

# Sport England Families Fund

## Final Evaluation Report

September 2022

# Introduction

# The Families Fund – an introduction

## The Families Fund

The Families Fund was launched by Sport England in 2018 as a focused investment to increase opportunities for **families and children to do sport and physical activity together**.

Since its launch, the Fund has invested in **39 projects** across England. These have been led by a **wide range of organisations**, including local authorities, national charities and small voluntary sector groups.

In addition to engaging families across specific neighbourhoods, several Families Fund projects have focused on working with **specific types of families**, from those with **physical or mental health difficulties** to families who have **experienced domestic violence**. All projects have worked with families in **lower socio-economic groups**, and, more specifically, those living in areas defined as experiencing **high levels of multiple deprivation**.

## Programme objectives

The primary objectives of the Families Fund have been:

- To **increase the activity levels of children aged 5 to 15** in lower socio-economic groups, who are not doing at least 60 minutes a day of physical activity.
- To **support and enable** families to be active together **throughout the week**.

- To provide families with **positive experiences** of physical activity and sport that help them to develop more **positive attitudes towards activity**.
- To impact positively on a **wider set of outcomes** including physical wellbeing; mental wellbeing; individual development; and social and community development.

The objectives, it has been hoped, would be delivered through the following programme delivery principles:

- Work with organisations who are **experts** in understanding and building family relationships.
- Build **partnerships** between these organisations and the more traditional sport sector.
- Work with **families of all types** (however defined).
- **Challenge and change attitudes** about the types of physical activities that are 'appropriate' for families and children to engage in (together and separately).
- Work on the basis that families engaging in sport and physical activity together will produce **better physical activity and other outcomes** for children and their families than more traditional approaches.
- Take an **action learning approach**; testing and learning from a wide variety of organisation and intervention types.

# The evaluation

Substance ([www.substance.net](http://www.substance.net)) was commissioned by Sport England in 2018 to provide learning and evaluation support for the Families Fund. Drawing on a range of **quantitative** and **qualitative** data sources (including programme management data collected from projects, participant surveys and interviews with project deliverers and participants) Substance has investigated a series of evaluation objectives including those listed below.

## Evaluation objectives

- To test the **feasibility** of families taking part in sport and physical activity together, and understand the impact of funded projects on the objectives of the fund.
- To generate **learning** that increases understanding of **how** families in lower socio-economic groups can be engaged in sport and physical activity, identifying **'what works'** to change behaviour and achieve the desired outcomes.
- To identify **opportunities** for delivering at scale and therefore have an increased impact.
- To provide **analysis and learning** in suitable formats to inform delivery by funded projects and potential future deliverers.

# Structure and purpose of this report

## This Report

This is the final Families Fund evaluation report from Substance. Building on a series of interim reports presented over the past four years, it draws together a wide range of data, analysis and learning. More specifically, it reports on:

- 1) The **breadth and scale of activity** delivered by funded projects since 2018.
- 2) The **socio-demographic, deprivation and physical activity profiles** of the families engaged.
- 3) Families' **prior experiences** of – and relationships with – sport and physical activity before engaging with projects.
- 4) Families' **motivations** for first engaging with projects.
- 5) The **key principles of delivery** that have emerged amongst projects during the funded period.
- 6) The physical activity and other **outcomes** achieved by family members through their engagement with projects.
- 7) The **unique value** of family physical activity interventions (vis-à-vis more traditional age-specific approaches).
- 8) The ways in which Sport England and other stakeholders can **secure the legacy** of the Families Fund and continue to improve the availability of family-focused opportunities to be physically active.

# Summary of findings

- **39 projects** have engaged **10,451 families** and **29,979 participants**.
- **Three main types of project** have been delivered: 'universal' projects, 'inequalities' projects and 'targeted' projects.
- The families engaged have most often tended to be made up of a **female parent/carer** and **children aged 13 and younger**.
- The adults, children and young people engaged have tended to be **less physically active** at first engagement than the general population.
- Parents and carers with low physical activity rates at first engagement reported a range of reasons for this, including **low rates of physical literacy**, **negative perceptions** of physical activity, and **limited time and financial resources**.
- Families were **motivated** to engage with projects for a range of reasons including concerns about family members' **physical and mental health** and addressing **specific problems** or dynamics within the family.
- Families Fund projects have developed and shared a range of **key principles for delivery**, including the importance of **relationship building** with families and delivering project activities that are **flexible, convenient and useful**.
- After 12 weeks of engaging:
  - **46% of adults, 51% of children and 50% of young people** reported **increases in their weekly minutes** of (at least moderate intensity) physical activity.
  - Up to a **third of adults and young people** reported increases in at least one aspect of their physical literacy, with the most significant changes being seen amongst those who also **increased their rate of physical activity**.
  - **42%** of **adults** reported being more **satisfied with life**, **40%** said they were **happier** and **46%** said they were **less anxious** than they were previously.
  - **32%** of **young people** said they were **happier** after engaging with projects for 12 weeks, whilst **25%** said they were **more resilient** and **23%** said they were more **trusting of others**.
- Over **90%** of adults and young people agreed or strongly agreed after 12 weeks that that their family's attendance at projects had:
  - Brought them closer together
  - Increased the amount of time they were spending together
  - Helped them to enjoy being together more

# The breadth and scale of delivery

# A broad range of projects

As a 'test and learn' initiative, the Families Fund has invested **in range of varied projects** over the past four years. Whilst the outputs and outcomes achieved by projects are presented collectively in this report, it is important to provide a broad sense of the variability of projects, the families they have worked with and how they have operated.

In general terms, three main types of projects have been supported by the Families Fund since 2018. These are:

## Universal projects

These projects, which have been relatively few in number, have worked across reasonably broad geographic areas and have engaged large numbers of untargeted families. They have tended to focus on 'supply side' approaches to tackling physical inactivity amongst families, directly delivering new family-focused physical activity sessions to supplement those available in the wider sport and physical activity 'market'.

## Inequalities projects

These projects, whilst still reasonably large in scale, have been more focused than universal projects, often targeting families living in areas with multiple forms of deprivation/disadvantage. In addition to delivering new family physical activity sessions, these projects have also typically invested in 'demand side' interventions, supporting families with information, education, behavioural prompts and even physical resources to help them develop and sustain new physical activity habits into the long term.

## Targeted projects

Often delivered by organisations specialising in working with specific populations (e.g., 'troubled families', those with mental health problems or specific disabilities), these projects have worked intensively with fewer, often referred families than their counterparts. The projects have tended to work with families who are on the cusp of needing - or are already receiving - statutory sector interventions and have provided them with focused help - to improve their levels of physical activity and other family outcomes.



# Project delivery – in numbers...

**39**

Projects delivered

**10,451**

Families engaged  
An average of 268 families per project

**29,979**

Participants engaged  
An average of 3 participants per family

**12,675**

Sessions delivered

**125,866**

Sessions attendances  
An average of 10 participants per session

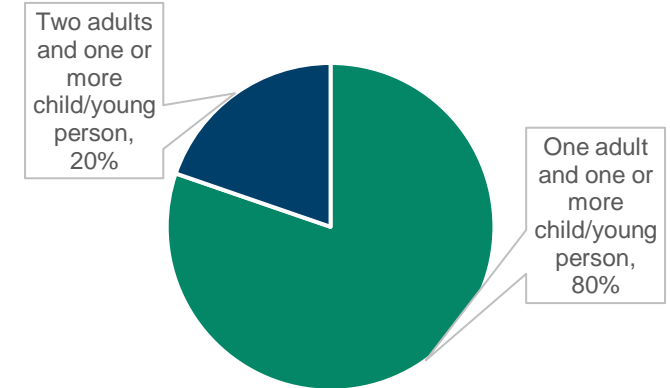
# The families and participants

# Family profiles

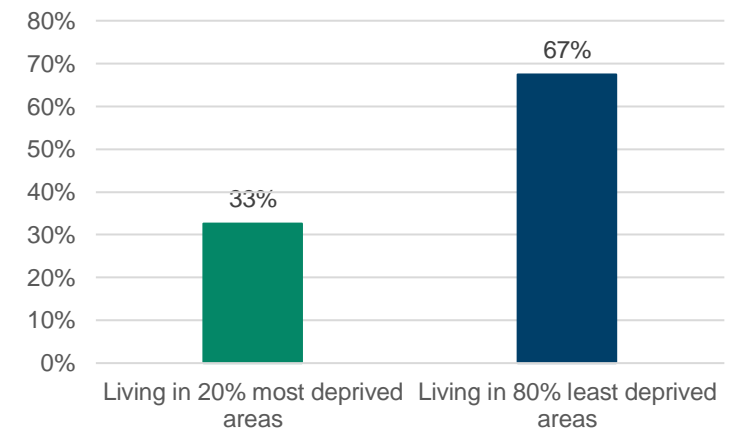
- Between September 2018 and August 2022, Families Fund projects collectively engaged **10,451 families**.
- The largest **universal** project engaged over 2,000 families, whilst the smallest **targeted** project engaged less than 60.
- **80%** of the families engaged were made up of **one adult and one or more child or young person**, with only 20% of families involving two or more adults.\*
- **33%** of all families engaged were from the **20% most deprived areas in England**.
- **More than a quarter of projects** engaged **50%** of more of their families from the **20% most deprived neighbourhoods** in England.
- The remaining projects tended to target less deprived geographical areas and/or **specific population groups** defined by, for instance, family members having physical or learning disabilities or other personal/social challenges.

\*All percentages used in this report are presented on a 'where known' basis. This means that percentages do not include unknown responses.

Percentage of families with adults and children, grouped by count of adults



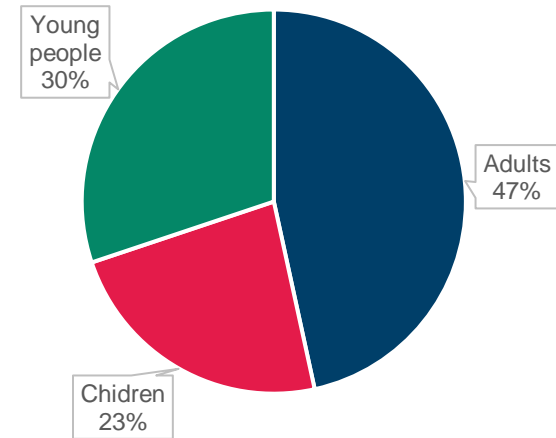
Percentage of families, grouped by deprivation status



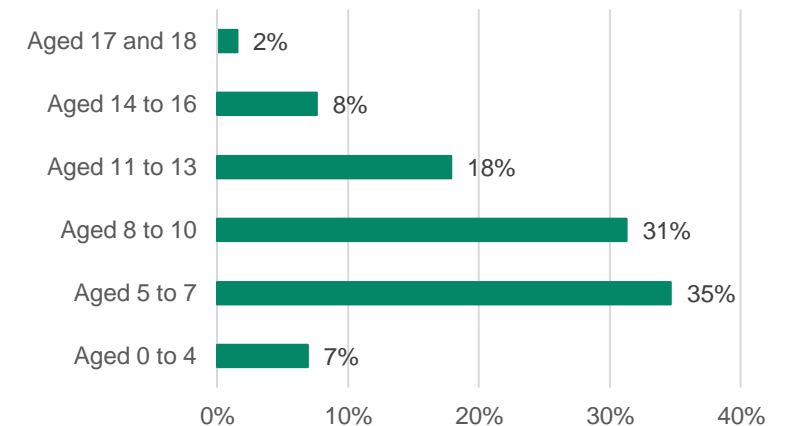
# Participant profiles

- The families engaged by Families Fund projects were made up of **29,979 individual participants**.
- Of these:
  - 47% were **adults**
  - 23% were **children** (defined as being aged 7 years or younger)
  - 30% were **young people** (defined as being aged between 8 and 17)
- Of the children and young people engaged:
  - 35% were aged between **5 and 7** years
  - 31% were aged between **8 and 10** years
- Overall, **73%** of children and young people engaged were aged **10 or younger** and 90% were aged **13 or younger**.

Percentage of participants, grouped by type



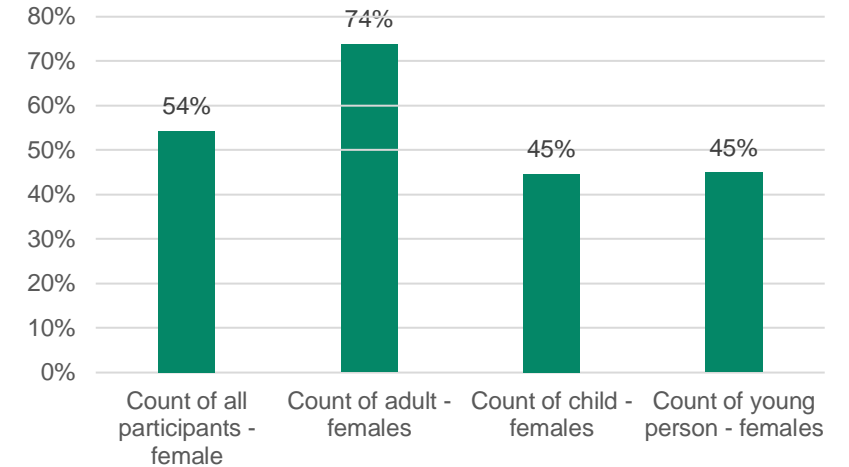
Percentage of children and young people, grouped by age



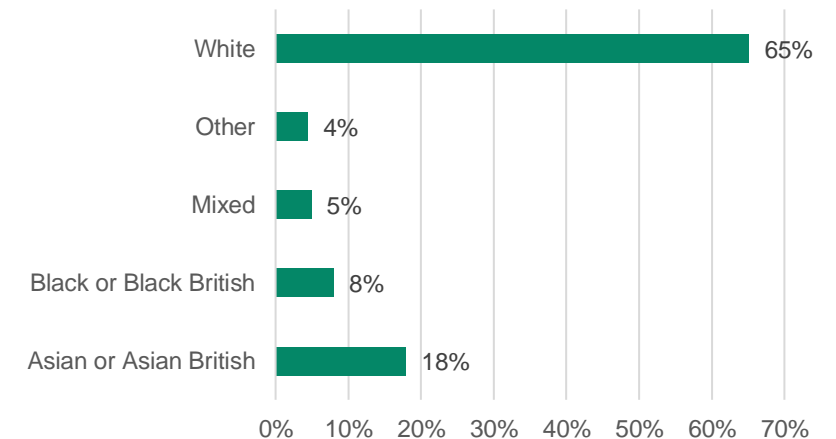
# Participant profiles (2)

- The **gender profile** of children and young people attending Families Fund projects was **reasonably balanced**, with 45% of both children and young people being female and 55% being male.
- Amongst **adults** attending, nearly three-quarters of participants (74%) were female, indicating that Families Fund projects have been more successful targeting female parents and carers rather than males.
- Across all projects, 65% of participants were ethnically 'white', whilst 35% were from **Asian, black and other diverse ethnic communities**.
- The ethnic profile of participants **varied considerably from project to project**, with some projects working almost exclusively with ethnically diverse participants. In total, a third of Families Fund projects (13) engaged **50% or more** of their participants from diverse ethnic communities.
- **11%** of all participants engaged had a **physical or mental disability** or a long-term limiting illness. Again, the proportion of participants with a disability varied from project to project, with six projects having **over a third** of their participants declaring a disability.

Percentage of participants, grouped by type and gender



Percentage of participants, grouped by ethnicity



# Families' prior experiences of physical activity

# Levels of physical activity

## Physical activity levels

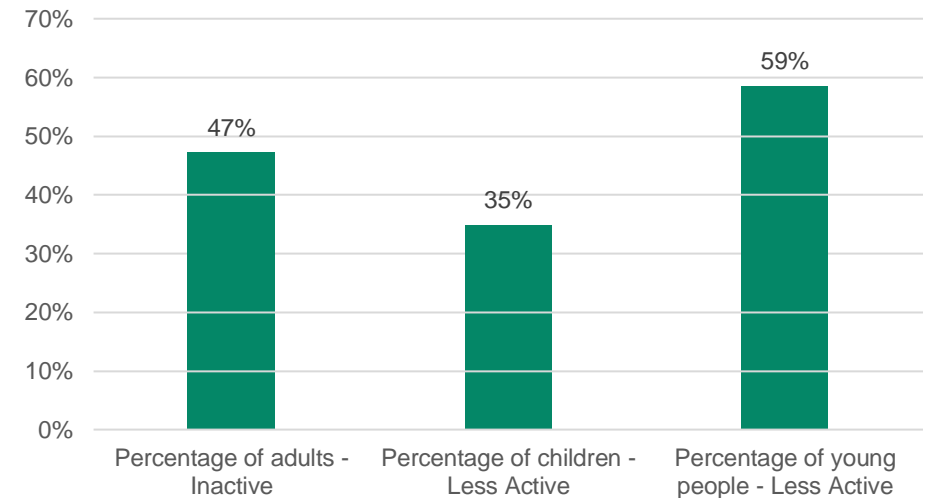
The adults, children and young people attending Families Fund projects tended to be **less physically active** at first engagement than the general population.

- **47% of adults** attending projects were 'inactive' at first engagement (i.e., doing less than 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity per week). This is close to double the current national average (27%) as measured by Sport England's Active Lives survey.
- **35% of children** attending projects were 'less active' at first engagement (i.e., doing less than 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity per day). This is ten percentage points higher than the current national average for children aged between 5 and 7 (25%).
- **59% of young people** attending projects were less active at first engagement, close to double the current national average for young people aged between 8 and 16 (33%).

## Relationships between adults' and children's physical activity levels

Families with at least one 'active' child or young person at first engagement **were more likely to include** at least one active adult than other families. **56%** of families with an active child or young person included an active adult, whilst **44%** did not. This showed a reasonably strong relationship between the physical activity levels of children and their parents/carers when first engaging with projects.

Percentage of participants inactive/less active at first engagement



# Levels of physical literacy

## Physical literacy levels

Adults, children and young people have been surveyed throughout the past four years about their levels of 'physical literacy'\* at first engagement. This has been done to understand the **relationships** between physical activity and physical literacy levels amongst project participants, and any correlations between the two.

- Adult participants who were active at first engagement were more likely to say they **enjoy** and **understand** the importance of sport and physical activity compared with their inactive or 'fairly active' counterparts. For example, adults who were active at baseline were **26% more likely** to agree or strongly agree with the statement '*I find sport and exercise enjoyable and satisfying*' than inactive adults.
- Young people who were active at first engagement were similarly more likely to say they **enjoy** sport than less active or 'fairly active' young people. For instance, **93% of active young people** said they agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I enjoy taking part in sport and physical activity', compared with **79% of inactive young people**. Active young people were also more likely to say they feel **confident** when playing sport or exercising (84% of active young people vs 71% of inactive young people).
- Clear links between physical activity levels and different elements of physical literacy have **not always been evident for adults and young people**. For instance, only small variations have been seen between active and inactive young people regarding their baseline **competence** and **knowledge** of why and how to be physically active. This suggests that increasing a person's knowledge of why they should be physically active - or their competence in being so - will not *necessarily* drive them to be more active as other factors may also be in play.
- There have been also **no observable links** between levels of physical activity and physical literacy amongst children at baseline who, regardless of how active they are, have been overwhelmingly positive in their attitudes towards sport and physical activity.

\*Sport England defines physical literacy as having five main elements: enjoyment, confidence, competence, understanding and knowledge. All are understood as being essential prerequisites for establishing and maintaining positive physical active habits.



# Prior barriers to physical activity

At various points throughout the evaluation, interview evidence has been gathered on why 'inactive' participants were not previously motivated – or were not able – to be more active prior to first engagement.

## Issues relating directly to physical literacy

Several parents/carers reported that they had not previously been physically active because of a lack of **confidence** or broader **physical literacy** about being physically active in public. They explained feelings of shame or discomfort at the idea of being physically active around other people, especially if they viewed physical activity as (in effect) an alternative form of sport or another form of 'specialised' exercise.

## Perceptions of physical activity and who it is for

Some parents/carers also explained that physical activity has traditionally been seen by them as a **lifestyle commodity** and something that 'other people' do. They explained that they saw sport and exercise as something that happens in branded, paid-for gyms, leisure centres and clubs, and was not financially affordable – **or even necessarily relevant** – for them.

## Limited financial resources

Families frequently explained that they have **limited disposable income** and that in their hierarchy of needs, physical activity has historically been 'way down the list'.

## A lack of time

Several families suggested that the most important historical factor in limiting their ability to be physically active was a lack of time. Parents/carers said that prior to attending projects they rarely felt able to dedicate time to being physically active (either on their own or with their children) because of the sheer amount of time that school, work and routine tasks take out of each day. This was especially true of **single-parent families** and those where both parents are working (often multiple jobs).

# Prior barriers to physical activity (cont.)

## The physical environment

Several parents/carers in larger urban areas suggested that their family's understanding of physical activity as a commercial/privatised activity has historically been reinforced by the physical environments in which they live. They noted that many families they know live **in poor quality and cramped housing** and often have only **limited local access to 'free' green/outdoor space**.

Many parents/carers similarly noted that the environments in which they live make it difficult for them and their children to be physically active. One parent explained that she and her two children live in a small flat with no garden, and that with very little green space in the local area they had 'always found it difficult to even get out for a simple walk together'.

## Issues of safety

Even where local spaces to be physically active do exist, some families explained they are unwilling to use them because of safety concerns. Several parents explained that they are reluctant to let their children 'play out' in local parks and neighbourhoods and often feel threatened by local issues of **crime, anti-social behaviour and racism**.

## Distrust of local services and organisations

Some projects reported that the families they were working with – and especially those who are traditionally viewed as 'hard to reach' – had significant levels of **distrust** of local services and organisations when first engaging. This, it was suggested, had resulted in various forms of social and cultural isolation, including from opportunities to be physically active.

# Families' motivations for engaging

# Why families have engaged

Given the historical barriers to being physically active that many families reported when first attending Families Fund projects, families have been interviewed throughout the evaluation to find out what specifically motivated them to engage.

## Addressing concerns or specific dynamics within the family

Several adults/carers explained they hoped that being more physically active with their children would help them to **change or redefine sometimes difficult or challenging relationships** within the family. By getting out of usual routines and doing something 'fun' and 'exciting' together, the parents/carers said they hoped the projects would help family members to build new and more positive relationships with one another.

## Lack of previous physical activity opportunities (or knowledge of, or access to)

Other parents/carers stated that their primary motivation for engaging was to **learn more** about how and where they and their children could be more physically active, individually and collectively. This was especially true of parents/carers with **low physical literacy** and those who said limited financial resources has historically played a part in restricting their access to physical activity.

## Project accessibility

In a similar vein, other parents/carers noted that they had been motivated to start attending because the project offered **affordable, convenient, credible and/or relevant activities**. These families explained that historically they did not feel that there were many suitable opportunities for them to be physically active and that their local Families Fund project was now providing new and much needed additional services.

# Why families have engaged (cont.)

## COVID-19 lockdown specific (or inspired) motivations

In the period after March 2020, several parents/carers explained that **concerns about the physical and mental health impacts** of repeated lockdowns had motivated them to engage. As previous routines were disrupted by the pandemic – and people’s options to be physically active were restricted – many parents/carers reported wanting to find new activities that they and their children could do together.

## Children’s physical activity and health concerns

Several parents/carers also noted that broader concerns about their **children’s physical and/or mental health** motivated them to become engaged. Some parents explained that concerns about their children’s **weight** had encouraged them to join the project, whilst others noted concerns about their children’s **levels of confidence and self esteem**. One young female interviewed explained that she had asked her parents to join a Families Fund project alongside her because she was lacking confidence and wanted to connect with new people and new activities in a safe environment.

## General (or adult) physical activity and health concerns

Some parents/carers also explained that concerns about **their own physical and mental health** had motivated them to start attending projects. One mother explained that anxiety and a lack of confidence had played a significant role in her not being physically active historically, something she hoped to be able to overcome by attending the project alongside her two teenage children.

# Key principles of delivery

# A range of delivery styles

As already noted, a varied range of delivery styles have been used by Families Fund projects over the past four years. Projects representatives have been interviewed to explain the rationales for the interventions they have delivered and explain how they have helped families to overcome many of the barriers to physical activity identified at first engagement.

## The importance of 'pre-engagement' work

Several projects - and especially those working in targeted ways with 'hard to reach' families – explained that, as they have often worked with families who **distrust or have difficult relationships** with statutory sector agencies, they have needed to spend significant time establishing **relationships of trust** with them. By building extended periods of time for 'getting to know' families into their projects, it was explained that project staff have often taken on the role of a **general support worker** (rather than an employee of a physical activity intervention) that is interested in *all* aspects of a family's life, the concerns they have and their understanding of how (if at all) physical activity relates to the challenges that are most pressing for them.

## From intensive support to supported signposting

Following the relationship building stage of their work, several projects explained that they have typically begun their 'formal' interventions by devising **personalised programmes** of activity for their families. This has involved encouraging the family to attend bespoke physical activity sessions run by the project in venues and places that are familiar and convenient for the family to access. The families have been encouraged to come to these '**safe spaces**' to gain an introduction to the concept of 'achievable' exercise, and to meet other families who are going through the same experiences as them.

If this 'facilitated' introduction to physical activity is successful, the projects explained that they have then often worked with families to identify **places, venues and activities locally** that they can use beyond the immediate project setting. This, it is hoped, will help sustain their new habits and interest in being physically active together.

# A range of delivery styles (cont.)

## Direct activity provision

Most Families Fund projects have delivered at least some physical activity sessions themselves over the past four years. Whilst often different in scale and focus, a reasonably common set of 'principles of delivery' have been shared by projects. These include:

**Be flexible** – projects explained that they have adopted 'almost endlessly' **iterative approaches** to designing their sessions. They have embraced the '**test and learn**' philosophy of the wider Families Fund and have been continually vigilant about which aspects of their delivery have or have not been supporting families to be active. Projects staff have frequently explained that have been in 'continuous conversation' with their families about the venues being used, the times at which sessions begin, the types of activities being delivered and the styles of delivery that have been adopted.

**Be convenient** – many projects have explained that the most important principle influencing their service design has been the need for sessions to be **convenient**. Through building up knowledge and understanding of different families' lives - and the multiple, practical barriers to physical activity they face - projects explained that they have constantly tried to create sessions that **complement and work with the daily routines of family members**, thereby maximising their chances of being able to take part.

**Be useful** – several projects have also explained that they have encouraged engagement with their activities by ensuring sessions have a series of **uses or functions for different family members**. In addition to direct activity provision, for instance, some projects explained that they have provided guidance and support regarding housing, education, health and other services in and around their sessions so families could use them as opportunities to address ongoing issues in their lives.



# A range of delivery styles (cont. 2)

## 'Alternative' provision of opportunities and resources

In addition to directly delivering physical activity sessions, several projects explained they have also focused on **distributing resources and 'how to' guides** to families to encourage them to be active independently. Some projects said that following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the restrictions this placed on their ability to work with families face-to-face – they became increasingly dependent on this way of working, concentrating on distributing activity packs and other resources designed to inspire and support families to become more physically active 'under their own steam'.

## Information, education and behavioural prompts

Projects have also described the broader, **educational support** they have provided for family members' understandings of physical activity and physical literacy. They explained how they helped family members to understand the place of physical activity in their lives through 'wellbeing sessions', behavioural prompts and other types of interventions designed to help educate families about the relationships between physical health, mental health, physical activity, nutrition and resilience.

## The importance of partnership working

To conclude this section, it is important to note the value of partnership working for Families Fund projects over the past four years. As projects have often been led by organisations from outside the 'traditional' sport and physical activity sector, many of them have worked in partnership to ensure that the physical activity sessions and broader resources made available have been informed by professional expertise. Projects that have worked in this way have suggested that building relationships between organisations from different sectors has significantly benefited their overall projects: enabling different organisations to combine their knowledge, understanding and expertise to produce 'well rounded' programmes that combine the very best of their respective approaches.

Many Families Fund projects also developed wide-ranging partnerships to support referral processes, various forms of additional assistance and exit routes for their families. Several projects explained that foremost amongst these partnerships were those they developed with schools, and especially schools that have well-developed health, wellbeing and/or broader pastoral support services. Projects explained that in some of the communities in which they work, schools are often the only 'trusted' organisations into which families come into regular contact. They also noted that by working with children and young people, schools are often in the best places to identify issues and problems – even at a family level - that can benefit from additional support and assistance.

# Outcomes achieved

# Outcomes relating to physical activity

## Physical activity levels

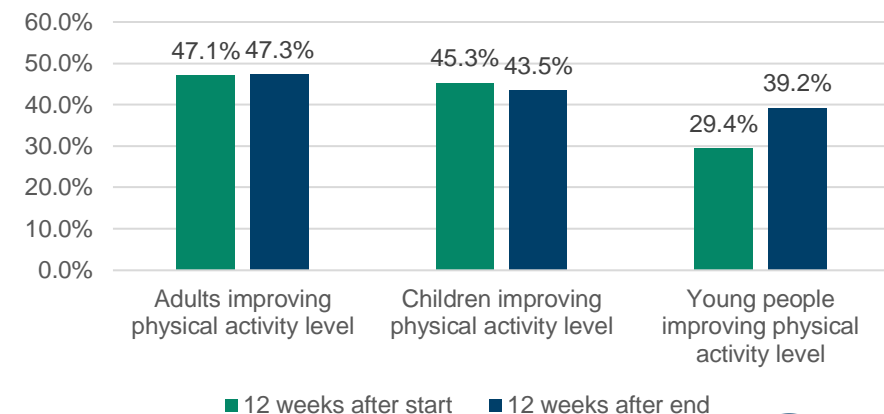
Adults, children and young people attending Families Fund projects have all reported widespread **positive impacts on their levels of physical activity**. Project staff have also noted significant changes amongst the families they had worked with. Some projects did note that they suspected they were having greater impacts on adults' and younger children's physical activity rates compared with older children and young people. This, they explained, had resulted from what they saw as the difficulty of delivering 'whole family' interventions that are as suitable and attractive for teenagers as they are for parents/carers and younger siblings.

**Programme monitoring data** shows that:

- After engaging with projects for approximately 12 weeks, **46% of adults** reported increases in their weekly minutes of (at least moderate intensity) physical activity.
- After the same period, **51% of children** and **50% of young people** reported increases in their daily minutes of physical activity.
- **47% of adults**, **45% of children** and **30% of young people** who were classed as 'inactive/less active' or 'fairly active' at baseline increased their physical activity classification by at least one category after 12 weeks.

- Approximately 12 weeks after **ceasing** engagement with their project, **47% of adults** who were 'inactive' or 'fairly active' at baseline still reported increasing their physical activity classification by at least one category, whilst the same was true of **44% of children** and **39% of young people**.
- These figures suggest that the majority of previously inactive or fairly active adults and children who improved their level of physical activity after 12 weeks **maintained the benefits over a longer period**. For young people, the figures indicate that a greater proportion of previously less active or fairly active participants increased their physical activity level after engaging for longer periods than they did after 12 weeks.

Percentage of inactive/less active/fairly active participants improving physical activity category



# Outcomes relating to physical literacy

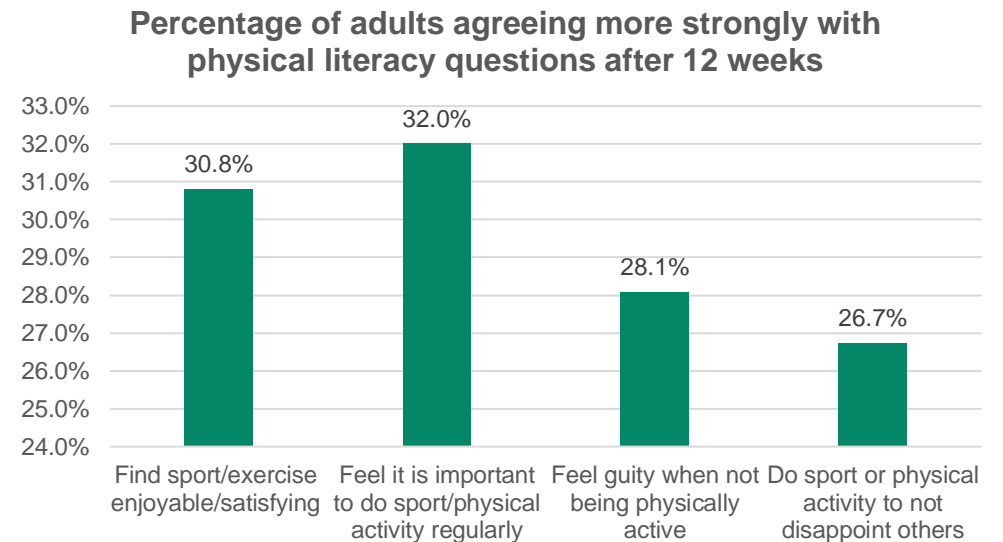
## Physical literacy levels

Adults, children and young people all qualitatively reported widespread positive impacts on their levels of physical literacy. Many said that project engagement had broadened their practical **knowledge** of how to be physically active, had increased their **confidence** and had also 'completely changed' their **understanding** of the benefits of being physical active.

**Programme management data** shows:

- After 12 weeks of engagement, between 26% and 32% of adult participants agreed more strongly that:
  - They find sport and exercise **enjoyable** and satisfying (31%)
  - It is **important** to do sport/physical activity regularly (32%)
  - They **feel guilty** when they don't do sport or physical activity (28%)
  - They do sport or physical activity because they **don't want to disappoint** other people (27%)
- Adults who increased their level of physical activity were more likely than others to have positively changed their attitude towards sport and physical activity. For instance, whilst 25% of adults with an unchanged physical activity level agreed more strongly with the statement '*I find sport and exercise enjoyable and satisfying*', this was true of 44% of adults who had become more physically active.

- Similar trends were also observed for measures of physical literacy amongst young people. For example, young people who increased their level of physical activity from baseline were **64% more likely** than those with an unchanging level of activity to agree more strongly with the statement '*I know how to get involved in sport and physical activity and improve my skills*'.
- Children's enjoyment of sport and physical activity - and their feelings of competency – **did not correlate significantly** with changes in their levels of physical activity (mainly because they were so positive about sport at first engagement).

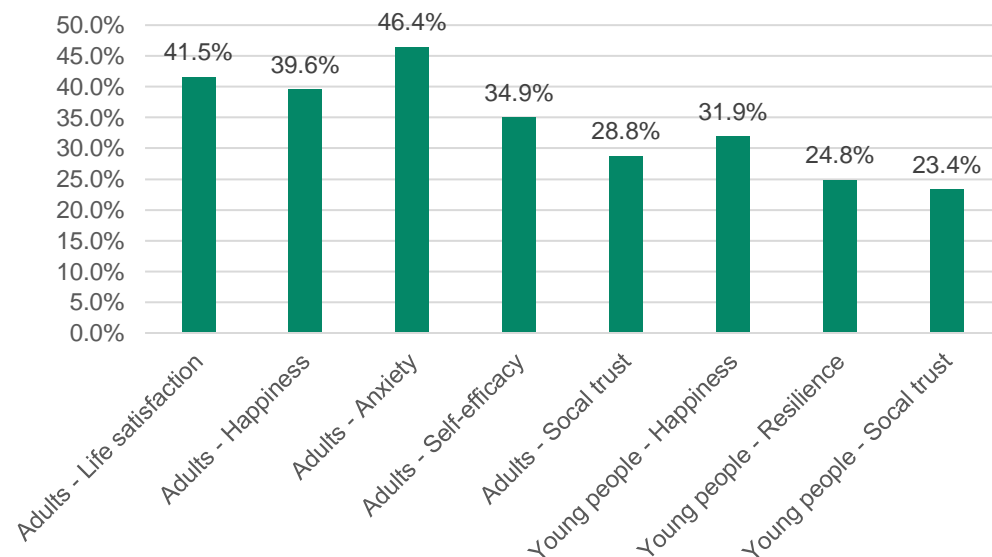


# Outcomes relating to personal and social wellbeing

## Happiness, confidence, self-efficacy and social trust

In interviews, many parents and carers explained how their experience of projects – and especially meeting new families and ‘getting out more’ – had positively influenced their – and their children’s - feelings of happiness, confidence, self-efficacy and social trust. Several project staff similarly explained that in addition to improving families’ levels of physical activity and physical literacy, they have also observed widespread improvements in family members’ mental health and their feelings of resilience.

Percentage of participants with improved personal and social wellbeing after 12 weeks



Programme management data shows:

- After 12 weeks, **42%** of adults reported being more **satisfied with life**, **40%** said they were **happier** and **46%** said they were **less anxious** than they were previously.
- **35%** also reported increased feelings of **self-efficacy** and **29%** reported improved levels of **social trust**.
- Adults who **increased their levels of physical activity** were more likely to report improvements in their personal and social wellbeing than those whose activity levels remained the same. For instance, whilst 53% of adults who increased their levels of physical activity reported increased life satisfaction, this was true of only 40% of those whose activity levels were unchanged.
- Amongst young people, 32% said they were **happier** after engaging with projects for 12 weeks, whilst 25% said they were more **resilient** and 23% said they were **more trusting of others**.
- In contrast to adults, it was only in relation to **happiness** that young people who had increased their level of physical activity were more likely to report improvements than those whose activity levels were unchanged.
- An overwhelming majority of children reported **unchanged** levels of happiness after 12 weeks of engagement. This is because over 90% of them were already very happy at first engagement.

# Wider personal and family outcomes

Several other positive impacts were also reported qualitatively by Families Fund participants and project workers throughout the evaluation. These include:

## Impacts on physical health

Parents and carers have reported positive physical health impacts from projects for both themselves and their children. Several have mentioned **weight loss** as a positive benefit, whilst others have referenced improved **motor skills** and **coordination**, especially amongst children and young people with physical disabilities and/or other impairments.

## Behavioural benefits (for children)

Parents/carers of children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties have also reported significant positive impacts from project engagement. They have noted that their children's abilities to **focus** and **concentrate** have improved and have also explained that their children's **confidence** and **interpersonal skills** have flourished in the positive social environments created by many projects.

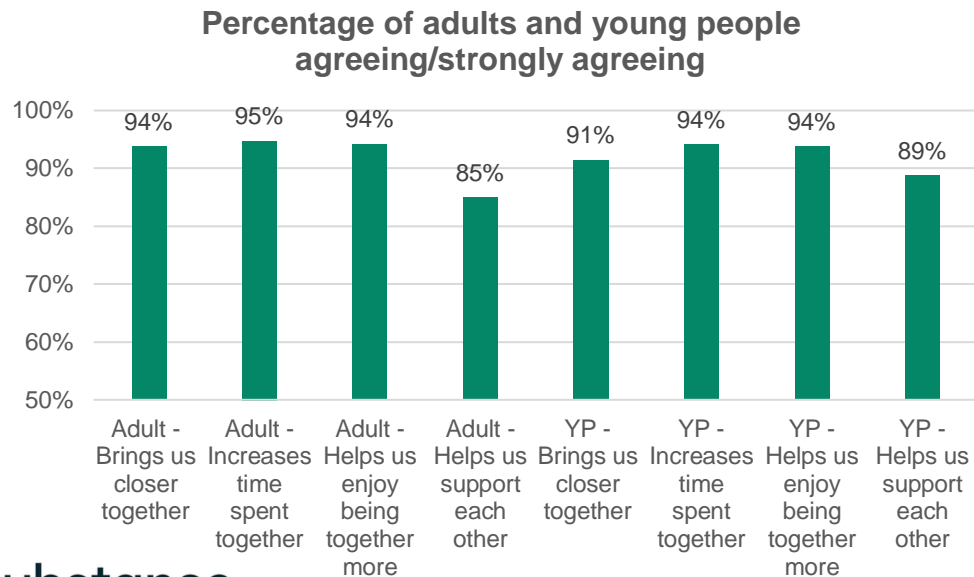
## New relationships and reduced isolation

Many family members have also reported the **new friendships and connections** they have made through projects as significant positive impacts. Parents and carers who were in some way 'isolated' prior to attending have explained that the new friendships they have made with other families have added significantly to their project experience, helping them to feel more **connected** with other people and the neighbourhoods in which they live. Crucially, several of these family members have also noted that the friendships they have built have developed into new supportive networks that will help to sustain family routines of physical activity into the future.

# Wider personal and family outcomes (cont.)

## Improved family relationship

Parents and carers have reported many positive 'family outcomes' from engaging with projects. With project activities becoming '**designated family time**' for many, several parents and carers have explained how important the activities have become as opportunities to **concentrate on one another** and build **new and improved relationships**. One mother whose children previously 'really didn't get on', explained that through playing together she 'all of a sudden realised they could work as a team when they wanted to', something she never previously thought possible. Another parent explained that she, her husband and her two children had all learned new practical skills through their project, but more importantly had 'learned that we can actually learn new things together'.



Regarding family relationships, **programme management data** indicates that:

- After 12 weeks, over **90% of adults and young people** said they agreed or strongly agreed that their family's attendance at projects had:
  - **Brought them closer together** (94% of adults and 91% of young people)
  - Increased the **amount of time** they were spending together (95% of adults and 94% of young people)
  - Helped them to **enjoy being together more** (94% both adults and young people)
- **85% of adults** and **89% of young people** also agreed/strongly agreed that projects had helped their family to '**support each other more**', whilst 71% of adults and 83% of young people said the project had helped their family to communicate better.
- Adults were also asked to estimate how often they and their family were physically active together **before and after their engagement** with projects. Whilst only 22% of adults said their family were regularly physically active prior to engagement (defined as 4 times a month or more), **this rose to 67% after engagement**.
- Over 92% of adults also said that they **intend to continue to be physically active** with their families after engagement with projects.

# The unique value of family-based physical activity interventions



# Why work with families?

The previous section has demonstrated the wide range of positive outcomes achieved by participants attending Families Fund projects. Whilst some – or even many – of these may also have been achievable through age specific, non-family physical activity interventions, the evaluation has been eager to understand the added value that ‘whole family’ approaches have brought. Below are a series of thoughts from project staff and other stakeholders.

## Family members being exposed to experiences they may otherwise avoid

Project staff have reported that many of the parents and carers who initially engaged mistakenly believed they were signing their children up for child-specific activities, not realising that adults could - and were expected to - get involved. Whilst this was challenging for some parents and carers, projects explained that handled correctly - with appropriate support, encouragement and reassurance – these moments presented **unique opportunities** for projects to have open conversations with different generations about physical activity. One project explained that amongst the families they have engaged, parents often initially did not want to take part in activities. However, once they had seen other parents and carers engaging – and had been ‘pestered’ by their own children – they had tentatively begun to take part, often surprising themselves with how much they enjoyed the experience.

## Shared (and reinforced) learning and experiences

Several projects also reported that family-wide approaches to delivery have enabled family members **to learn together** about new ways to be physically active, and the importance of physical activity in their lives. This learning, it was suggested, had occurred in all directions – from parents to children, children to children, and even children to parents – with all family members being exposed to new ways of connecting with and experiencing physical activity.

## Linking physical activity to other ‘positive experiences’

Projects also noted that in addition to enabling families to enjoy being physically active together, their activities had also aimed to deliver a range of other **‘positive experiences’** for family members including spending quality time together; building better relationships; and encouraging greater honesty and support for one another. Where these ‘family outcomes’ have been experienced alongside positive collective engagements with physical activities, some project staff suggested that they have become mutually reinforcing; ensuring that participants’ previously negative experiences of sport and physical activity have been replaced with more positive associations.

# Why work with families (cont.)?

## New ways of tackling mental health and confidence problems

Project staff from organisations specialising in working with people with mental health and other related concerns have explained that whole family physical activity interventions have become **important new tools in their wider services**. Whilst many traditional mental health support services are relatively formal and focused solely on the individual, it was explained that the relaxed and social nature of Families Fund activities have created new opportunities for participants to reflect upon and improve their mental health in **comfortable, safe and supportive surroundings**. One project worker explained that the 'the main difference with our Families Fund work is the atmosphere - it's voluntary, gentle, informal, it doesn't have someone with a clipboard or a desk so it's a more comfortable setting.' This, she went on to note, helps family members to share their feelings and experiences with one another – and other families – and to understand that others in the group may be experiencing similar feelings and problems to themselves.

## Maintained motivation and improved chances of sustained change

Finally, several project staff explained that, in their opinion, family members are more likely to **sustain** their increased engagement with physical activity when they have made changes together, rather than individually. Several projects said they believe that tackling physical inactivity at the level of the family – and getting as many family members involved as possible – increases the chances of family members **maintaining each other's motivation**, and of sustaining changes into the long term.

substance.

