



We Can Be Active

IMPACT REPORT

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Introduction

We Can Be Active is a shared ambition to help more people across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight move more in everyday life.

Launched in 2021, the strategy grew from a big online conversation where more than 800 local people and organisations shared what helps them to be active and what gets in the way. Those ideas were then matched with evidence from around the world to shape a plan that works for people living across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Over the past five years many people and organisations have adopted and used all or parts of the strategy, to influence, advocate and deliver in their communities.

Five years on, it’s the right time to pause and ask: what difference have we all collectively made, and what have we learned?

We set out to understand what has changed – what’s working well, and whether we’re reaching the people who face the biggest challenges to being active. The strategy is made up of five goals:

- Positive early experiences for children and young people
- Opportunities that meet our needs and are accessible and easy to find
- Places and travel routes that feel safe and welcoming
- Support to get started or keep moving
- Bold leaders working together to create happier, healthier communities

We’ve looked at the impact that’s been shared for each goal and highlighted some of the great work in practice.

We’re sure much of the report will resonate with you. There are things to be proud of, learn from and be inspired by. It’s a celebration of the journey we’ve all been on over the past five years and helps us understand we’re on the right track.

Our Approach

This report helps us to understand the impact across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, informed by those that are involved in or using the We Can Be Active Strategy.

It represents 165 pieces of evidence from 48 organisations. These pieces of evidence, which had been created by or shared with Energise Me over the past five years, were submitted following a public call for evidence in March 2026 or captured during focus groups.

We’ve worked with expert evaluators to look at all of the evidence submitted to help us find common themes and shared experiences. In this report, we’ve reflected back the areas where there was most overlap and consistency.

Inactivity Trends are Heading in the Right Direction

The latest Active Lives data from Sport England shows Hampshire and the Isle of Wight inactivity levels are their lowest for Adults (16+) and heading in the right direction for Children and Young People (aged 5–16).

Since the strategy launched, 9000 fewer adults are inactive, and substantially more (115,200), are now classed as active. While inactivity has reduced modestly, the biggest change has been an increase in the number people reaching the “active” threshold for 150 minutes per week.

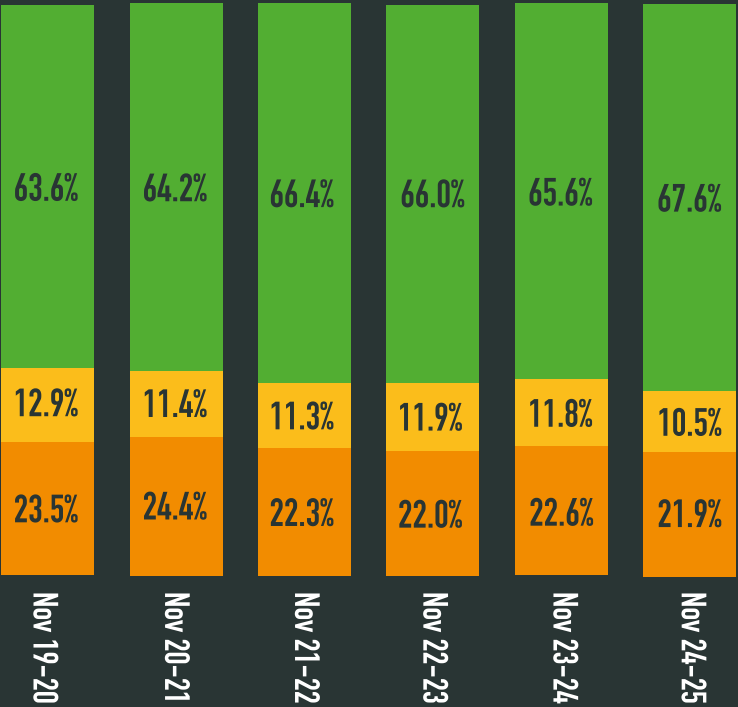
For children and young people, the trend is encouraging but less consistent. Around 8,900 more children and young people are now classed as Active, while around 3,900 fewer are not meeting 60 active minutes per day. The trend is encouraging, but just over half are still not reaching 60+ minutes a day.



Source: Sport England Active Lives Adults Survey Nov 19/20 – Nov 24/25.

Source: Sport England Active Lives Children & Young People Survey Academic Year 19/20 – Academic Year 24/25.

Adults (16+)



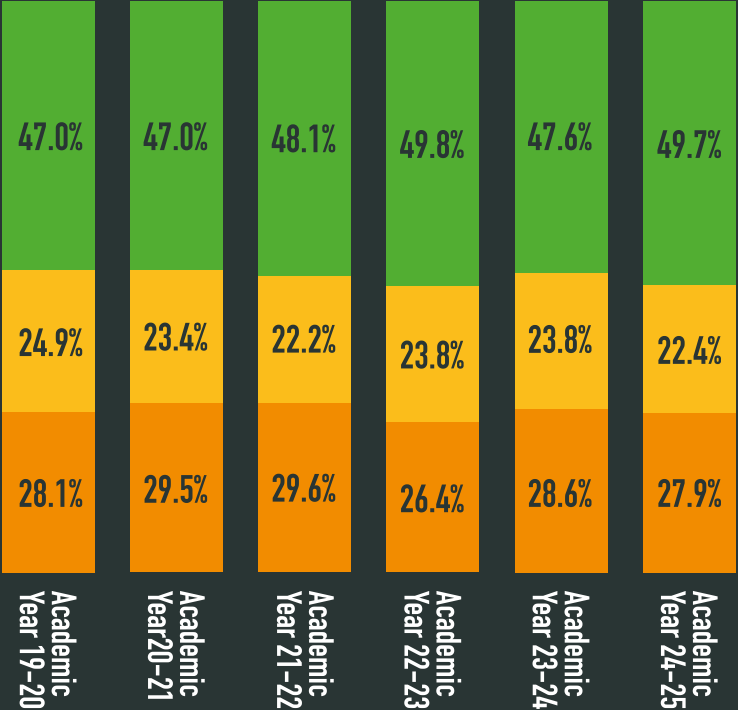
115,200 ↑



more residents are now classed as Active – a 4% increase

Active: at least 150 minutes a week **Fairly active:** 30–149 minutes a week **Inactive:** less than 30 minutes a week

Children and Young People



8,900 ↑



more children and young people are now classed as Active – a 2.7% increase

Active: an average of 60+ minutes a day **Fairly active:** an average of 30–59 minutes a day **Less active:** less than an average of 30 minutes a day

Foundation Blocks

How the system is making impact

Across the evidence, several common themes came through. These themes appear in many – and sometimes all – of the Strategy’s five goals. We’ve highlighted them as the key building blocks that can help create healthier, happier communities across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.



People-centred approaches

There is a clear shift away from services being designed only by providers. More organisations are now designing with communities, and giving real value to lived experience and local voices.

Inclusion is being treated as the starting point, not an add-on. This includes targeted support for people who are least likely to be active, such as disabled people, people with long-term health conditions, women, older adults, ethnically diverse communities and lower-income households.



We’re in it for the long-term

Behaviour change is being understood as gradual and not always straightforward. Many organisations are now focusing more on longer-term pathways, steady progress and ongoing support rather than on one-off or project type engagement.



Reimagining physical activity

Physical activity is being understood more broadly than sport or fitness. It now includes walking, play, active travel, social connection, culture and volunteering. More activity is also happening in trusted places such as schools, parks, faith venues and healthcare settings, with public spaces seen as an important part of community wellbeing.



The people making it possible

Dedicated roles such as navigators, inclusion officers, welfare officers, ambassadors and walk leaders are being invested in to help people get started and keep going.

People in these roles are more commonly being seen as leaders, as leadership is becoming more distributed and relationship led. Peer leaders, volunteers, young people and community advocates are all also playing an important role alongside professionals.



Collaboration

Health, education, transport, leisure, voluntary and community organisations are increasingly working together through We Can Be Active as a shared framework for change in local places.

What We’re Learning from the Evidence

Looking across the evidence, five clear learning points stand out. Together, they show how much we are beginning to understand about what helps people be active – and how all of us can use these learnings to keep building the lasting change we want to see.

1 Inactivity is often linked to confidence and belonging

The evidence suggests inactivity is rarely just about awareness. More often, it is shaped by:

- Low confidence or fear of judgement
- Poor mental wellbeing or anxiety
- Feeling unwelcome in activity spaces
- Past negative experiences

This is why helping people be active often means offering emotional and social support, not just sessions.

2 Activity often grows in small, non linear steps

When people do become more active, progress is often:

- Gradual, often starting with light or informal movement
- Non-linear, with pauses and restarts
- Part of everyday life, not only formal exercise

This reminds us that progress cannot always be measured in simple, straight lines.

3 Short-term gains can be hard to maintain

The evidence shows activity levels can fall when funding, staff or support roles come to an end. This often happens when:

- Trusted relationships are lost
- Support pathways are disrupted
- New life pressures get in the way

Keeping people active is often harder than helping them get started.

4 Broader definitions help us see more activity

Looking beyond sport shows that some people labelled “inactive” may already be:

- Walking for everyday reasons
- Active through caring, play or volunteering
- More engaged when movement is social or cultural

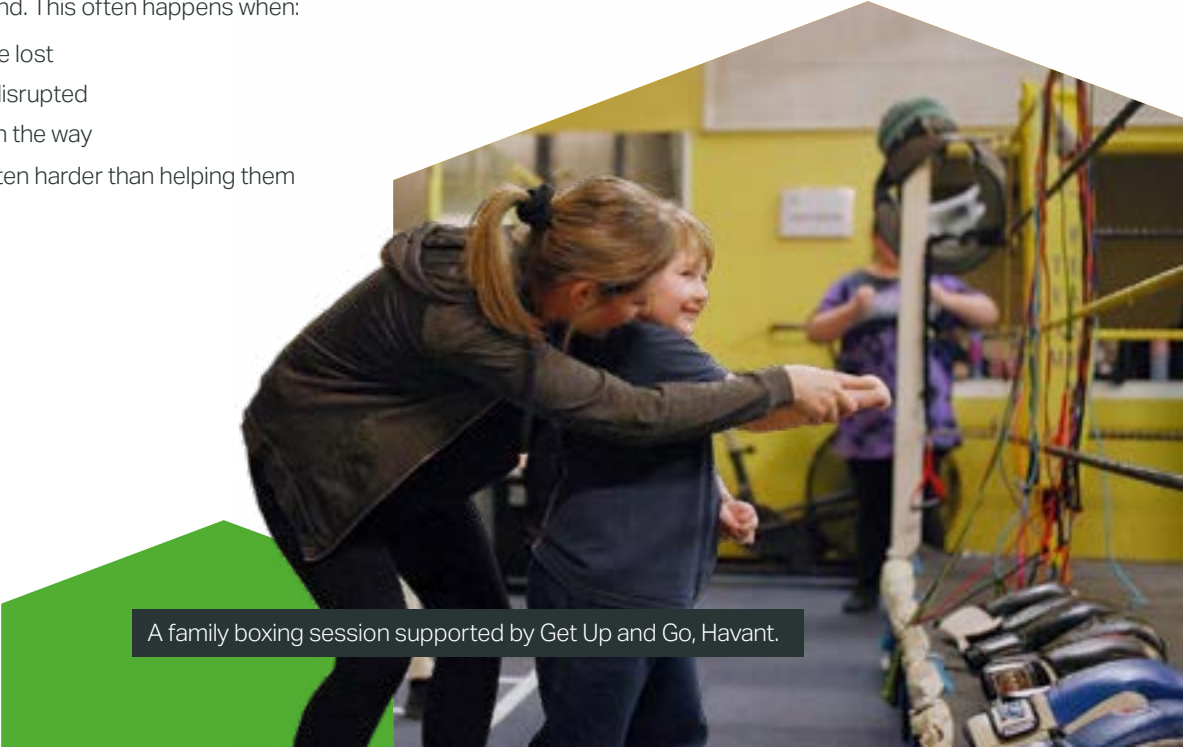
This opens up new opportunities that meet people’s needs, helping us value meaningful movement that is often missed.

5 The greatest impact comes from system change

The strongest message in the evidence is that activity levels improve most when whole systems change, not just when new programmes are added. This includes:

- Inclusive workforce behaviours
- Support and navigation roles
- Trusted community settings
- Alignment with health, education and social care

A family boxing session supported by Get Up and Go, Havant.



Introducing Mindset, Practice, People

It's become evident over the past five years that before we see impact for our communities and participants, mindset and practice shifts need to happen within the organisations and people that work with them. We've used this framework to help us understand and observe how impact happens.



1 Mindset: How the system thinks and feels

Sustainable change starts with mindset – the beliefs, assumptions and attitudes held by organisations, professionals and communities.

Key mindset shifts in We Can Be Active include:

From sport and delivery ➡ to movement, wellbeing and lived experience

From expert led ➡ to people centred and co-designed

From silos and competition ➡ to shared missions

This change in mindset is strengthened by leadership, the words we use, learning and development and organisations working together. Without it, inclusion can slip and lasting change is harder to achieve.

2 Practice: What the system does differently

Changed mindsets lead to observable practice changes across organisations, workforce and delivery models. Some practice changes we've observed include:

- Co-design and engagement activities with communities
- Delivering activity in trusted, everyday places (parks, health and faith settings)
- Expanding offers away from formal sport and fitness
- Investment in support roles and relationships
- Collaboration networks and groups across sectors and places

The evidence consistently shows that practice change happens at system and workforce level first, before it can happen for individuals.

3 Local People: Who benefits and how?

When mindset and practice shifts are both present, we reach the most inactive people and can create more consistent behaviour change around physical activity which can have much broader benefits.

Beneficiaries include:

- People least likely to be active
- Children and young people disengaged from traditional sport
- Individuals experiencing anxiety, isolation, long-term health conditions or life transitions
- Communities previously excluded from shaping services

We can often see a clear link between a change in thinking, a change in what people do, and the difference that follows. Using this framework helps us understand how We Can Be Active is influencing the organisations involved. Just as importantly, it helps us see not only the difference being made in communities, but also how that change is happening.

Positive Early Experiences for Children and Young People



The evidence points to a clear shift: from delivering activity to children to creating the conditions in which children and young people feel safe, confident and motivated to move. This matters because positive early experiences are increasingly being understood as the foundation for lifelong participation, not just short-term increases in activity.

Child and youth first approaches are becoming more common

Across the evidence, there is a clear move away from adult-led design towards approaches that start with the child or young person’s experience.

This shift – starting with what matters to young people, with greater emphasis on choice and ownership – suggests that child- and youth-first values are becoming more embedded into early thinking.

Reframing ‘sport’ to ‘fun’

Where young people have had negative prior experiences of PE or competitive sport, people understand the need to reframe physical activity around fun, friendship and choice, rather than competition or judgement. The evidence suggests this is helping to create more positive entry points into movement. Confidence, belonging and feeling “seen” are increasingly being treated as important outcomes in their own right, alongside participation in physical activity.

Youth voice and co-design are shaping decisions

There is a growing recognition that young people should help shape both delivery and decision making, and that this requires more than consultation. The evidence describes how youth-led research, walking interviews, co-authored stories and student voice panels are producing insights that are being used by schools, councils, commissioners and Health and Wellbeing Boards as primary evidence rather than supplementary feedback.

This is particularly important for children and young people who are least likely to take part. Evidence highlights that sensory needs, anxiety, social confidence, body image, identity and previous negative experiences of PE or sport are influencing how activity is designed from the outset. As a result, schools, clubs and providers are paying more attention to environment, communication and pace before the first session begins.

Practice Change:

Targeted design with our least active young people

Evidence shows that schools, providers and activity organisers are becoming more intentional about who they design for and invite into opportunities. Rather than defaulting to the most confident or able, more activity is being shaped with and for young people who are most likely to be inactive, including neurodivergent young people, those with SEND, young carers, children eligible for free school meals, those from low-income households and LGBTQ+ young people. This is changing the make up of who experiences positive early experiences of physical activity.

Barriers being removed

Insight from young people and their families is leading to cost, transport, equipment and time increasingly being addressed as part of programme design rather than left for families to overcome. The evidence suggests that genuine accessibility is being considered and planned at the beginning, rather than as an afterthought.

Youth first approach is being supported by evolving roles and skills

There is consistent evidence of sustained, deliberate investment in the people leading activity – coaches, instructors, youth workers, club welfare officers, volunteers and ambassadors. This includes workshops, peer learning, sport-specific training and accredited qualifications. Workforce development is increasingly being recognised as the route to more sustainable change.

Youth leadership is becoming part of delivery

Young people are being involved more often in planning, design and evaluation, and being supported to contribute as young leaders, volunteers and ambassadors. The evidence suggests that youth leadership is not only a development opportunity, but is increasingly being used as a delivery approach in its own right.

Activity is more frequently included amongst wider support

Physical activity is increasingly delivered alongside wider support, including food, mental health and wellbeing conversations, education and post-16 guidance, healthy relationships, work, family liaison and safeguarding.

This reflects a growing recognition that a young person rarely shows up “just” for activity in isolation, but they bring their whole life, and the system around them needs to collaborate to meet that need.



Finding new fun ways to be active at the Hampshire School Games.

Impact for Young People

Significant reach of physical activity in our most inactive young people

Evidence shows substantial annual reach across after-school, holiday, family, education and community provision for children and young people, spanning early years through to post-16. Across this activity, there are signs that engagement is becoming more sustained rather than one-off.

The evidence also suggests the profile of participants is changing in a meaningful way. Children with SEND, those from low-income households, young carers, ethnically diverse young people, neurodivergent young people and LGBTQ+ youth are increasingly visible in headline reach figures, not just in “targeted” programmes.

Improved confidence, wellbeing and healthier choices

Young people are reporting greater confidence in being active, a more positive attitude to sport and movement, and a willingness to try new things. For groups who often feel overlooked, sessions are experienced as safe, affirming spaces where they can be themselves. This is consistently cited as an important reason young people return. In some cases, engagement is also associated with healthier everyday choices and reduced risk of harmful behaviour.

Benefits beyond physical activity

The evidence shows that positive early experiences are contributing to a wider set of outcomes beyond activity itself. Young people are developing transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, organisation and employability. In some settings, they are also gaining practical skills and qualifications, such as bike maintenance, cooking and accredited awards. These experiences are helping to shape wider aspirations, including post-16 pathways and career direction.

The benefits are not limited to the young person. Families report changes in shared activity, increased access to peer support and better connections into wider services. In some cases, engagement in physical activity is also creating routes into safeguarding, family support and broader community support.

The Bay Youth Project with Portsmouth University

This three year project, which was a partnership between University of Portsmouth and Bay Youth Project, Isle of Wight explores how to engage young people in sport and physical activity, and how to help them stay involved over time.

Over 18 months, Hannah, the lead researcher, worked alongside young people and staff to understand their experiences, challenges and local environment. A key method she used was youth-led walking tours, which helped reduce the usual barriers between researcher and participant and gave young people more influence in the process.

This collaborative approach led to the creation of a shared story about the Bay Area. It compared the places young people enjoy with those they do not and explored themes such as the role of youth workers in building self-esteem and the sense of community created through Bay Youth Project sessions. The story belongs to Bay Youth Project and will be presented to Isle of Wight Council by the young people themselves, to support local change.



Credit: Simon Chadwick with Cadland Primary School – On a story trail in the New Forest.

Change Champions

The “Change Champions” programme, developed by Energise Me, focused on empowering teenage girls to advocate for improvements to physical activity in their schools. Based on local insights, the programme worked with schools with the highest rates of inactivity among girls to help them overcome barriers to engagement.

The programme consisted of three workshops involving 46 girls across Years 8, 9, and 10:

- Workshop 1:** Built relationships and identified barriers to being active in school.
- Workshop 2:** Developed confidence and leadership skills needed for advocacy.
- Workshop 3:** Created specific action plans for change and defined success.



88% of girls felt listened to and believed their opinions mattered.



89% said they would be more likely to engage in physical activity if their proposed changes were actioned.



Teachers who were initially resistant became advocates for student voices after receiving support.

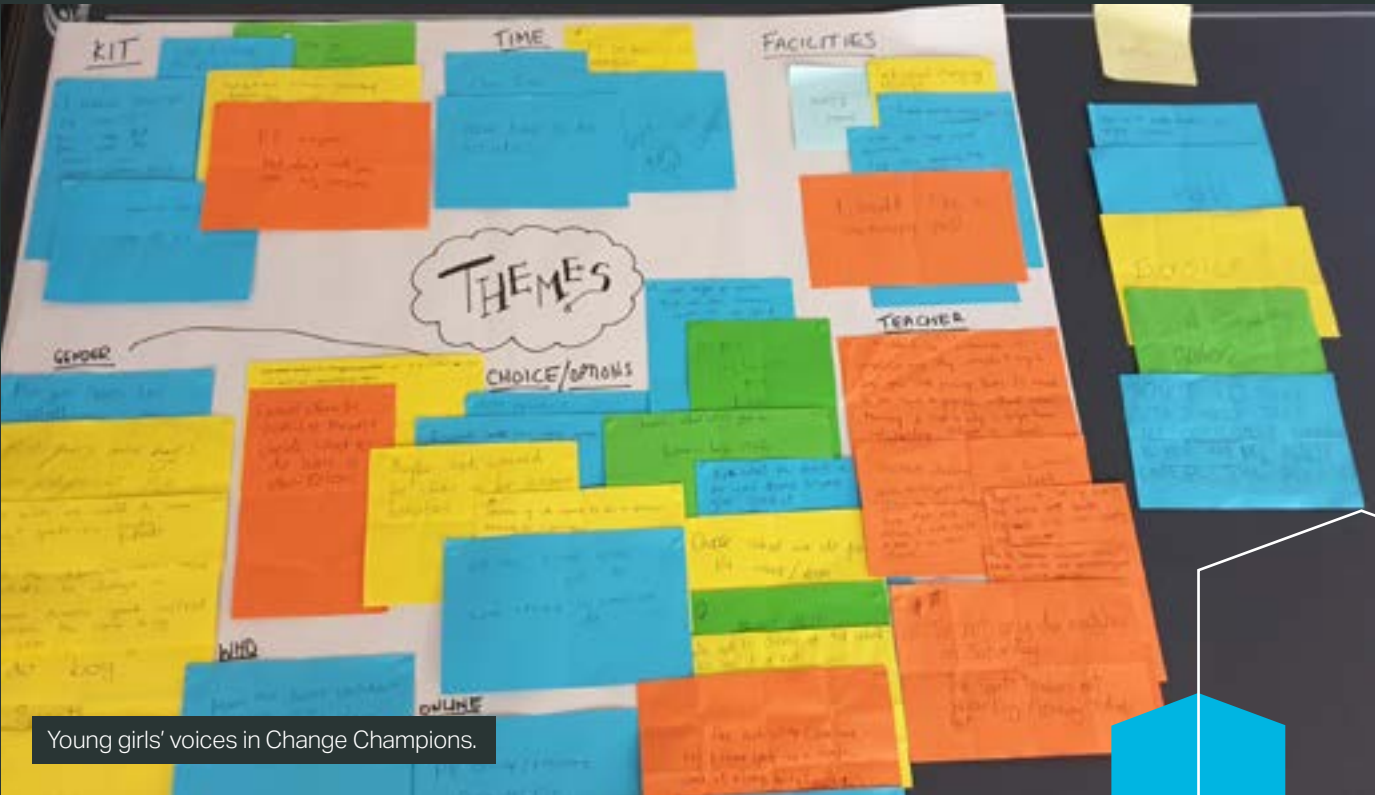
Action plans were presented to the schools, many of which implemented the girls' ideas, embedding their design into the school's physical activity offer.

Support was provided to schools to action the girls' suggestions, which included:

- Cultural dance clubs where students vote on the dance style.
- Trauma-informed coaching to reform detentions given for missing PE.
- Expanded opportunities for specific year groups, such as trampolining.
- Teacher training focused on child-centred approaches and language.

Key takeaway:

The programme successfully shifted the school environment by ensuring girls' voices led to tangible changes to their PE and after school offer.



Young girls' voices in Change Champions.

Opportunities that Meet Our Needs and Are Accessible and Easy to Find

The evidence suggests a meaningful difference to how opportunities are designed, communicated and accessed.



Across the evidence, accessibility, findability and choice are increasingly being treated as core design principles rather than secondary considerations. This mindset shift is visible in how partners are using local insight, meeting people in everyday settings, broadening how activity is described, and treating digital, peer and place-based routes into activity as essential infrastructure.

Meet people “where they are” as a guiding principle

Across the evidence, partners increasingly recognise that people will not always come to formal facilities, or traditional sport offers. In response, they are increasingly designing opportunities in everyday settings, using accessible language and formats that feel relevant to people’s lives. This reflects a move away from one-size-fits-all approach towards a more diverse and flexible offer.

The gateway to engagement

Recommendations from people and organisations people already trust, across multiple channels, is increasingly recognised as the most powerful route into activity. The mindset has shifted from broadcasting offers to building trust.

Listening is shaping design

The evidence points to a stronger culture of designing from local insight rather than from a standard programme template. People’s feedback and lived experience are increasingly being used to shape what is offered, when it happens and how it is described. This suggests that insight is becoming a starting point for design, rather than something used to review delivery after the event.

Activity rebranded, not just “sport” or “exercise”

People are increasingly thinking about physical activity through the lens of everyday life like walking, gardening, dancing, social activity and family fun, rather than primarily through sport or fitness language. This includes thinking about where activity takes place - the mindset has shifted from “bring people to facilities” to “use the places people already love.”

Joining up health, leisure, community and faith systems

There is a growing acceptance that no single sector can make activity accessible alone. Health, leisure, community, voluntary, faith and council systems are increasingly framed as a single “front door” into local activity, rather than competing pathways.



Credit: Community Class, Horizon Leisure Trust.

In Practice:

Delivery is becoming more tailored and hyperlocal

Practice is changing on the ground in visible ways. Delivery is increasingly taking place in everyday community settings such as churches, gurdwaras, community halls, GP surgeries, parks, care homes, schools and high streets, rather than only in formal leisure environments. This means more opportunities are available in places that are familiar, trusted and easier to reach.

The evidence also suggests that offers are evolving over time. Local insight is being gathered and used continuously. Engagement is increasingly being treated as part of the delivery model itself, rather than as a separate or one-off exercise.

Signposting is becoming more visible and trusted

Evidence shows that signposting and promotion are increasingly happening across multiple channels, improving the likelihood that someone will come across an opportunity in a way that feels relevant to them. Rather than depending on local people already knowing a leisure provider or sports brand, some partners have developed more recognisable and accessible brands that act as a clear entry point into a range of opportunities.

Outreach is also increasingly taking place through trusted community routes, including GP surgeries, schools, faith groups, voluntary organisations and community networks, rather than relying on leisure-led marketing alone.

Improving access and connection

Across the evidence, named roles are being created to help make activity easier to find, access and navigate. These roles are focused specifically on helping people connect with the right opportunities, rather than adding this responsibility to delivery roles as a secondary task.

In addition, providers are increasingly referring people on to one another’s offers rather than competing. This helps people to find the opportunities that better meets their needs, not just whatever the first contact happens to deliver.



Credit: Winchester Personal Bests, Winchester City Council.



Credit: The Source Young People's Charity.

Impact for People

Inactive people are taking part in activities that suit them

People are reporting opportunities better suit their needs, health, life stage, confidence level or interest. The evidence suggests the increased variety and choice is being used by the people it was designed for.

The make-up of who is participating is changing. People from groups historically least likely to take part such as older people, women in low-income areas, disabled people, ethnically diverse communities, faith communities and people with long-term conditions are visible in headline reach figures.

In many cases, this is supporting continued participation. Once someone has found an offer that fits, they are tending to stay, converting first contacts into membership, regular attendance and onward engagement.

Activity is becoming easier to find

Local opportunities are becoming genuinely findable to people online, on social media and through trusted local channels. Evidence suggests this is improving the reach of activity offers, including among people who may not previously have encountered or considered formal physical activity opportunities.

Barriers to first engagement are being reduced

Cost, transport, intimidation, language and information barriers are increasingly being addressed through programme design and delivery. People often describe offers as "gentle", "welcoming" and "not overwhelming", suggesting that first steps into activity are becoming more manageable for people who may previously have felt excluded or unsure.

Horizon Leisure Trust

Meeting people where they are

Horizon Leisure Trust has proved how accessible, community-based wellbeing support can make a real difference to people's lives.

Across programmes including Beat It, ESCAPE-Pain, FLOURISH, the Health Referral Scheme, the Wellbeing Hub, and community classes, they've focused on creating supportive opportunities that feel approachable and achievable. This has been especially important for people managing long-term health conditions, low confidence, or barriers to traditional fitness settings.

Many group sessions are now delivered away from the leisure centre, in places that are easily accessible and already familiar to the community. What started as conversations with their community, led to the team meeting people where they are and delivering in community venues. By tailoring programmes, the organisation has made it easier for individuals to get involved, build confidence, and make positive changes at their own pace.

The results show the value of this approach:



Participants in Beat It achieved average reductions of **11.9%** in systolic blood pressure and **9.3%** in diastolic blood pressure.



ESCAPE-Pain led to a **30.58%** improvement in quality of life.



FLOURISH supported women to improve their health through sustainable changes, delivering an average **4.5%** weight loss and a **93.3%** increase in physical activity levels, with **80%** of participants coming from high deprivation areas.



The Wellbeing Hub achieved an **86.4%** conversion to membership and continued activity.



Community classes attendance in local settings now represents over **22%** of all class attendance (**2303** occasions).

Together, these outcomes highlight how a friendly, inclusive and community-led approach can improve health, reduce inequalities and help people feel more supported in their wellbeing journey.



Credit: Horizon Wellbeing Hub.

Places and Travel Routes Where We All Feel Safe and Encouraged To Be Active

For people who have not previously seen themselves as someone who exercises or plays sport, the familiarity of a place is often the decisive factor. Known faces, known environments, and a sense that the space was designed with them in mind, all helps a person engage for the first time.

Community assets are being recognised as wellbeing infrastructure

Parks, waterfronts, country parks, school grounds, town centres and other public spaces are increasingly being viewed as important physical activity infrastructure in their own right, alongside leisure centres and sports halls. The evidence suggests that investment, programming and partnership effort are increasingly flowing into these spaces because they reflect where people are most likely to move in everyday life.

This also reflects a broader mindset shift. Rather than seeing culture, parks and sport as separate agendas, partners increasingly recognise that the features which make a place valued and well-used are often the same features that make it supportive of activity and wellbeing.

Active travel as core to a healthy place

Across the evidence, walking, wheeling and cycling are increasingly being understood as more than transport choices. They are being recognised as practical ways to build movement into daily life and to create healthier places. This suggests that active travel is increasingly being treated as a strategic physical activity issue, not only a transport or highways concern, and is being considered through schools, primary care, community organisations and local planning.

Feeling safe is a condition for activity

There is now a clear shared view that access to safe, welcoming places to be active should not depend on which neighbourhood a person lives in and that feeling safe is a condition for activity. Factors such as lighting, supervision, peer presence, trusted leaders and supportive companionship are increasingly being considered at the design stage.

This recognises that anxiety, fear of judgement, traffic risk and personal safety concerns continue to be significant barriers to using public space, particularly for women and girls, disabled people, older people and young people in underserved neighbourhoods. Across the evidence, there are signs that these realities are being taken more seriously in the planning of place-based opportunities.

Practice Change:

Investment in community assets and public spaces is creating more places to be active

Evidence shows that public investment is increasingly being directed into open-space activity infrastructure, including outdoor gyms, park-based fitness, multi-use games areas and waterfront facilities. In addition, rather than relying only on new infrastructure, schools, faith buildings, civic halls, care homes, community centres and other underused spaces are increasingly being brought into use as local activity venues.

The evidence shows that capital and revenue investment are increasingly being directed towards neighbourhoods and communities least likely to have safe, welcoming places to be active. This suggests a more deliberate effort to address the geographical inequalities of physical inactivity.

Active Travel is becoming a key supporting infrastructure

People describe that transport teams are working with schools, community organisations and local people to shape routes that feel safe and usable. Across the evidence, engagement is often being treated as an early design step rather than a final stage.

This is particularly evident within schools. Initiatives such as Bikeability progression and 'bike-bus' means that many children are learning to cycle in safe, supervised and familiar settings. The evidence suggests this is helping to normalise active travel for children and families.

Deliberate programming is helping public space feel safer and more accessible

Evidence suggests that outdoor gyms, parks, courts and trails are increasingly being activated through scheduled sessions, ambassador-led activity and community events. This helps public space feel used, welcoming and socially supported, rather than simply available.

Group walking is commonly used to help public spaces feel safer, more social and more accessible, particularly for people who would not feel comfortable walking alone. The evidence suggests that group walks are also providing a route into wider activity, peer support and community connection.



Impact for People

More people are visibly using public space and routes

The evidence suggests that the profile of people using outdoor spaces, community settings and active travel routes is changing. Older people, women, disabled people, neurodivergent young people, low-income families and ethnically diverse communities are becoming increasingly visible in the use of these spaces.

For children, they are growing up able to walk, cycle and move more confidently through their local environment. A growing number are learning to ride at school and progressing through Bikeability, while families report changes in routines that make cycling and outdoor play feel more normal.

Communities and social connections are forming around neighbourhood level activity

Where places are home to regular and welcoming activity, visible communities are forming around them. Across the evidence, group walks, outdoor gym sessions, free football evenings and activity in faith or health settings are contributing to connection, friendships, support networks and a stronger local sense of belonging.

In some places, the feedback suggests that this welcoming and supervised activity in public space is associated with reductions in anti-social behaviour. This can improve how safe a place feels.

Living Streets

Hampshire County Council worked with national charity Living Streets to get more children walking or wheeling to school.

They worked with over 40 local schools, encouraging them to take part in the "WOW - the walk to school challenge". Alongside the incentive of receiving monthly badges, the team used fun activities like assemblies, competitions, and special events to get students and families involved. They also supported schools with ambassadors and worked closely with teachers and local partners to make walking to school easier and more appealing.

As a result, many more children in Hampshire started walking or wheeling to school. The number of pupils traveling actively increased by about 20% and the project's creative approach helped boost enthusiasm and made a real difference in how children got to school.



Credit: Living Streets.

PLAYCE Pompey

A UK First

PLAYCE Pompey transformed an underused play area in Lord's Court, Landport, into a colourful, inclusive multi-movement space designed to help local people be more active. The project was a partnership between Portsmouth City Council, the University of Portsmouth and residents, particularly people living in the surrounding homes, to ensure the space met local needs and would be well used.

The project used the existing PLAYCE model, based on the Athletic Skills Model from the Netherlands, to create a space that supports a wide range of movements for people of all ages and abilities, including disabled people. By combining research, design and community engagement, the partners created the UK's first PLAYCE site.

Since opening in July 2024, use of the space has more than quadrupled, while the number of people taking part in vigorous physical activity has increased tenfold.

Participation in the 'fundamental 10' movements, such as hopping, crawling and changing direction, has also risen by more than four times, showing that people are not just visiting the area more often but are being more active when they do.

In June 2025, PLAYCE Pompey won 'Best Company Health and Wellbeing Initiative' at the Housing Heroes Awards, with judges praising its innovation, strong resident involvement and demonstrable improvements in anti-social behaviour.



Credit: Robyn Montague, University of Portsmouth and Ali Coote, from Portsmouth City Council.

Credit: Robyn Montague, University of Portsmouth and Ali Coote, from Portsmouth City Council.

Support to Help Us Get Started or Keep Moving When We Feel That We Can't Do It Alone



The evidence shows a clear shift in how support for physical activity is understood and delivered. Many parts of the system are recognising that support, trust and relationships are essential.

Recognising that needing support is not a personal failing

People increasingly accept that needing help to get started, or to keep going, is the rule rather than the exception, especially for people living with long-term conditions, mental health needs, disability, weight stigma, anxiety or low confidence. This is shifting language and design away from “motivating people” towards making it easier to ask for and accept help. Support is being treated as a core service offer, not as an add-on for a minority of people.

Trust, relationships and one-to-one support matter

Trusted, relational support is increasingly recognised as an important part of the work. There is a growing recognition that supporting someone to be active is a specific workforce skill that’s different from delivering a class or running a programme. The mindset is moving towards seeing support roles as core, fundable infrastructure rather than a “nice to have.”

Behaviour change is a long-term journey, not a single event

People increasingly accept that supporting someone to be active is not a single intervention but a long-term journey, with a shift towards thinking about “getting started” and “keeping going” as parts of the same continuum. The mindset has shifted from “did they attend the session?” to “are we still in their life six or twelve months on?” This is reshaping how programmes, funding and reporting are designed.

Addressing what stops people, not just what activates them

People increasingly accept that physical inactivity is rarely because of activity itself; it’s because of everything around it such as cost, transport, anxiety, food, mental health, family circumstances, safeguarding, work, caring responsibilities and life transitions. The mindset has shifted from designing the activity to designing everything that needs to be in place around it before someone can sustain it.

Physical activity considered in mental health support, care pathways and professional practice

Clinicians, coaches and community practitioners are increasingly supporting movement, wellbeing and mental health as part of their everyday role. This means physical activity is more likely to be embedded in trusted relationships, therapeutic settings and longer-term support pathways rather than offered as a separate intervention.



Practice Change: In practice, this is leading to more personalised, joined-up and sustained forms of support, including dedicated workforce roles, peer support, referral pathways and tailored offers for different needs.

New workforce roles dedicated to walking alongside people

Named workforce roles have been created across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight whose explicit job is to walk alongside people through making first contact, helping people take their first step, connecting them to the right activities, and checking in to help them keep going. These roles are now seen as a core part of support, not an optional extra.

Primary care and partnership pathways into activity

GPs, social prescribers and health and wellbeing coaches are increasingly acting as a gateway into supported physical activity, with referrals becoming more personalised and relationship-based. This is being strengthened by cross-organisational pathways, where partners across health, leisure, voluntary, faith, sport and local government work together to provide joined-up support and reduce the risk of people falling through gaps.

Activity combined with social purpose as a distinct support model

Some of the most effective and lasting ways of helping people be active combine movement with doing something meaningful. This gives people a reason to take part that goes beyond motivation or willpower alone. Having a shared purpose can help people get started and keep going.

Buddy systems and peer support

Programmes are increasingly designed to start with small, supportive groups, buddy systems and informal starting points, rather than expecting people to walk into a large class on their own. This is making the first session feel manageable for people who would otherwise not turn up at all.

This is leading to people who have benefited from support increasingly becoming part of how that support is offered, as ambassadors, walk leaders, peer-group facilitators and youth volunteers. Peer leadership is now treated as a recognised model, not an informal extra.

Pathways for people with specific needs

A growing menu of structured, supported pathways now exists for people with specific needs such as long-term conditions, weight management, neurodiversity and life transitions. These pathways are explicitly designed to support people to start and to keep going, beyond just a one-off programme.

This is especially evident in the variety of mental health and trauma-informed offers, with safe spaces, trusted relationships, gentle progression and the option to talk. This is supporting people whose mental health might otherwise stop them engaging at all.



Credit: Let's Get Moving with Living Well Partnership.

Impact for People

Evidence shows substantial annual reach across longer-term engagement

Where people have been supported, they tend to stay. Conversion into sustained activity, retention into community offers and ongoing relationships with workforce roles are now consistently seen across very different cohorts.

Increased confidence and self-belief

People who arrive with low confidence, anxiety or fear of judgement are reporting a clear improvement in self-belief and are more able to stay engaged over time.

New cohorts engaging who would not otherwise have done so

The presence of supported pathways is enabling new cohorts to engage with physical activity for the first time, those whose inactivity, condition, identity or circumstances would otherwise have kept them out.

Improvements to people’s health

Where people have been supported through structured, condition-specific programmes, improvements in clinical markers and quality-of-life scores are evident. This is producing health gains alongside the physical activity outcomes.

Wider wellbeing benefits beyond physical activity

Supported pathways are producing wider wellbeing gains such as improved mood, sleep, family relationships, employment confidence and reduced reliance on harmful coping strategies. Where supported pathways have included a group, participants consistently report feeling less isolated, new friendships and a sense of being part of something.

The support is doing more than getting people active; it is helping them rebuild parts of their lives.

“It’s not just exercise – it’s sharing experiences and ideas with others. That’s what keeps me coming back.”

Let’s Get Moving Participant



Credit: Let’s Get Moving with Living Well Partnership.

Let’s Get Moving

Living Well Partnership

Living Well Partnership successfully piloted and expanded ‘Let’s Get Moving’, an eight-week behaviour change support programme which combined education, peer support and group walks.

The programme supports older people with two or more long-term health conditions that are also above a healthy weight. This group are twice as likely to be inactive. The partnership ran weekly 90 minute sessions which included 45 minutes of movement like walking or games. They used the COM-B model of behaviour change to plan the sessions and collaborated with 13 partners to bring it all to life.

Feedback showed people often begin with uncertainty but go on to achieve meaningful positive change. It also highlighted the importance of peer support and role modelling in building belonging, motivation and confidence in new participants.

Impact snapshot



24% increased GP capacity by reducing repeat visits from people who had previously sought care.



68% of participants stayed consistent or increased physical activity.



83% agreed they are more confident to engage in the behaviour change.

Physical Activity Navigator Pilot

The Physical Activity Navigator pilot was developed through Southampton’s So:Linked navigation service to test whether dedicated, person-centred support could help people with health conditions become more active.

Led by Southampton Voluntary Services with partners including Southampton Public Health, Energise Me and Communicare, the pilot combined a specialist navigator role with plans for activity buddies, digital inclusion support and community development. People were referred through existing So:Linked routes or could self-refer, then received tailored support to explore what kinds of movement or activity might work for them. In practice, the specialist navigator became the core of the pilot, offering one-to-one conversations, follow-up support, signposting and encouragement to help people overcome barriers such as low confidence, poor health, transport issues and fear of going out.

Over 12 months, 31 people took part in the pilot, most of whom had complex physical or mental health needs and needed more intensive support. The pilot showed that this kind of personalised approach can help people start moving in ways that feel realistic and relevant to their lives, whether through walking groups, swimming, gardening, wheelchair sport or social activities with a movement element. Participants reported increased confidence, greater awareness of what was available

locally and renewed motivation to be active. The pilot also had a wider systems impact: it helped referral partners and organisations think differently about physical activity, moving the conversation away from sport or the gym alone and towards everyday movement, connection and wellbeing. While staff turnover, limited capacity and delays meant some parts of the model were not fully delivered, the pilot demonstrated the value of a specialist physical activity role embedded within a wider navigation team.

Bold Leaders Working Together to Create Happier and Healthier Communities



The evidence has shown clear progress in understanding who can be a Bold Leader. We’re seeing community leadership alongside professional leadership, collaboration across sectors and a greater emphasis on equity, long-term commitment and advocacy. This is leading to more joined-up services, visible local leadership and better opportunities and outcomes for local people.

Cross-sector collaboration as the way to support change

People increasingly accept that no single organisation, whether local authority, NHS, leisure trust, sport, school or charity, can move the dial on physical inactivity or inequalities on its own. Cross-sector collaboration is now treated as the operating model for system change, not as a project-specific arrangement.

Bold, brave decisions and willingness to test and learn

Leaders are increasingly willing to take bold decisions, moving the focus from competition to having fun, investing in underserved neighbourhoods, opening schools to communities and redesigning programmes around lived experience, even where the outcome is uncertain. The mindset is starting to shift from “what is safe to fund” to “what is necessary to test if we are serious about happier and healthier communities.”

Community-led leadership valued alongside professional leadership

There is a clear shift towards recognising that leadership for happier, healthier communities must include community leaders such as ambassadors, walk leaders, peer-supporters, parents, young people, faith and voluntary leaders, not just senior professionals. Community leadership is increasingly being treated as professional-grade leadership in its own right.

Long-term commitment over short-term metrics

Leaders increasingly accept that the changes required for happier, healthier communities will take years, not funding cycles, and that bold leadership means committing to long-term work even when short-term metrics will not reward it. Good relationships, a progressive workforce, and a long-term commitment to communities are increasingly seen as signs of bold leadership.

Leadership through advocacy and influencing

Leaders are increasingly using their position to advocate publicly for physical activity, active travel and equity, through speaking at boards, submitting evidence to inquiries, influencing policy and using their platforms to bring the voices of local people and partners into decision-making spaces. The mindset has shifted from delivery-only to delivery-and-influence.

Staff members at every level are being recognised as leaders when they walk alongside people, broker connections and hold the system accountable, regardless of seniority.

Practice Change:

Cross-sector partnership

Public health, transport, planning, leisure, voluntary and community partners are increasingly working together on the same outcomes to pool expertise, plan jointly and align delivery, so that communities experience a single system rather than a patchwork of programmes.

Investment into bold capital and revenue programmes

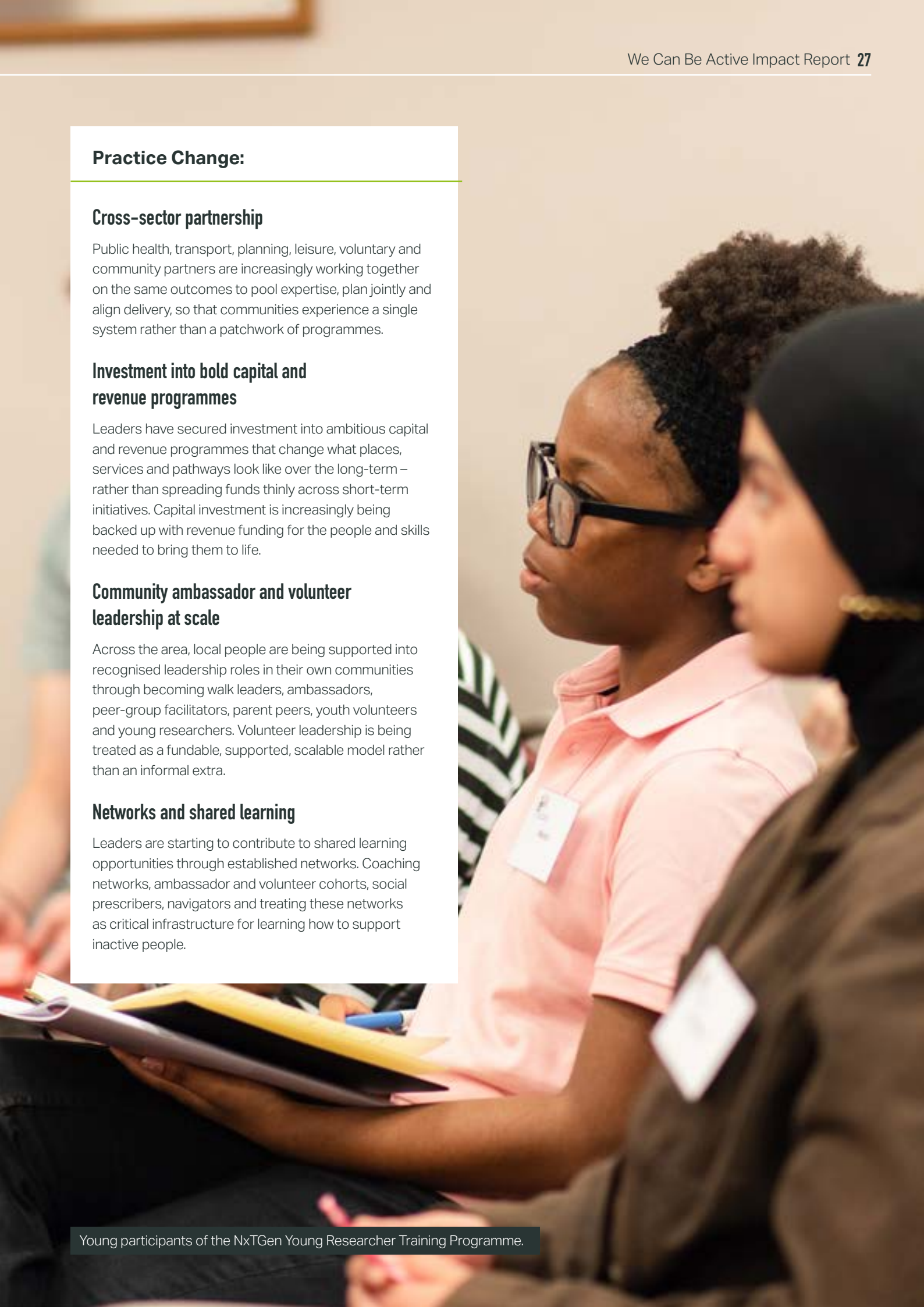
Leaders have secured investment into ambitious capital and revenue programmes that change what places, services and pathways look like over the long-term – rather than spreading funds thinly across short-term initiatives. Capital investment is increasingly being backed up with revenue funding for the people and skills needed to bring them to life.

Community ambassador and volunteer leadership at scale

Across the area, local people are being supported into recognised leadership roles in their own communities through becoming walk leaders, ambassadors, peer-group facilitators, parent peers, youth volunteers and young researchers. Volunteer leadership is being treated as a fundable, supported, scalable model rather than an informal extra.

Networks and shared learning

Leaders are starting to contribute to shared learning opportunities through established networks. Coaching networks, ambassador and volunteer cohorts, social prescribers, navigators and treating these networks as critical infrastructure for learning how to support inactive people.



Young participants of the NxTGen Young Researcher Training Programme.



Young people at The Agency

Impact for People

We Can Be Active priorities reflected in strategic plans

People are now living in a place where physical activity priorities are explicitly held by Health and Wellbeing Boards, councils and organisations business plans. This means the strategic plans around communities are more aligned behind their happier, healthier lives.

More joined-up experience

People are now interacting with a more joined-up system – where their GP, leisure trust, school, voluntary group, faith setting and council are increasingly working together rather than separately. When this happens it produces smoother handovers, fewer dropped referrals and a better experience.

More options and pathways

Where bold leadership has aligned funding and delivery, people are experiencing programmes that connect to each other – tasters into blocks, blocks into community offers, community offers into leadership and volunteering. People experience this as better-organised support which meets their needs.

People recognise local bold leadership

People are more often able to see leaders who are recognisable, accessible and active in their own neighbourhoods – ambassadors, walk leaders, navigators, foundation staff, social prescribers, walk-leading GPs and youth workers. Leadership has become visible at street level.

More local people leading in their own communities

Where bold leadership has invested in volunteer, ambassador and youth-leadership roles, local people themselves are increasingly leading through walking, organising, advocating and supporting others. Leadership is multiplying out into the community and producing a sense amongst communities that local activity is something they own and are proud of.

Sustained infrastructure for the next phase

Bold collective leadership is producing the partnership infrastructure that communities will rely on into the next phase of the strategy through networks, governance groups, learning and evaluating approaches, recognised brands, volunteer cohorts and shared resources.

Exploring Active Uniforms at St Michael's CE Junior School

At St Michael's CE Junior School in Aldershot, a bold decision to introduce active uniform sparked a shift in how students experience activity at school.

Working with the University of Winchester, the school explored the impact of introducing active uniforms designed for movement, play and everyday school life.

By wearing clothes and shoes that made it easier to run, jump, climb and play, pupils at St Michael's were able be active more freely



70% of the children said they really like active uniforms.



Teachers noticed children becoming more active at breaktimes, including some who had previously avoided physical activity.



Neurodivergent children and those with sensory needs benefited from less restrictive clothing.



Girls reported feeling freer and more confident to join in activities such as football and gymnastics.

Parents also reported easier mornings, less laundry stress and fewer worries about remembering kits for after school activities. Active uniforms also made it easier for children to move between school, sport and active travel.

St Michael's experience shows what can happen when one school is brave enough to lead the way. By introducing active uniforms and working with the University of Winchester to understand the impact, the school has helped create both the evidence and a practical blueprint for others to follow.

“I like it because it's comfortable and I can be more active and run around better. And the shoes make you run around better and not trip over”

GoodGym Southampton

GoodGym began in Southampton in 2023 after people registered interest following a community call out.

In one year, the group gained 52 members, completing 127 missions spanning litter picking, conservation, and community farm building, and is still running three years on. A single commissioning decision created a self-sustaining, multi-purpose community movement built around movement and social purpose.



GoodGym-ers getting stuck in.

How the Strategy is Being Used

For those that have interacted with the We Can Be Active Strategy, it has helped them bring people together around a shared goal: making it easier for everyone to move more in ways that work for them. It has supported them to build on existing good practice, strengthen partnerships and create more inclusive opportunities for children, young people, families and communities. Some have adopted the strategy, others have adapted it, some have integrated it into wider work.

Across the strategy, partners told us that the biggest changes have been a stronger focus on people who are least active, more co-design with communities, and better joined up working across sectors such as health, education, housing and local government. There is also growing recognition that safe, welcoming places and travel routes are vital to helping people be active.

The strategy has also encouraged services to offer the right support for people who need help to get started and keep going, often through peer support, behaviour change approaches and local partnerships. While not every change can be linked to the strategy alone, the evidence shows it has helped strengthen the work already happening and given partners a clearer, shared direction.

One of the clearest benefits has been bringing a wider range of leaders into this work, including schools, healthcare, community groups and local services. This broader leadership has helped create more opportunities for people to be active in everyday life, not just through traditional sport and exercise.



Credit: Bay Youth at Sandown MUGA.

Creating a Shared Direction

The Southampton Physical Activity Alliance

Southampton City Council adopted the We Can Be Active Strategy in 2022. Led by the council's Public Health team, the city formed an alliance to broaden the responsibility for supporting happier and healthier communities across the city.

Southampton Physical Activity Alliance is a city-wide partnership established to support delivery of the We Can Be Active Strategy in Southampton. The Alliance brings together more than 45 organisations from public sector, health, voluntary, community, education and business sectors to help more residents build physical activity into everyday life in ways that work for them.

With a collaborative, whole-system approach to physical activity, rather than focusing on sport and exercise, partners champion movement in everyday life and work together to make activity (whatever that might be) more accessible, inclusive and normal for Southampton residents. Members are also acting as ambassadors within their own organisations, helping to embed the strategy across services and settings.

The strategy has meant partners working to a shared framework and allowed for the following shifts:

- 1 Everyone deserves an equal chance to be active; it's something the system as a whole must work together to provide.**
- 2 Distributed leadership: no one member owns the strategy and each member of the alliance has a role to play in leading change – from policy to delivery.**
- 3 Focus has moved towards least active residents.**

- The result is a more coordinated approach for the people and places that need it most. The alliance has used its wider reach to make strong progress in Southampton with notable achievements, including:
- Wider engagement of schools and early years settings in healthy activity programmes such as the 'Healthy High 5 Award' and 'Healthy Early Years Award'
 - Development of an annual Early Years Physical Activity Survey, which in its first two years (2025 and 2026) has highlighted the importance of promoting 'tummy time' to parents and professionals, informing training programmes for key workers
 - Introduction and use of the survey by schools to inform their action plans
 - Successful local campaigns to promote physical activity, including events such as 'Love where you Live'
 - Leisure providers across the city have improved their approach to inclusive communications, including image use and language
 - Greater emphasis on physical activity pathways for people with long-term conditions, such as the use of Good Boost (an AI tool) to support patients with musculoskeletal conditions
 - Active Travel programmes that are run in schools, workplaces and communities: including school and workplace travel planning; Bike Doctor repair sessions in school and public locations; delivery of Bikeability Cycle Training; Place Based Cycling; and active travel campaigns
 - Development and delivery of Safer Routes to School infrastructure schemes and implementation of School Streets to create environments that better support movement and wellbeing
 - Delivery of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and continued operation of micro-mobility schemes (cycle and scooter hire) to make active and sustainable travel more accessible, attractive and inter-connected

By creating a shared framework for action, the Southampton Physical Activity Alliance helps partners align effort, pool expertise, and respond more effectively to local need. Its value lies in turning the strategy into coordinated local action that can reduce inequalities and make physical activity a realistic part of everyday life for more people.

Challenges to Impact

Among all the great evidence submitted, challenges still exist that can limit impact. Our collective progress will be dependent on us acknowledging and understanding these, and working together to address them.

The system is moving in the right direction, but adoption is still uneven, and progress can remain fragile where it depends on particular people, programmes or partnerships rather than on embedded ways of working.

Across the evidence, the main challenges to impact that people reported are consistent and fall into a few recurring themes:



Capacity and workforce pressure

Capacity and workforce pressure is one of the clearest recurring themes from across the evidence. It is especially evident in relation to schools and those working with vulnerable children and young people, and those with additional needs. An increasing requirement for provision and time, competing priorities and staff turnover all appear regularly as challenges to sustaining new ways of working.



Short-term conditions and lack of time to embed change

Despite the evidence suggesting many people now recognise that relationship-based, inclusive and tailored practice takes time, the system conditions often remain too short-term to let this embed properly. Some evidence cited how this approach was making communities wary of new programmes after past disappointments – where local opportunities have suddenly stopped.



Inconsistent adoption across the system

The evidence suggests that some organisations and settings are changing faster than others. There is repeated reference to uneven buy-in, and reliance on individual champions rather than fully embedded system change. The evidence highlights good examples of collaboration and change for health, education, local government, leisure and community providers, but fragmented efforts cannot solve inactivity challenges on their own.



Monitoring, feedback and evaluation

Lots of rich examples of evidence were submitted – such as feedback forms, lived experience, stories of change and project reports. But these examples also suggest that how we are capturing impact is happening inconsistently, rather than through an embedded system-wide approach.

It has also highlighted that evidencing sustained impact is harder, especially where outcomes are softer, longer-term or cumulative. This means some of the strategy’s most important impact may be real but under-recorded.



Live Longer Better, Winchester City Council.

Challenges for Our Communities

Many contributions included feedback and responses from local people. These evidenced that even where there is strong commitment, good local provision and clear evidence of need, communities are still facing challenges to being active.

These challenges are rarely caused by just one thing. They are usually the result of a mix of low confidence, stigma, practical barriers, pressure on services, short-term funding, and places or environments that do not always feel safe, welcoming or relevant. These challenges are often felt most strongly by the people the strategy most wants to reach, which can make it harder to create lasting and inclusive change.

Confidence, stigma and feeling that activity is “not for people like me”

Many people still carry negative associations with sport, PE or exercise, and this affects whether they engage at all. This includes fear of judgement, low confidence and a sense that opportunities are “not for people like me.”

This shows up strongly for young people, older adults, disabled people, some faith and ethnically diverse communities, and those with previous poor experiences of activity.

Practical access barriers

Even where good provision exists, people still face practical barriers that prevent participation, including:

- Transport and distance
- Inconvenient timing
- Childcare, caring and work responsibilities
- Affordability
- Digital exclusion
- Limited translation/interpreting support
- Lack of suitable or culturally appropriate venues

The evidence is clear that accessibility is not just about the activity itself, but about the whole journey into and through it.

Trust takes time, and short-term systems make that difficult

A repeated challenge is that building trust with underserved communities takes longer than many programmes or funding cycles allow. This is made harder by stop-start programmes that reduce community confidence in new offers. This particularly affects groups who have experienced previous disappointment or inconsistent provision.

Infrastructure and environment

For place-based and active travel work, physical conditions are still a major barrier. These include:

- Unsafe or poor-quality routes
- Lack of bike storage
- Poor lighting
- Unsuitable crossings
- Limited safe cycling/walking infrastructure
- Venues not being close enough or appropriate enough for local people

The report shows that people are unlikely to be active if the environment does not feel safe, welcoming and easy to use.

People facing inequality still experience the biggest barriers

Although there is evidence that more people affected by inequality are becoming active, the evidence also shows that they face the biggest challenges to engaging with activity consistently. For many, staying involved can be fragile and easily disrupted by a poor first experience, a change in support or life circumstance. This also shows that physical activity programmes are often trying to respond to wider inequalities that they cannot address on their own.



What’s Next

Over the past five years, We Can Be Active has helped build real momentum across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Together, we have made meaningful progress, not only in supporting more people to move more, but in laying the foundations for the long-term system change needed to make active lives easier, fairer and more normal for everyone.

This report shows that mindsets are shifting, practice is changing and stronger partnerships are forming across communities and sectors. At the same time, this report is a reminder that there is still more to do. Progress remains uneven, some barriers are deeply rooted, and long-term change will require continued commitment and shared leadership.

But the progress so far gives us real reasons to celebrate. The last five years have shown what is possible when people come together around a shared mission. Now is the time to build on that progress, go further together, and invite even more people, organisations and communities to join us in creating happier, healthier places where everyone can be active.

We Can Be Active



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