected versus achieved engagement of multiple audiences

## The impact of Together Fund activities on participants

Of participants who completed end-of-programme surveys, there were high levels of agreement that their participation resulted in benefits to physical health, likelihood of being active, and improvement in mental health – key objectives of the Together Fund.

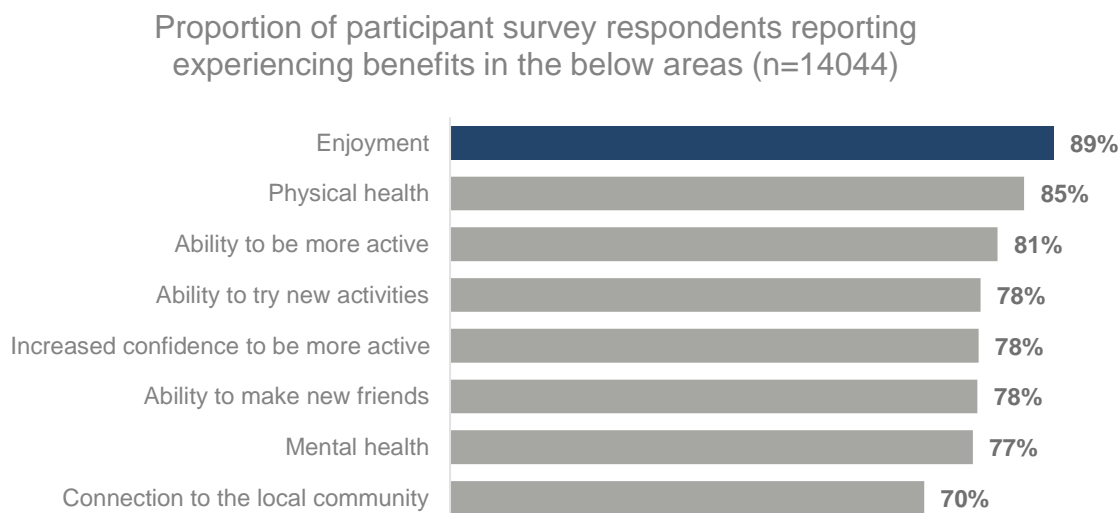


Fig. 11 Impact of the Together Fund on participants

The highest levels of positive self-reported impact were for enjoyment (89%) and physical health (85%). A high proportion of respondents also indicated that participation in Together Fund-supported projects had a positive impact on their ability to be more active and try new

<sup>7</sup> A limitation of the available data is that it does not provide a picture of the proportion of projects that worked with at least some participants from each group.



activities. This therefore suggests that the Together Fund was **successful in achieving one of its core outcome areas** – increasing physical activity for communities who have faced barriers to engagement in the past.

In contrast, the lowest levels of agreement were for positive impact on **connection to local community (70%)**. While this is still high – at over two thirds of total respondents – this may reflect the more tailored nature of Together Fund supported provision. In other words, not all provision focused on producing all outcomes. In their survey responses and in interviews, Partners, community organisations and participants highlighted the importance of activities for **bringing people together with similar lived experience** for sustaining access to physical activity. As a result, activities may have led to participants experiencing a greater sense of connection within communities. We explore this in more detail in the next section.

There were some small differences within outcome areas for individuals from different target populations, as reported by community organisation staff in end-of-programme surveys. Notably, projects working with culturally diverse groups were most likely to report benefits across the board, whereas projects working with Disabled participants were least likely to report positive impact across all benefit areas. It's important to be careful with the inferences we draw from this data around the effectiveness of Together Fund supported programming in supporting individuals from various groups. For example, this may be an indicator of more diverse and complex needs among some groups compared with others, and the need for more targeted and time/resource intensive provision.

Proportion of community organisations working with each target audience reporting that their participants benefitted in the below areas (n=1785)

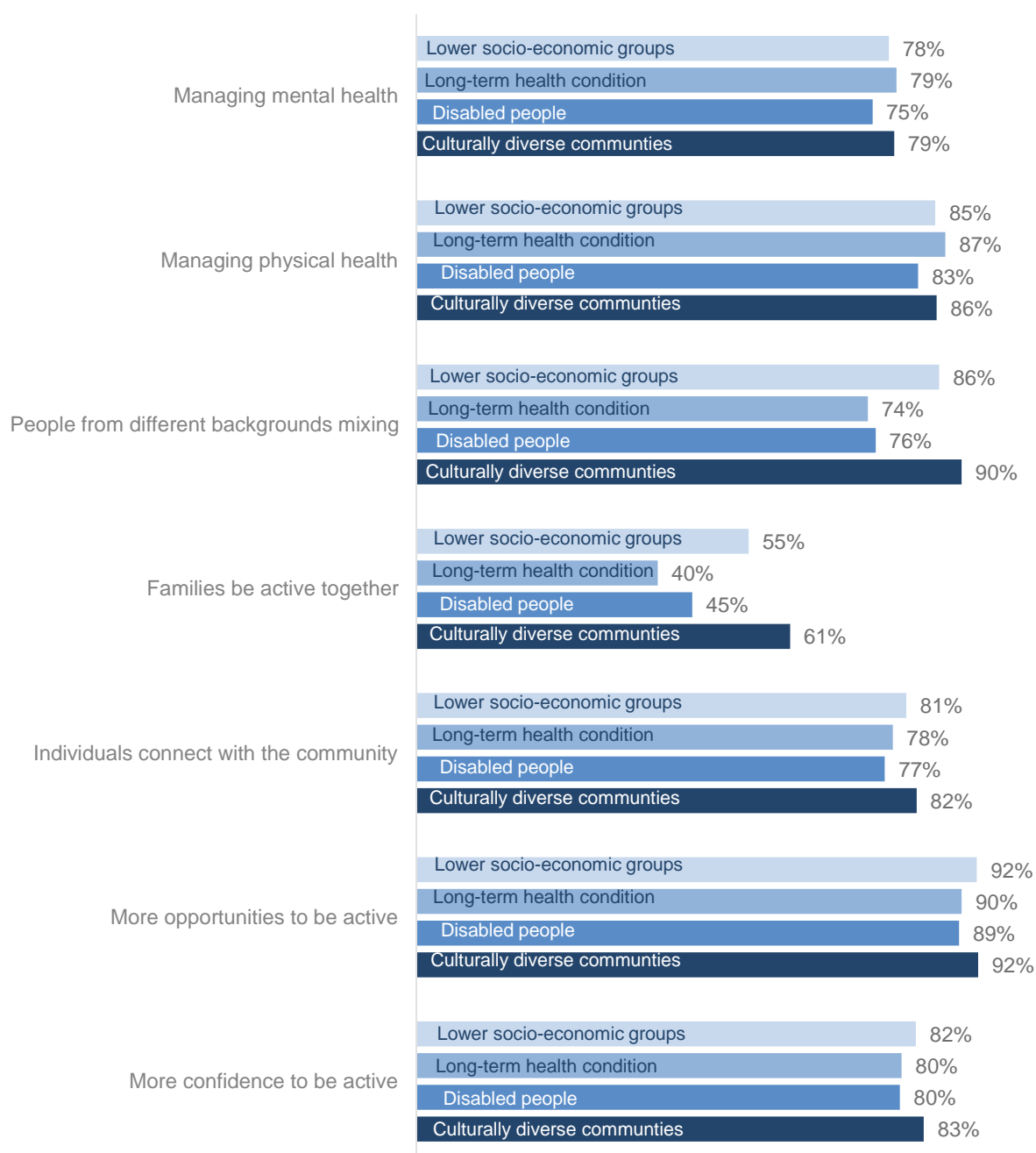


Fig. 12 Impacts by priority audience

## Impacts across the four priority audiences

This section explores the key impacts of the Together Fund for each of the four priority audiences. In doing so, it also highlights case studies from across the Together Fund network.

### Culturally diverse communities

Together Fund projects that aimed to deliver activities for people from culturally diverse communities led to significant positive impacts for individuals. As well as the opportunity to **be more active** and to **explore new activities**, access to physical activity served as a transformative platform for **social connection**. Over time, activities contributed towards an **enhanced sense of community** with positive impacts on **mental health and wellbeing**.

### Addressing structural inequalities in access to physical activity

One of the four key outcome areas of the Together Fund focused on **tackling inequality** for communities which have faced barriers to accessing physical activity in the past. Evidence from our evaluation indicates that through the Together Fund, community organisations found success in **offsetting the intersectional racial inequalities** that result in lower levels of activity for culturally diverse communities. The lack of free, safe, and accessible community spaces, absence of accessible information about exercise, and financial barriers – such as gym memberships – associated with common forms of exercise can prevent people from developing the confidence and knowledge to have an active lifestyle. Organisations were able to help surmount these barriers when, through Together Fund support, they could deliver an activity in a **safe, nearby and familiar venue**, such as a Mosque, library, youth centre or park. Participants also valued the provision of **accessible** and **free-of-charge activities**, such as walking sessions and, especially for children and young people, basketball, netball and boxing.

The **cultural adaptation** of delivery played a pivotal role in creating enjoyment, boosting confidence and encouraging sustained participation. For some women from culturally diverse communities, the provision of **women- and girl-only classes** was a key enabler of safe and comfortable participation. For example, in Tottenham, north London, Selby Trust created an independent space in their local hub for girls and women from the local Somali community to take part in boxing classes without men present. Participants valued this opportunity to **build confidence**, **motivation** and **positive thinking** in a safe space.

#### The Walk and Talk Project - Offering provision for Muslim women around the country

On the next page, you can read more about how the **Muslim Women Network UK's** women-only walking sessions boosted physical health and social connection for Muslim women around the country.



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## Walking group led by and for Muslim women

### Muslim Women's Network UK

The Walk and Talk Project, led by the Muslim Women's Network UK, facilitated **331 walks**, across **eight** cities and **66** green spaces. The project engaged 22 walk leaders and **supported 210 women from diverse ethnic backgrounds**, aged 17 to 79, many of whom also had long-term health conditions. The walks not only **promoted physical health** but also **fostered social connections** and **raised awareness of health management**.

Despite challenges in recruitment and weather, participants reported **improved mental and physical well-being**, **decreased isolation**, and a **greater sense of community**.

Participants highlighted the transformative impact of the project, expressing gratitude for the **opportunity to connect with nature, make new friends**, and improve their overall **quality of life**.

Through **weekly walks, indoor activities**, and **educational sessions**, the Walk and Talk Project successfully empowered women from ethnic minority communities to prioritise their health and well-being while building a supportive community network.

*“We have developed a small community of our own.”*

Participant

## The importance of community-led organisations in driving engagement

The engagement of culturally diverse communities in the delivery of Together Fund supported projects was most effective when provision was delivered **across familiar networks** and **through community-led organisations**. As a result, impact was limited in places where there was a **shortage of local organisations** delivering specific provision for ethnically minoritised communities, especially in **rural areas**. This was also a challenge for sports with **higher associated costs**, such as horse-riding. Within this, projects targeting specific groups within ethnic minority communities, such as **Disabled people** and **LGBTQ+ people**, struggled to reach higher levels of engagement, due to a lack of targeted organisations working at these intersections.

More generally, there is a **low level of collaboration** between physical activity providers, infrastructure organisations and organisations serving ethnically minoritised individuals in the physical activity and sports sector. Organisations serving minoritised people appeared to have lower trust levels in physical activity providers and other infrastructure organisations, suggesting that resources, information, and processes in the sector can remain **inaccessible**. Some community organisations also had negative experiences engaging with **formalised funding structures**.

*“I thought if we get involved in this sort of funding, we would be owned by them and we’d lose our way of doing things.”*

Community organisation stakeholder

In the face of these barriers, Partners played a role in **bringing together local networks of organisations**. Together Fund provided resources for Partners to undertake outreach with a breadth of organisations and programmes, such as those in the sport and activity sector who had not previously worked with specific audiences, or those working with specific communities but who had not previously provided activity-focussed delivery.

*“This funding has strengthened [our] position in the local network.”*

Partner

Within this, **trust-building** emerging as an important and sometimes lengthy process. For example, Northamptonshire Sport approached their engagement in the Together Fund as an opportunity to strengthen relationships in the local network of activity and support services. They contacted new organisations through desktop research and social media and leaflet drops, and gradually tapped into community networks, for example via WhatsApp groups, to become a trusted partner of the local authority (in particular, its public health provisions) during the Covid-19 pandemic.

By **working closely with embedded and grassroots community organisations** who have an in-depth understanding and awareness of different communities’ needs, Partners were able to fund activities that were **culturally specific** and relevant to each community.

On the next page, we highlight the approach of **Active Communities Network**, which sought to develop equitable, culturally competent, and non-hierarchical forms of collaboration with community organisations to tackle barriers to engagement.



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## Culturally competent approaches to delivery

### Active Communities Network

The Active Communities Network made **cultural competency** a central tenet of their Together Fund experience. As a National Partner of Sport England, Active Communities Network perceived their role as a “cultural intermediary” between sports sector organisations and local communities.

Staff were from marginalised communities and had **familiarity with the systems and processes** in place at both a local and national level, making them well-placed to **expand networks** and increase the **visibility of marginalised groups**.

Through **tailored mentoring and taking an asset-based approach**, they countered local organisations’ mistrust and negative associations with formalised funding structures. This fostered **trust and collaboration** to **empower** marginalised communities to **access new opportunities**.

*“Disentangling information and simplifying processes has been a key component to engaging groups... Examples include direct conversations about some language, not least ‘Low Socio-Economic groups’ and ‘Culturally Diverse Communities’.”*

Partner

## Lower socio-economic groups

For individuals in lower socio-economic groups, participation in physical activity through Together Fund projects led to a range of positive impacts. Delivery of the fund coincided with the cost-of-living crisis, during which delivery organisations witnessed increasing demand for physical activities that were **free and accessible to all**, alongside a need for more holistic support for families and individuals.

### Removing barriers to trying new activities

Through the delivery of free activities, participants gained access to **new activities** that would otherwise be financially inaccessible to them, particularly during this period of heightened living costs. The removal of this barrier **increased levels of physical activity, strength and fitness**, while also generating **enjoyment and excitement**. Participation also instilled individuals with a greater sense of **motivation for the future**.

*“This has given me something new and exciting to be involved in, talk about and to break up the monotony of life. It has refreshed my outlook on life and what is possible.”*

Participant

Removing fees entirely was a pivotal strategy to achieving impact for this priority audience, as it ensured that activities were accessible. The provision of lunch and snacks removed barriers associated with food costs, especially for children from families in lower socio-economic groups. Delivery in hyper-local venues, such as libraries, was an effective means of minimising costs for participants who would otherwise need to pay to travel.

Through Together Fund projects, people from lower socio-economic contexts valued the opportunity to **make use of their strengths**, such as teamwork and communication skills, which built individuals' confidence in their own abilities, contributing to **improved mental health**. Access to new activities, and the opportunity to expand into volunteering roles, also enabled people to **acquire new skills**, such as coaching, first aid and equipment maintenance.

Importantly, the impacts and enabling factors **experienced by people of all ages from lower socio-economic contexts were intersectional with racial inequalities**. Individuals facing immigration and housing issues also found some **respite** away from the routine challenges of daily life through engagement in Together Fund projects. Where projects provided a higher level of wraparound or holistic support, participants at these intersections were effectively **signposted toward essential community services**, such as Warm Hubs or housing support.

## Young people – a key outcome area for the Together Fund

Supporting young people represented another key outcome for the Together Fund. Evidence from our evaluation indicated that, for young people from who fall into the lower socio-economic group priority audience, Together Fund activities offered fun and accessible activities which boosted physical activity, increased confidence, and created opportunities for developing new skills.

Children and young people from lower socio-economic families valued projects that put **young people at the centre of decision-making** around the design of activities, by inviting participants to suggest ideas. Organisations found that **adaptability**, for example around hot weather in the school summer holidays, and the provision of a **safe, nearby venue** were also essential steps for engaging young people. In addition, offering a **diversity of sports** helped to encourage young people out of their home and into contact with other communities, and **social media** was a useful tool for **community-building** outside of the regular sessions.

The provision of a **diverse range of activities** was a key factor in positively engaging people from lower socio-economic groups. **Traditional, low-cost sports**, such as football, boxing and rugby, were often the most popular, especially for younger people. At the same time, less traditionally accessible sports, such as canoeing, gained traction when delivery was tied into **skills development**, such as team-building.



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## Removing barriers to support girls to play football

### Health Exchange – Rising Stars

In Aston, Birmingham, Rising Stars Young People Services were supported by Health Exchange to run weekly football sessions for girls aged 14-18.

Participants were from lower socio-economic groups and culturally diverse communities. At the start of the project, many participants said they would not usually engage in physical activity, citing a range of barriers, including their financial position, ethnicity, gender, body image and self-confidence.

Through Together Fund, the **number of girls playing football** with the club **increased by 50%**, including a higher proportion of **girls of Asian heritage**.

During the project, there was also an increase in the number of women interested in **completing FA level 1 course**, and **more parents were showing interest** in their daughters playing football.

Participants said the weekly sessions helped them to **develop habits** to continue taking part in sport in the long term.



## Disabled people

For Disabled people, Together Fund supported projects led to significant positive impacts, most notably **increased participation in physical activities**. Beyond exercise alone, initiatives fostered a **greater sense of confidence and independence** and **improving the overall life quality** of Disabled participants. Positive impacts from engaging with Together Fund were particularly evident among **children and young people** with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), who were especially likely to experience **improved mental wellbeing and mood** through activities.



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### Engaging young people in horse riding

#### British Equestrian Foundation

Through the Together Fund, British Equestrian Foundation supported 27 community organisations to engage over 1600 participants, of which a high percentage were young Disabled people.

Time spent around horses and riding had a positive impact on young people's ability to **manage mental health conditions**, including anxiety, stress and depression. The activities also positively supported participants with neurodiversities, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Participants reported that they had improved their **physical health** and **confidence to be more active**. Young people also felt excited by the opportunity to **try an exciting, different activity** not typically offered in school.

British Equestrian Foundation collaborated more closely with community organisations working in **non-traditional structures**, through the Together Fund, supporting with governance strengthening and business development.

However, a lower number of applying organisations focused on equine activity provision for ethnic minority communities. British Equestrian Foundation have taken this forward as a key indication of the importance of directing future funding and partnership initiatives towards culturally diverse communities, with a focus on **helping riding centres to establish connections with key organisations** identified through the Together Fund process.

## The value of hybrid delivery and online support spaces

A significant period of the delivery of the Together Fund coincided with extended periods of self-isolation for Disabled people due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many organisations working with Disabled individuals adopted a **hybrid model** of in-person and virtual delivery of activities, which effectively expanded the reach of organisations by overcoming both **physical and financial barriers** to engagement. This approach **connected people with organisations** they had not previously engaged with, while cultivating a sense of community in both in-person and virtual spaces.

**Virtual social support structures**, such as WhatsApp groups, played a vital role in **maintaining ongoing connections** among participants in between activities, positively contributing towards their overall **well-being**. Participants also valued this opportunity to **strengthen their digital skills**, which could improve their experiences and engagement in other aspects of life. For in-person activities, the **provision of transport** to and from the venue, and the **accompaniment of a support worker** were key enablers for the participation of Disabled people. Some organisations also highlighted how the intersectional lived experience of Disabled people in a lower socio-economic group could shape their support needs for engaging in physical activity.

*“Being able to offer this activity at a low cost to the group participants has made it accessible to them as many are likely to have struggled to manage the cost due to the impact of their condition/disability on their economic situation.”*

Community organisation

Despite these positive impacts, the engagement of Disabled people presented a **significant challenge** for many organisations. Some Partners strategically chose not to target delivery for Disabled people, due to a lack of specialist knowledge and processes. Other Partners who did try to connect with this group reported the lowest levels of engagement out of all four priority audiences. One Partner described the activities they were able to provide as more of a “sticking plaster” that led to **shorter-term impacts** than for other groups. The **diversity and range in level of support needs** among Disabled people may suggest that additional support and funding, offered over a longer period, is needed for sustained, impactful support of Disabled people in comparison to other communities.

### Safe walking activities for Disabled people: Speakup Self Advocacy

Disability Rights UK supported Speakup Self Advocacy to offer walking activities for Disabled people. On the next page, you can read more about how activities were adapted to provide safe and accessible walks during the Covid-19 pandemic.



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## Improving Disabled people's access to safe walking activities

### Disability Rights UK – Walking Bubbles

Disability Rights UK distributed funds to Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and small community organisations to support disabled people to **take part in physical activity without fear of pressure or stigma**.

The community organisation Speakup Self Advocacy set up a Walking Bubbles project to support Disabled people to be active and maintain their mental health during and beyond Covid-19.

Together, inclusion workers at Speakup and local self-advocates undertook **accessible, easy-read risk assessments** to ensure that the activities were as safe and inclusive as possible. This meant that projects were kept between two and six individuals, in line with then government guidelines. They **limited the need to use public transport or taxis** by keeping walks within the local area.

Walking Bubble participants reported an **improvement in both mental and physical health**, as well as an increase in their **general confidence**.

The activities also led to **new and strengthened friendships in local areas** and **reduced social isolation**.

A key factor in supporting Disabled people to take part in Walking Bubbles was the role of the **supportive relationships** between self-advocates and Speakup inclusion workers, which helped facilitators of the walks to **tailor activities** to each individual's needs.

*“The park is a bit hilly and [the participant] was worried about walking up the hill... I told [her] to focus on listening to the water, listen to the sound of the trees moving. With this advice, and chatting away to me, she made it up the hill.”*

Facilitator

Where Partners were able to **invest time** in developing relationships with **grassroots organisations**, local groups were supported to deliver new tailored exercise sessions for specific groups, which they often had no previous experience in. For example, Disability Sports Coach supported local organisations to deliver an athletics session for Disabled people with long-term mental health conditions.

However, recruitment challenges persisted even for specialist organisations with experience of physical activity delivery for Disabled people. For example, Disability Rights UK cited **confidence and motivation** as huge barriers that prevent Disabled people from engaging in physical activity. According to Partner experiences, some Disabled people could perceive exercise as something that is “not for them”, with some also showing reluctance to take part for fear of losing access to state welfare payments as a result. The diversity of needs among Disabled people may also contribute to this systemic barrier to achieving sustainable impact in comparison to other priority groups. This indicates that additional support is needed for impactful engagement with people with a range of needs, in comparison to other priority groups.

## People with long-term health conditions

Participation in Together Fund supported projects had a **transformative impact on individuals living with long-term health conditions**, including but not limited to dementia, Parkinson’s disease, chronic fatigue, diabetes and arthritis. These impacts extended beyond physical well-being and fitness to encompass broader aspects of daily life.

Together Fund support enabled people with a long-term health condition to **increase their levels of physical activity**, which contributed towards the **alleviation of pain and other symptoms** in addition to **improved stability, memory and cognition**, especially for those living with dementia. Engagement in activities also bolstered the confidence and ability of participants to **manage chronic pain** in the long-term by **fostering knowledge and resilience** in navigating setbacks and flare-ups.

*“Because of my fibromyalgia, I was in quite a lot of pain. These classes have made me feel much better. I couldn’t even scratch my back but because of these [chair-based] exercises, I am much more flexible.”*

Participant

The provision of **accessible and adaptable activities** was a key enabler for supporting individuals with long-term health conditions to engage comfortably and safely. Organisations found that **clear advance communication** about the planned activities helped people to feel confident and prepared to take part. The option to **meet outside the venue**, such as a gym or leisure centre, with facilitators and participants before a session also encouraged participation for those who would otherwise feel uncomfortable or reluctant entering the space independently.

Together Fund supported activities served as a **platform for social connection** between people experiencing similar health conditions. At a time when people with long-term health conditions were emerging from prolonged isolation periods due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this opportunity for connection contributed towards **improved mental health** and a sense of

**community**. When this community-building process was **directly facilitated by the delivery organisation**, for example by staff setting up a WhatsApp group, participants were supported to **develop friendships** and **maintain regular communication** with each other.

*“I have received empathy from, and have been able to empathise with, other people who have had the same illness.”*

Participant



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## Behavioural change approach to support people with long-term health conditions to be active

### Active Humber

At the start of Together Fund, Active Humber embarked on over 240 “physical activity conversations” across North Lincolnshire through focus groups, community events and one-to-one discussions to gain insight into people's physical activity levels. They found that one of the biggest barriers identified was having a long-term health condition.

Active Humber adopted a **behavioural change approach** to develop a sustainable project, using the COM-B model to understand factors of influence in addition to a behaviour change wheel to design an effective intervention.

Community organisations found that a **WhatsApp group** was a useful mechanism for the consistent engagement of participants with long-term health conditions, who could use the group to ask questions about activities and scheduling, as well as foster an environment of encouragement and humour.

*“My attitude to physical activity has improved immensely, I actively seek exercise whether in sport or around the home. My confidence has improved with being in a group setting... I do not feel as vulnerable to exercise in front of others.”*

Participant

Some recurrent barriers added complexity to the engagement of participants living with long-term health conditions. **Consistent attendance** at regular sessions was a challenge for many people, primarily stemming from the **need to manage flare-ups, fatigue and rest**, particularly for those juggling exercise with work and care commitments. In areas where the **provision of evening activity sessions was limited**, this sub-section of people experienced reinforced challenges to engagement.

Finally, working with **care homes** introduced unique hurdles. During Covid-19 lockdowns, last-minute cancellations and low levels of collaboration occurred in some places due to a lack of internal capacity in care homes, as well as Covid-19 breakouts.



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## Key enablers and barriers for people with long-term health conditions

### Northamptonshire Sport

Northamptonshire Sport were funded with the aim to support people with long-term health conditions to be active.

Projects supporting people with cancer saw good engagement through **yoga** and **walking**.

For people with Parkinson's, a thriving support group with weekly physical activity sessions was extended through the funding to include **neuro boxing** and **indoor bowls**.

Providing these extended offers enabled organisations to **increase the activity opportunities** available for people with long-term health conditions.

Recruitment for people with long-term health conditions worked best through channels of **pre-existing support groups**. In Kettering and Northampton, Macmillan Cancer Support staff recruited participants by integrating physical activity into their **hospital-based offer**.

In parts of the county where there was a lower number of pre-existing support networks for people with long-term health conditions, projects saw lower levels of engagement and impact.

In particular, Northamptonshire Sport reported a **shortage of active support groups for people from ethnic minorities with long-term health conditions**, such as diabetes.

## Common enablers for participation in physical activity

Across the activities offered as part of the Together Fund, there were several key enabling factors which enabled community organisations to engage and support across the four priority audiences. In this section, we highlight some of these factors which helped to foster and sustain engagement in physical activity.

A common key enabler across different audiences, ages and needs, was having a **regular and engaging instructor or coach** who over time was able to get to know individuals and adapt **activities to each participant's needs**.

*"[The instructor] is very good, you are not forced into doing things.  
My wife has osteoporosis, and the instructor knows about that and  
she fits the exercises to her."*

Participant

Organisations frequently reported a common challenge among marginalised groups who perceived sport and exercise as being "not for them". By **reframing the concept of sport and exercise** in communications, resources and delivery, organisations encouraged participants to recognise that they may already be engaged in various forms of physical activity as part of their daily life, from lifting objects to walking to work.

The integration of a **lifestyle, learning or community element** into sessions led to increased engagement and enjoyment across audiences, such as walk and talk sessions and litter-picking. Children and young people across different priority groups also showed higher levels of engagement and enjoyment when the facilitators weaved the activity theme together with **major live sporting events**, such as the Commonwealth Games and the UEFA European Women's Championship.

The provision of equipment and information **in the right space** was a key enabler among communities. For both Disabled people and girls and young women, during and after the pandemic, feeling unable to leave the house to exercise was identified as a key barrier to increasing activity levels. The provision of at-home exercise equipment and guidance helped to increase engagement with Together Fund supported initiatives across these communities.

## Sustainability of impacts achieved

Activities offered through the Together Fund led to **significant behavioural change for participants by increasing their confidence in activity, sport and exercise**. This was especially the case for Disabled people, people with long-term health conditions, and children and young people, and marginalised groups who had previously not had access to platforms for physical activity.

Sustainability through behavioural change was particularly successful when it was a primary objective of the community organisation from the initial inception of the programme, or where the programme was already established. For example, through Together Fund support, British Gymnastics Foundation was able to scale up their pre-existing programme, Love to Move. The project delivers accessible activities for elderly people with long-term health conditions, with the funding going primarily towards venue hire and other delivery costs. As Love to Move is a model of delivery that has already been tested and found to benefit communities, British Gymnastics Foundation was confident community organisations would continue to deliver after the end of Together Fund.

Participation in Together Fund projects also led to mindset shifts in relation to sport and exercise. There was significant evidence that participants gained the long-term ability to exercise by taking the confidence and skills developed through Together Fund initiatives outside into daily life.

*“For quite a lot of Disabled people who come to our services, it gives them the confidence to then go on and access other physical activity services that they wouldn't have thought they were able to do before coming to us.”*

Community organisation staff member

Where funding resourced equipment and training of existing staff, **especially within a pre-existing programme**, the provision of activities became sustainable beyond Together Fund period.

*“Sometimes when I am on my own in my garden on a Sunday afternoon, I will put my headphones on and do some of the [Qi Gong] movements.”*

Participant

The sustainability of impacts from Together Fund initiatives for culturally diverse communities was most successful when the necessary equipment and guidance around safe, solo exercise were provided. For example, participants of Cycling UK's Community Cycle Clubs received training for bike maintenance and were loaned a bike to use outside of community-based cycle rides.

For lower socio-economic communities, including intersecting groups across ethnic minorities, the reassurance of a **sustained free activity** was crucial for the fostering of initial and continued engagement. The introduction of any fee could prevent participation, especially after the funding had ended. Collaborative exploration, within the session schedule, of ways that participants could **incorporate physical fitness into their daily routines** was a powerful enabler of behavioural change in the long-term.



Whilst activities did help participants to develop routes into continued participation for the longer-term and offer organisations funding that could support delivery beyond the Together Fund, sustainability of outcomes achieved was also closely linked to the continuation of projects. Feedback from both community organisations and Partners **highlighted the need for and importance of longer-term funding to sustaining participation** in physical activity and the associated benefits. Access to funding to deliver projects over a longer period of time could enable participants to continue to engage in physical activity opportunities, embedding it into their daily life, while also supporting community organisations to develop deeper relationships with the communities they serve. Future funding opportunities could therefore explore how projects can be funded for more extended periods of time, to enable longer-term impacts to be achieved for both community organisations and participants.

## Key learnings and considerations

The evaluation of the Together Fund offers a range of learnings and future considerations to inform support for Partners and community organisations, delivery of future funding programmes, and provision of physical activity.

Return to [page 7](#) of this report to explore the key learnings from the evaluation in more detail.



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