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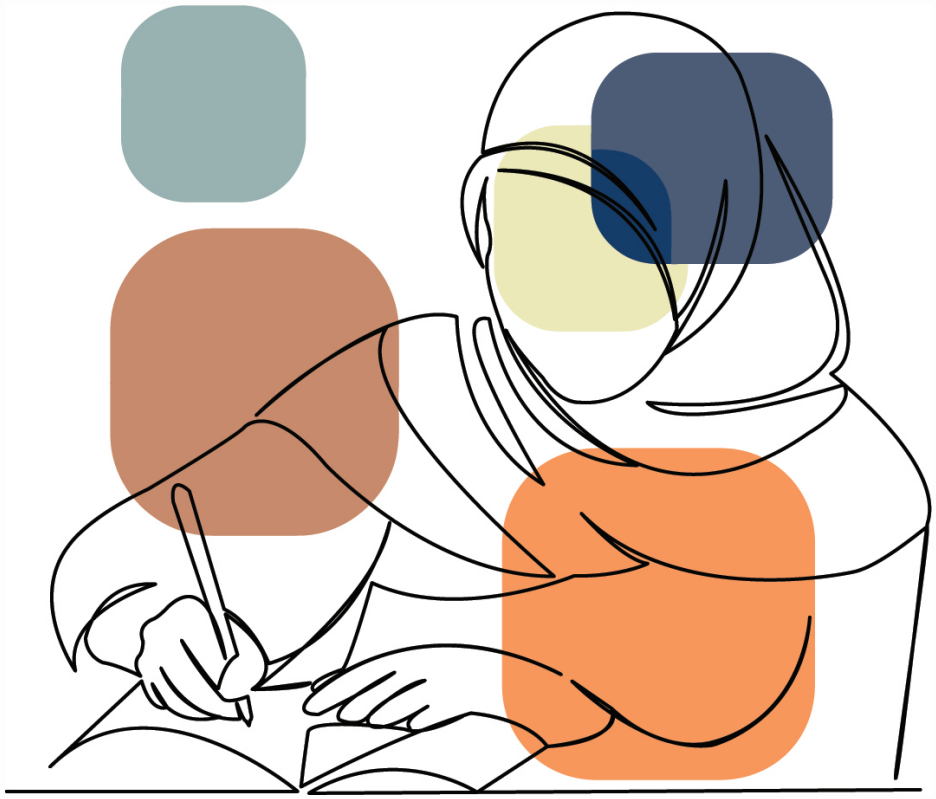
Research and Innovation



Inclusive Communities Evaluation Report

May 2024

SERIO
Informing Policy and Decision Makers

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Project Overview

Identifying the Need

The 2020 wave of Local Active Lives (LAL) data identified a significant difference between the percentage of people from Asian/ British Asian communities who are 'inactive' compared to 'inactive' people in other cultural groups. Prior to the pandemic this difference, or gap in activity, did not exist when comparing previous LAL data. Therefore, the Inclusive Communities project was proposed to enable the Live and Move programme to discover the reasons this gap had opened and find sustainable solutions for those communities affected.

SERIO carried out further qualitative investigation among community representatives to understand the issues affecting the Asian/ British Asian communities of Exeter when it came to physical activity. The research identified a number of COVID related issues including a climate of fear related to actual and perceived additional vulnerability to COVID, perceived fear of racial and/ or religious discrimination without the security of groups (lockdown ban on group exercise), social media misinformation, and the closure of important community focal points, such as the Mosques. These factors were recognised alongside pre-existing issues such as an absence of an exercise culture coupled with religious norms that make it more difficult to participate at times, long unsociable working hours, and a strong cultural emphasis on importance of work, and the importance of family time in what free time is available. This information was a starting point for the Inclusive Communities programme.

Project Aim

The main aim of the project was for the Asian/ British Asian citizens, living in Exeter (primarily in the Priority Areas) to feel motivated, confident, and able to access opportunities for physical activity that suit them. Opportunities that can become sustainable as part of their lifestyle, are supported by their communities, and help to increase their sense of belonging by supporting the community cohesion. A key part of this is the vision of Asian/ British Asian families being active together.

Evaluation Methodology

Data generated by the Inclusive Communities project was collected by the evaluation lead researcher via the following methods:

- Attendance at monthly Inclusive Communities steering group meetings between December 2021 and April 2024, including the Inclusive Exeter Lead, L&M Senior Manager, L&M Project Manager, and activity leaders.
- Process learning feedback gathered via monthly insight meetings with the L&M Project Manager.
- Four process interviews with key staff undertaken by phone between October 2022 and February 2023 including Inclusive Exeter Lead, L&M Senior Manager, L&M Project Manager, and volleyball group leader.
- Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 13 participants

conducted at the launch event (15 May 2022), through attendance at one yoga class (n=5, 07 Feb 2023), and via feedback from the yoga group leader.

- Survey data from participants collected from the Winter Badminton event.

- Three process learning interviews with key staff undertaken by phone during March 2024 at the end of the Inclusive Communities project including Inclusive Exeter Lead, L&M Senior Manager and L&M Project Manager.

- Seven activity and event case studies including telephone interviews with eight activity leaders.

Making it Happen

A number of activities aimed at the BAME community were already taking place in Exeter through Active Devon funding through the winter of 21/22 however, this funding was coming to an end. In order to continue these groups and further build on the programme, Live and Move, in partnership with Inclusive Exeter CIC, working under the umbrella of 'Inclusive Communities' continued the support, planning and delivering a number of physical activities throughout Exeter.

With the aim of narrowing, and ultimately closing the inactivity gap between Asian/ British Asian communities it was crucial to understand the communities' wants and needs in terms of physical activity and the barriers that currently exist. Mahi Ahmed, Community Officer, was appointed Project Manager due to his close connections with Inclusive Exeter and the Asian/ British Asian communities. He carried out an in-depth community and asset mapping exercise to identify the Asian/ British Asian communities in Exeter, key partners/ community influencers, and any existing resources and potential co-created opportunities that could be developed using a test and learn approach. Mahi worked closely with relevant community bodies, religious institutions, and leaders, such as the Mosque and Hindu temples to engage with the local communities, asset map, and establish a means of supporting existing or co-created initiatives.

Once complete, a steering group was then carefully assembled from community representatives. This group was viewed as an excellent means to engage and empower communities and provided a supportive space for the voices of both men and women to be heard. It served as a melting pot of ideas and a representative discussion group to explore the barriers, challenges, and experience of Asian communities in relation to physical activity.

Fasihullah Hakimi, a prominent member of the Muslim community, was nominated as Chair of the steering group and volunteered his support in this role and as the group leader for the volleyball and football groups. The steering group has

held monthly meetings since the start of the project, all of which have been well attended and provided useful insights and ideas. Key partners include Inclusive Exeter, Exeter Mosque, Exeter Hindu temple, Exeter Malayalee Association, Filipino Community Association, Afghan Community Association, Devon Bengali Association, Wellbeing Exeter and the Hong Kong Association also join.

Promotion

In order to increase awareness of the project within hard-to-reach communities, Inclusive Exeter/ Communities had a presence at several public and community events including the Jubilee Street event on the Cathedral Green, the Respect Festival in Belmont Park, the St Thomas Together Festival, as well as in Princesshay as part of the Exeter Street Arts Festival. It was hoped that through this kind of promotion, these activities would be able to reach more residents – not only those from a BAME community – and help to build more inclusive and cohesive communities across Exeter.

Word-of-mouth networking within Asian/ British Asian communities was influential in attracting participants to the launch day and its different activities. This was evidenced in the large number of Asian/ British Asian community members attending the launch day and the high numbers regularly attending the current activity groups.

"... we have done the social media, we have done the leaflets, and that kind of thing, but I think that word of mouth has been really important... some people have seen it on Facebook and I am not denying the usefulness of that and the leaflets but I think way above is word of mouth."

The Launch

In order to differentiate between the previous support of Active Devon and the new funding from Live and Move, a launch was held at Wonford Sports Centre on Sunday 15th May 2022, post Ramadan, and coinciding with the start of new Devon Bengali Association (DBA) Badminton sessions and Spring Park Walks. Invitations were sent to stakeholders, partners, local councillors, and local press. It was felt that word of mouth and social media amongst participants played a big part in its huge success which saw over 100 people attend to be active and socialise. On the day, introductions and speeches were given by Babu, the Badminton group leader, Shahar Lashkor, the Chair of the Devon Bengali Association and Kate Hannan from Inclusive Exeter. The local Devon County Councillor for Wonford & St Loyes, Marina Asvachin, also came to give support and was impressed by the project.

"It is an amazing project that is going on here and I am so proud to be able to come along and join in, it has been fantastic to see how many people have actually come along. This is great because it encourages diversity and inclusivity in the place that we live and call our home and it's just amazing to see." (Marina Asvachin)

The success of the launch was far reaching. Publicity and promotion were through social media channels, sending out press releases and an A5 colour flyer distributed to various shops and other venues. The Exeter City Council Communications Team also released a story on their website. There was a piece in the Express & Echo community news section and video clips of the launch were featured on NTV, one of the top five Bengali TV stations, which broadcasts

across Bangladesh and online around the globe. Exeter Living Magazine also published a piece in their June 2022 issue.

"It was a fantastic event but what I was really pleased with, is that we had people from really hard to reach communities come along and I can see a lot of people who didn't have the confidence to access those services or any physical activities like badminton or the walking group and they came and participated, I am really pleased with the project launch."

Walking group leaders from Devon Bengali Association

The Offer

Activities

A number of existing activities, such as Yoga and Zumba®, had been running through the winter of 21/22 supported by Active Devon funding. Yet with this funding having come to an end, Live and Move, through the Inclusive Communities project, were able to continue to fund the existing activities and further facilitate six new activities based on community demand fed back through the steering group – badminton, cricket, martial arts, park walks and volleyball, alongside additional Zumba® classes at Countess Wear and Wonford. Whilst the activities have been delivered by, and with particular focus on, the various ethnic minority communities and associations within the Inclusive Exeter family, they are open to everyone and take up by the wider community has shown signs of growing. Below is an overview of the activities, and a full suite of case studies is available in the appendix.

Badminton

The badminton sessions are held every Sunday afternoon at the Wonford Sports Centre with sessions between 1pm - 4pm. Three courts are booked and attract around 25/30 players each session. A large vinyl banner, basic racquets and shuttlecocks were purchased for use by the group with Live and Move funds. Sessions are run by the Devon Bengali Association but are open to all.

Volleyball

Volleyball is held at the Riverside Leisure Centre each Monday evening at 8.30pm, facilitated by Fasihullah Hakimi and members of the Afghan community but open to all. Average attendance is around 20/25 per session, over two courts. Members of the group also recently took part in an event held by the Coaver Club in conjunction with other teams from the Volleyball UK association.

Women's Yoga (Women only)

Women's Yoga is held regularly at The Mint Methodist Centre in a private room and delivered by Sonia Rashid. These attract anywhere between 8/18 people per session from all backgrounds. Current times are Tuesdays 11am-noon and

Thursdays 1-2pm. Once again, all are welcome.

Zumba®

Organised by Arlene Lewis from the Filipino Association, Zumba® classes are held each Saturday afternoon from 3.30 - 4.30pm at the Newtown Community Association Hall in Belmont Park. The sessions have proven to be hugely popular, and each session is attended regularly by at least 15/20 participants from all backgrounds.

Park Walks

After a winter break there are currently two Park Walk sessions per week. Sunday's walk starts from the Wonford Centre at 3pm for around an hour round trip. Led by Emdad Aziz and Lira Hossain from the DBA, attendance so far has been between 10/12 people. The Tuesday late afternoon walk is led by Fasihullah Hakimi and Mohammad Sardi from the Afghan Community Association. It starts at 5pm from the Arena Park car park and has also had an attendance of around 10 people. It is hoped that this will pick up as more people hear about it and the weather improves.

Martial Arts

The Martial Arts group started in November 2022. Man runs the group with his wife Kit, and a previous student of his from Hong Kong who is now the assistant coach. Sessions are held on Saturdays at the Wonford Sports Centre, and the class has around 18 members – although this number can vary week to week. The class is open to all but made up mostly of Hong Kongers. Man wants to expand the group and advertise more widely to attract more people of different nationalities.

Cricket

Devon Cricket provided free taster sessions, equipment and access to a local cricket green. Having established these, Devon Cricket stepped back and volunteers were able to continue independently.

Events

Alongside these activities the Inclusive Communities project supported communities to run multi-cultural events as listed below with full case studies available in the appendix.

Sports Fest

Sports Fest was a two-day event organised by Inclusive Exeter CIC and funded by Live and Move. It was aimed at BAME communities in and around Exeter, with the goal of promoting and encouraging physical activity and exercise through sports. The event gave a space for people to play the sports they enjoy, as well as try out new sports that they may not have had the opportunity to try out before. Through this physical activity, Inclusive Exeter hoped this would encourage people attending to socialise with new people and build a stronger BAME community in Exeter.

Winter Badminton Tournament

The Devon Bengali Association who run the badminton group hosted a Winter Badminton Tournament at the Wonford Sports Centre on the 24th and 25th February 2024. They were supported in

this event by Inclusive Exeter and Exeter City Council, and it was funded by Live and Move. The aim of the event was to promote physical activity as well as create strong community links through offering an event that was inclusive and diverse.

Impact

Increased Physical Activity

The impact of the project can be seen in the number of Asian/ British Asian participants taking part in a wide range of physical activities and the enthusiasm that exists to continue and grow these activities. It was felt that the project has successfully provided a varied and fun activity offer focusing on enjoyment and community and has been able to fill a gap in activity provision for the BAME communities in Exeter; taking positive steps to narrowing the physical inactivity gap that was identified post COVID.

"It is wonderful to see these organisations come together and participating. I have always believed that sport and physical activities bring people together, to understand each other, know each other, and it is a friendly association. It is not competitive, just people coming together, we have the walking group, and the badminton has recently started, and other activities. It is fantastic really." (Participant)

This offer has been informed each step of the way by the communities themselves through the steering group platform. It was suggested that the open engagement has enabled a better understanding of what works to engage the BAME community, but also what activities BAME communities are interested in. As a result, it was noted that the project has then been able to take that insight and learning and support and facilitate these activities to increase the opportunities for Asian/ British Asian communities to be more active.

"A key success for me is the desire to carry on, when we were coming to the end of the three months and I was asking people for some feedback and the importance that the people put on the activities, they were desperate for them to carry on, so I think that shows that they value it."

It was felt that the success of the activities and the number of attendees illustrates an appetite for physical activity amongst the Asian/ British Asian communities. It was also suggested that continuing to work closely with relevant community groups like Exeter City Community Trust, local leisure centres and community centres, the project has successfully engaged with Asian/ British Asian communities and seen to be enhancing community cohesion and integration.

Prior to the involvement of Live & Move, women-only Zumba® classes were offered at Belmont Park, funded by Active Devon. Based on estimates provided by the activity group leader, a mean of 700 women participated over calendar year 2021 (Table A below).

With the establishment of the Live & Move Inclusive Communities project, six new activities were introduced – badminton, cricket, martial arts, park walks, volleyball, and women-only yoga – alongside additional Zumba® classes at Countess Wear and Wonford. Based on estimates provided by activity group leaders, the estimated total number of attendees at these new classes between May 2022 and 2023 was 3,792 (Table B below).

This substantial increase in PA opportunities for Asian/ British Asian community members has significantly reduced PI in previously hard-to-reach communities.

Activity (existing)	*# sessions*	*# attendees (est.)*
Zumba® (Belmont Park)	40	15-20

Table A. *Existing PAs: sessions and attendees, 2021* (estimated) [source: estimates provided by activity group leader].

Activity (new)	*# sessions*	*# attendees (est.)*
Badminton	40	15-20
Cricket	15	10-15
Martial arts	18	28-30
Park walks	25	8-15
Volleyball	40	15-20
Women-only Yoga	65	12-15
Zumba® (Countess Wear)	12	10-15
Zumba® (Wonford)	21	15-20

Table B. *New PAs: sessions and attendees, May 2022 to 2023* (estimated) [source: estimates provided by activity group leaders].

Ethnicity and Gender

The Inclusive Communities project provided the opportunity for many Asian/ British Asian women from Exeter to sit at the steering group table and identify gaps in physical activity provision for women. Furthermore, they highlighted physical activities that interested them whilst articulating barriers to participation.

As a result, a women-only yoga group was set up attracting participants from multiple backgrounds including Muslim,

Ukrainian, Indian and British. Special measures were taken to book a private studio so that Muslim women were not able to be seen during class. The yoga leader encouraged a sense of freedom – for example, a laughing yoga session included a dance element where each woman shared dances/ moves specific to their country of origin; and had fun trying and comparing the moves. The women ended the session by embracing and being grateful for the social connection that the group provided. Participants in women-only Zumba® were encouraged to share popular music from their own culture, which the activity leader incorporated into the class. It was reported that the women enjoyed the mix of music, which instilled a sense of home and enabled them to better understand and experience each other's cultures.

Women-only yoga at Mint Methodist Centre

A women-only swimming offer was hindered due to a lack of female lifeguards available through Exeter Leisure, as well as limited availability of discreet swimming areas. Work is still being done to try to meet the specific needs in order to facilitate this activity yet remains a challenge. However, importantly, the views and voices of BAME women were being welcomed, heard and acted upon through their representation at the Inclusive Communities steering group.

"A lot of the women who go to yoga are women from cultures where their social interaction tends to be within family groups, or very much within a religious community, they are very strict about what they will or will not do. Anything that involves men, they just won't do it. So, providing yoga just for women in a space, which was very private. They come along week after week, and we've had to run two sessions, move to a bigger room. These are women from the lower socio-economic backgrounds for whom they just wouldn't do it if they had to pay, if they had to pay anybody."

Positive Family Experiences

Family time is very important for many of the Asian/ British Asian participants; it was felt that the Inclusive Communities project enabled conversations around the importance of being active and being active together. For instance, badminton classes enabled Asian/ British Asian families to come together, socialise and be active; thereby increasing their confidence and motivation to continue to be active.

"We have recently started the badminton group where the community comes together with parents, children and different age groups." (Badminton Group Leader)

"This is very good in the sense that everyone gets the time to enjoy together and do some healthy activity as well as promote interaction and social interaction." (Badminton Launch participant)

Further feedback indicated that weekly sessions enabled physical activity to become embedded into the weekly family routine. More Asian/ British Asian families were active together and recognised the

many benefits of exercise for mental and physical wellbeing.

"I live in Exeter, and this badminton programme is absolutely amazing. Before on Sundays, we don't do anything, stay at home, usually do nothing. We bring our kids here now, play, get involved, kids get involved, get to see all the community members, see the elders, the youngsters, everyone there. I absolutely love it. I will come every Sunday and spend as much time as I can on this. It is a very good programme and thank you so much to whoever did this." (Badminton Participant)

Antisocial Hours

For many of the Asian/ British Asian families in Exeter, their jobs involve long, unsociable working hours, and much stress. It was reported that providing the opportunity to take part in activities at convenient times, for free or at an affordable rate has addressed a major barrier and made physical activity an option for those that wish to take part. It is evident that for many the activities have helped to improve both their physical and mental health and wider wellbeing.

"I just came here because I like to do more physical activities like walking and help with my stress levels. My family, we have a lot of problems, tension and anxiety, so I think that it will help with my stress and I need to lose weight as well." (Walking Group Participant)

"The walking group is good for health, for mental and physical heath, so they're really happy; all the participants are really happy. I lead the park walk every week in the afternoon and people are really looking forward to it." (Park Walk Leader)

It was evident from the interviews conducted that many members of Exeter's Asian/ British Asian communities may work as taxi drivers and are sedentary for most of their day. Volleyball classes facilitated by Live & Move became an opportunity for drivers to be physically active, with some reporting games as the highlight of their week. The group was open to all and promoted itself on this basis, with many participants coming from Afghan communities. Interviews held with activity leaders and participants suggested that through playing in Volleyball Association tournaments, the group also aided community cohesion and had a positive impact on integration.

Community Interaction and Cohesion

Stakeholders and activity leaders felt that Inclusive Communities helped Asian/ British Asian citizens living in Exeter to feel motivated, confident and able to access physical activity opportunities. Classes were open to all and participation from the wider community was both welcomed and encouraged.

The project leaders reported increased engagement from multiple communities including Ukrainian and Hong Kong residents. For instance, during a women-only laughing yoga class, a Ukrainian participant demonstrated a dance move which a British participant recognised as similar to Morris dancing. They both shared the move with the rest of the class.

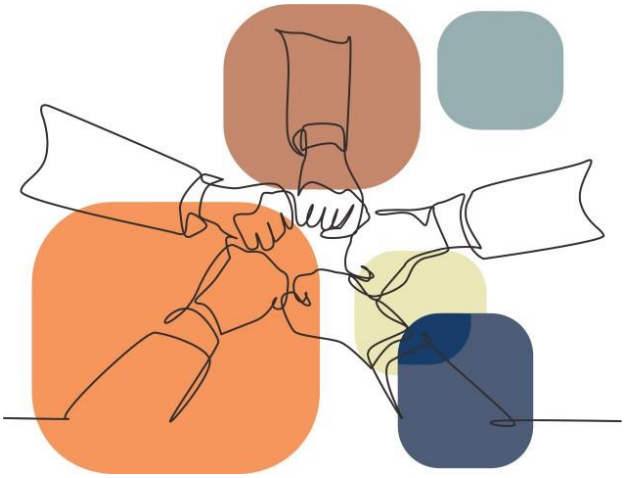
This wider community interaction and cohesion was also evident in the close connections and support given to new refugees arriving in Exeter. The Project Manager reported that enabling refugees access to physical activity and social

interaction helped to develop friendships and decrease isolation.

"...they are benefiting from meeting with others from their community, from the different diverse ethnicities. That gives a lot of added value, that people are not feeling so isolated, so I think the social thing is a real absolute key to what is helping it develop and grow."

"I think that it is bringing communities together that wouldn't normally meet each other. There are also members of the wider community or White British people who perhaps wouldn't meet with ethnic minorities, but they are meeting in that setting, which is great."

This was also seen in the multicultural events; Sports Fest in August 2023, and the Winter Badminton Tournament in February 2024. These events, whilst having a primary focus on sport and exercise, also served as an opportunity for different communities to come together regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or sporting ability. Sports Fest in particular gave people a chance to try sports they would not otherwise have the opportunity to experience, but the event went beyond promoting and inspiring physical activity. People brought games and food with them from their own cultures, allowing people to experience cultures different from their own. This cross-cultural networking served to bring all those in and outside of the BAME community together, and thus aimed to create stronger community links.



Making it a Success

Community-Led Not Service-Led

Both stakeholders and the Project Manager felt that the project being community-led as opposed to service-led was another key element to its success. By placing the community and those with lived experience at the centre of the process it was felt that the project was able to draw on the community's local knowledge, skills, perspective and networks when designing and delivering the project. Moreover, it was suggested that the community-led approach enabled the project to understand what was needed and could be improved, ensuring that activities were set up based on the unique issues and assets in each community, thus making the process an inclusive one. It was felt that the value of this engagement and shared leadership was seen in the social capital created and the communities' sense of shared ownership, contributing to the sustainability of the project.

"Over the years, I have heard funders and agencies say that working-class ethnically diverse communities are hard-to-reach, don't work together and don't integrate.

However, through our work with Inclusive Communities we have challenged this perspective and proven that such a belief is wrong. We have shown that if we give working-class communities a voice, respect and a stake, they don't only work together but they also take ownership and pride of their work – this is exactly what's happening with the Inclusive Communities project."

Well-Connected Project Manager

Mahi, the Inclusive Communities Project Manager, worked closely with community bodies, religious institutions and leaders at the Mosque and the Hindu temple in order to engage local communities, map assets and establish a means to either support existing, or co-create new initiatives. Stakeholders identified Inclusive Exeter's existing network coupled with Mahi's knowledge of both the cultural and social structures within Asian/ British Asian communities were critical to increased engagement. Having that connection with the Asian and British Asian families within Exeter and an existing trust and rapport enabled the successful engagement seen in this project. Flexibility in working hours was also felt to be critical to the project and the community engagement, recognising the unsocial working hours of many of the communities in which the project was trying to engage and accommodating this by taking phone calls late into the evening and at weekends. Process learning interviews identified that in order to engage with the BAME communities telephone was the best method with many not regularly checking emails or working in roles that were desk based to enable this.

"I think Mahi played an absolutely key role in helping to develop it and help with all the networking but the other key people that he has brought to be involved as well."

"Inclusive Exeter already had strong networks there which they had established, so they had very good connections and contacts and that continues to develop all time."

Engaged, Representative Steering Group

It was felt that a well selected, representative steering group has also enabled the reach and achievement of the project. The enthusiasm and commitment shown by the steering group members and group leaders has enabled the project to grow and gather valuable insights. They have been able to be a voice for their communities, communicating those physical activities which are of interest to those from the Asian/ British Asian communities and importantly the barriers which exist that hinder their participation. As a group of volunteers, many of whom work shifts, their interest and energy for continuing to support and run activities is encouraging for the longevity and sustainability of the project going forward.

"You need those co-ordinators, drivers, movers and shakers and I think that this group have got it in abundance, which is fabulous."

"It just felt great, the energy in the room, the passion, the ownership by all the different representatives from different communities, and they're continuing to grow it as well as bringing new people."

"Inclusive Exeter was capacity built to be able to take the lead (with much support from Mahi as Project Manager) and deliver this initiative for South Asian communities... this is quite pertinent to the success of the project and something we could compare with what is happening elsewhere in Exeter."

Volunteers

One of the main strengths of the Inclusive Communities project highlighted by both Stakeholders and the delivery team is its many willing, committed and enthusiastic volunteers who run the activities and sit on the steering group. Much investment has been made, both by Live & Move and Inclusive Exeter, to train group leaders, set up the steering group and provide the tools to enable the group to be self-sustaining in the future.

It was felt that with support and through their involvement in the design process and decision making the project saw volunteers grow in capability empowering them to run activities independently whilst deepening the community resilience and confidence.

"One of the guys has already done the training and we would like the others to do it as well, so they feel that they can run those walks independently. It doesn't have to be part of Inclusive Exeter; they can go off and do that themselves. I do think training gives people a bit of confidence."

It was recognised that many projects such as this struggle with finding such willing and enthusiastic individuals to volunteer their time and expertise, however this has not been the case for Inclusive Communities. Many volunteers stated how they felt part of the local community, and wanted to show their appreciation by helping where their skills could be useful and beneficial to others. It was also suggested that this way of 'helping out' was already well established in their community groups, and there is a real want to be involved, especially after the isolating nature of COVID-19. However, the main reason cited from leadership and volunteers themselves was that there were no existing opportunities for them and their communities, and so the BAME community created opportunities for themselves. It was recognised that this idea of community-led work has been the cornerstone for Inclusive Communities' success and has meant communities are taking ownership and leadership of these groups, creating opportunities to become self-sustaining.

"Whether they had funding or not, they would be getting together and organising things so whether it is in their place of worship or in their own homes or in green spaces, they're already doing that to a large extent. So, the foundations were already there."

"People felt isolated, there was nothing for them. People who are willing to do anything volunteer to engage with this."

"As a result, because community took ownership, community took leadership, so now, they've managed to get some more funding from their own work as well."

Relationship Building

It was felt that building and sustaining connections and relationships was at the heart of the project, and it was through these genuine connections communities found a strength and power to make a positive change in setting up and running activities that their communities had

requested. It was, however, recognised that building these connections takes time and consistency to build that trust that had, in many cases, been damaged by previous experiences.

"One of the things that is very important that I learned whilst working with marginalised communities, is achieving people's trust because this group have been misguided and let down by many funders and agencies on many occasions."

Challenges

Gatekeeping Leadership

A key challenge identified by delivery staff was that of community gatekeeping by key leaders in the community. Instances of sexism and homophobia highlighted the misogynistic values held by some higher up, leading to female staff being disregarded or ignored. This created a barrier when discussing issues around incidents or concerns of discrimination, especially when raised by women.

"How would he know elderly issues such as a BAME woman or a person who is struggling with their sexuality. They will be the first people who will do that, who they will victimise."

It was recognised that governmental organisations and funding bodies across the UK still struggle with diversity, especially concerning BAME representation. This was a challenge faced by the Inclusive Communities project, as it was felt by some that many decision makers holding positions of power were white and middle-class. This under-representation created a disconnect between leadership and the community, and led to misunderstandings such as the BAME community being assumed as 'hard to reach'. However, it was felt that this was not the case, as seen by the wide engagement from the BAME community with the project. Whilst there has been an identifiable gap between the community and leadership, this has come from leadership and its disconnect rather than from the community itself. It was felt that this is a result of underrepresentation of BAME identities in the initial project management, and is a challenge that could be easily mitigated in the future.

"When people like myself, like professional, we become hard to reach by this community. We create this gap between people who we are supposed to be working with... the problem isn't a community problem it's professionals problem with how we are structured."

Community Divisions

Another key challenge faced by Inclusive Communities was that of instances of discrimination, both in-person through verbal abuse, and in online spaces. It was reported that there was some controversy surrounding the use of the word 'multicultural' when used to describe the Sports Fest event in August 2023;the advertising of an event as 'multicultural' led to some backlash from local residents

that the event was excluding anyone not part of the BAME community. Whilst this reaction was confusing to the organisers as the event was open to all, regardless of being BAME or not, they did recognise that future events may need to be specified as not only being for the BAME community to increase the cross-cultural cohesion and community integration that they set out to achieve.

However, an unexpected challenge was the discrimination faced from within.communities. Process learning interviews identified tensions between groups, highlighted a hierarchy from within communities over class or forms of employment. This became somewhat problematic and required more work to build bridges between and within communities and encourage people to come together.

"It's not just race but with class as well... people who get all this discrimination, they get double marginalisation from their own community, plus that wider community as well."

Institutional and Systemic Challenges

It was highlighted that many challenges with tackling inactivity in BAME communities revolve around existing structural inequalities and was often the root of many barriers the delivery team faced. It was felt that these systematic challenges are reflected by the fact that there was no provision for BAME communities until after the pandemic when it became clear that they were a highly vulnerable group which had been significantly impacted by COVID-19 and had resulted in increased levels of inactivity. People in the BAME community, particularly those of Asian descent, were particularly fearful for their health as they had a greater propensity to catching COVID and consequently received higher levels of discrimination when out in public. This meant that many people isolated themselves, suffering from poor mental health as a result, as well as from lower levels of activity. Granted, that provision of funding was then allocated, however it was felt that if the BAME community had been recognised as a vulnerable group before the pandemic, it could be that those issues that arose for the community could have been mitigated or lessened.

"After the pandemic ethnically diverse communities in Exeter felt really isolated and also our Local Active Lives survey has indicated that clearly as well, that activity within ethnically diverse communities in Exeter was quite low during that pandemic time."

Much of the work conducted by Inclusive Communities was around challenging misconceptions and stereotypes around the BAME community. It was felt that this discrimination is widespread. An example of this discrimination was provided stating that when groups want to book facilities for their sports groups, it was perceived that they have been denied bookings based on their accent or appearance. Verbal abuse was also relatively common, with negative comments being received during park walks or when groups gather before activity sessions. This highlights the discrimination faced by the BAME community on a daily basis and shows the need for specific provision to ensure the community are supported in getting more physically active and to help tackle these systemic inequalities that create additional barriers specifically for the BAME community.

"But the amount of hostility we had to deal with at the start... People use local facilities and then experience racism."

Practicalities

Stakeholders and programme staff felt that more allocated funding would also support additional needs that the BAME community may have, especially regarding appropriate facilities. A swimming group specifically for Muslim women was discussed after interest was expressed by the community, however the group ran into difficulty with the practicalities around how the sessions would be run. In order for the group to go ahead, the women needed to be able to remove their head coverings to swim. This meant they required an enclosed and private swimming pool where they would not be disturbed, as well as a female lifeguard. These were significant obstacles and despite some of the women volunteering to train as lifeguards to ensure the group was safe, they could not find an appropriate venue and struggled to find a day and time they would be able to regularly meet due to family commitments.

"Women only swimming is a challenge. One reason is the lifeguard, but the other thing is when those women say they want somewhere private they mean private. Nobody able to see in through windows, that kind of thing. Now I believe the North Brooks swimming pool is very private, but it is the only one. The new St Sidwell's Point isn't one that these women will go to. I would like to see that happen."

"It also needs to be a time that will suit them as a lot of them are mothers and has to fit in with their children. I would like to see it happen."

Representative Steering Group

The initial selection of representatives to provide a voice for their communities was highlighted as a challenge. Care was needed to recognise and manage community dynamics and hierarchy and ensure that those recruited would truly represent communities with which the project was trying to engage.

It was suggested that a challenge with setting up steering group meetings revolved around finding time that worked with a variety of working schedules. It was felt to be vital that steering group meetings are made up of people that represent all groups in the community, and so it is important to be adaptable and flexible to the anti-social and often changing hours that many in the BAME community work. However, this can be challenging to arrange and so requires careful planning and communication. It is also important to recognise that not all people regularly have access to or use laptops and so must be reachable in ways other than email.

"These people don't look at email. These people they don't have time to reply to anybody's email, because they don't work in the area. They don't open their computer like us. Their work, they're in a very physical type of work. So you need to make a phone call."

"There is a lot of homework done to make the steering group run smoothly. Who you go to, who you reach out to? Knowing the people and the communities and being aware of those politics to put the right people together is important."

Looking to the Future

Creating Sustainability

Various cost saving/ recovery measures were tested in the final phase of the the project. The results of these suggest that the majority of activities funded via the Inclusive Communities project could achieve 100% cost recovery and be financially sustainable by the end of the funding period..

- A donation box was made available at most classes.
- Badminton at Wonford Community Centre offset venue costs via donations.
- Devon Cricket provided free taster sessions, equipment and access to a local cricket green. Having established these, Devon Cricket stepped back.
- Martial arts are fully sustainable via participant fees.
- Park walks are nearly zero cost and run by volunteers.
- Volleyball is cheaper during warmer months as no indoor court is required.
- Women-only yoga, women-only Zumba®. Cost of instructor and venue hire are a challenge to financial sustainability.

Stakeholders explained that with sustainability in mind, the project explored the appeal of providing training to people from these communities to become activators, activity leaders, trainers, and so on; giving them the confidence to lead while also giving people within the community confidence by providing them with activators etc who actually understand their requirements/ lifestyle. This offer was well received and saw several volunteers take up the training.

At the end of the project, the Project Manager reported that, Cricket, Zumba®, Volleyball and park walks are fully self-sustained.

It was recognised by the Project Manager that achieving 100% participant-funded activities is difficult in many cases, particularly for women-only activities. Many attendees at women-only yoga did not work and could not afford even a small contribution. Equally, as the cost-of-living continues to impact, it is likely that – without some form of continued funding – many of these activities will not be able to continue due to operating costs. One stakeholder has suggested that physical inactivity reduction within BAME communities is likely to take longer than equivalent initiatives for ethnic majority communities; therefore, funding bodies might consider an extended duration to

establish BAME physical inactivity reduction initiatives.

Better Connections Project

The Inclusive Communities project saw Live and Move collaborate with Inclusive Exeter with a shared vision of bringing communities together and providing opportunities to those from marginalised communities. Although some of the activities have become self-sustainable, with others making steps towards this, the need for the security of long-term funding was evident to continue to fund those activities where cost was a barrier but yet where need was at its greatest; this was often the women's groups.

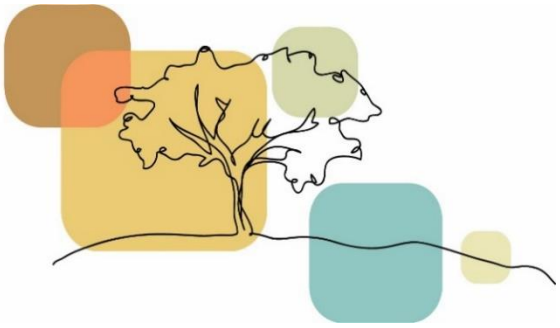
With Live and Move's encouragement and support, Inclusive Exeter has received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to run a three-year project working with grassroots ethnically diverse communities in Exeter and the surrounding areas. The Better Connections project will support Inclusive Exeter to continue its drop-in service, while also continuing the work of the Inclusive Communities project by funding the physical activities programme and cultural events that have been established. Although the funding will not stretch to achieve all the project's ambitions it will provide security to continue what has already been built and enable more time to work towards self-sustainability and seek long-term funding.

"We would like to thank the National Lottery players and the National Lottery Community Fund most sincerely for this grant. We would also like to thank Mahi Ahmed from Exeter City Council and Live and Move teams, who worked with us to secure this funding."

Inclusive Exeter expressed that being a part of the Inclusive Communities project with Live and Move's support was a positive experience for them as an organisation, which led to them being more widely recognised in the local community as an organisation which effectively brings people from different cultures together. It was felt that Live and Move were able to offer expertise in bid writing and support Inclusive Exeter to grow their infrastructure. It was also felt that collaborating with an already well established and connected organisation such as Inclusive Exeter and empowering them through funding, support, knowledge transfer and expertise has allowed Live and Move at the end of the project to step back knowing that the work will continue and grow in the safe hands of Inclusive Exeter under the Better Connections project, achieving the Live and Move aim of sustainability post funding.

Replicating Success: Lessons Learnt

This evaluation has highlighted what has made this project successful as well as the barriers and challenges that future projects should be aware of and plan to mitigate or create contingencies to handle. There have been many lessons learnt throughout the lifecycle of the project, and below are the key learnings that highlight what has made this project



a success. These key learnings should be considered if attempting to replicate the success of this project.

- **Adopt a community-led approach.** It was recognised that community-led change is hard – it takes time, skill and trust but, it also represents the potential to generate greater impact.
- **Engage volunteers through genuine relationship building.** Volunteers embedded in the community and with a sense of ownership become advocates of the project, spreading the word and dedicating their time and energy to the cause.
- **Employ a well-connected culturally aware Project Manager.** Mahi's professional knowledge of both the cultural and social structures within the Asian community, and more importantly, the people, were felt to be key to the success of this project.
- **Invest in BAME groups to stop creating a divided society.** Evidence from the research indicates that there needs to be an infrastructure organisation like Inclusive Exeter supported more financially and with other resources so that they can carry on their work in the longer term.
- **Recruiting BAME workers with a lived experience of inequality will be a way forward.** Ensuring that the BAME voice is heard when developing and implementing projects which aim to support these communities.
- **Support or collaboration with a grass roots, well connected, established organisation** such as Inclusive Exeter where there is an existing network and trust.

These key learnings indicate that the community-led approach conducted by the Inclusive Communities project is the biggest contributor to its success, and if these key learnings are considered for future projects, the success of the Inclusive Communities project should be possible to replicate in other areas of the UK.

Appendix

- Case Study - Badminton
- Case Study - Martial Arts
- Case Study - Volleyball
- Case Study - Women’s Only Yoga
- Case Study - Zumba
- Case Study - Sports Fest
- Badminton Event (Feb 2024)

Case Study – Badminton

About the Group

Badminton is a well-established group and has been running for four years. The sessions are run by Devon Bangladeshi Association, however, attracts people from a wide range of ages and nationalities. Sessions are held at the Wonford Sports Centre, and attendance currently stands at around 30 people a session, although this can differ week on week. The group held a Badminton Tournament in February 2024, and the popularity of the competition for both players and spectators has meant that they are looking at options to make this an annual event. The group is still funded by Inclusive Communities and so sessions have remained free to attend for all.

Activity Leader

Badminton is co-facilitated by Emdad and Al-Amin. They took up responsibility for the group as it gave them a regular opportunity to stay fit as well as promote the sport they enjoy to a wider audience and grow the group. The group also acts as a way for people to socialise and engage with others and has created a mini community in and of itself. Neither Emdad or Al-Amin were given specific training by Live and Move to run the group. However, Al-Amin had been involved in a badminton group when he had previously lived in London and used this experience to help take the group forward.

Promotion

The group is only advertised online on the Inclusive Exeter website and through word of mouth of its attendees. However, these forms of promotion have been incredibly successful, reflected by the group's increasing numbers.

"When I first joined, I saw something around 15 people. Now, every weekend we have sometimes over 30." (Group Leader)

Benefits and Impact

The obvious benefit of the group has been an increase in physical activity of its members. This was the core aim of Live and Move, and Sport England, and is one which has been clearly achieved. The group has also been successful in promoting the sport more widely, and has proved so popular that they were able to host a Badminton Tournament in February 2024. This increase in exercise has had a knock-on effect of also increasing the mental wellbeing of its members with many consistently striving for improvement, and receiving a sense of achievement and accomplishment.

'[Benefits] *ranging from obviously physical exercise, spending time with people, mental health issues. It's really helpful for people having stress or anxiety." (Group Leader)*

The group also serves as a social hub, with around 30 members for each session. Attendees come from a variety of ethnic

backgrounds, with the majority being of Asian descent such as Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Filipino, but also have some White British members too. This cross-cultural cohesion is a key feature of the group, and allows people to socialise with many different people. The group also attracts people from a range of ages, with the group being open to children so families can join together.

"People come with their kids. Spending good quality time with kids today is hard nowadays, everywhere you go you either have to pay, or it is really difficult to accommodate with timing being a big issue." (Group Leader)

The success of the group has been evidenced by the Badminton Tournament held in February 2024. The idea for the event came from the group members themselves as they enjoyed the sport and wanted to hold an event that was more competitive to try out their skills, and a chance to promote the sport. However, it was also an opportunity to create a memorable day that could bring people together. The group sourced funding from Inclusive Exeter, which allowed them to host two full days of competitive games with food and socialisation also being key elements of the event. It showed that events such as these not only promote and encourage physical activity, but also blend these aspects in with making friends and coming together as a community.

Challenges and Future Directions

For the time being, the group still rely on funding from Inclusive Communities to run the sessions. However, they believe that the group has the strong potential to become self-sustaining as extended funding could allow them to explore more options as the group continues to grow. The money would be used for further promotion as well as buying more equipment for the ever-expanding group. This would be an attractive feature for new members, especially children who are not able to bring their own and therefore rely on the group to provide racquets and proper shuttlecocks. Once the equipment has been bought, this would be a big step towards group progression and expansion, as well as self-sustainability.

Case Study - Martial Arts

About the Group

The Martial Arts group started in November 2022. Man runs the group with his wife Kit, and a previous student of his from Hong Kong who is now the assistant coach. Sessions are held on Saturdays at the Wonford Sports Centre, and the class has around 18 members – although this number can vary week to week. The class is open to all, but made up mostly of Hong Kongers. Man wants to expand the group and advertise more widely to attract more people of different nationalities.

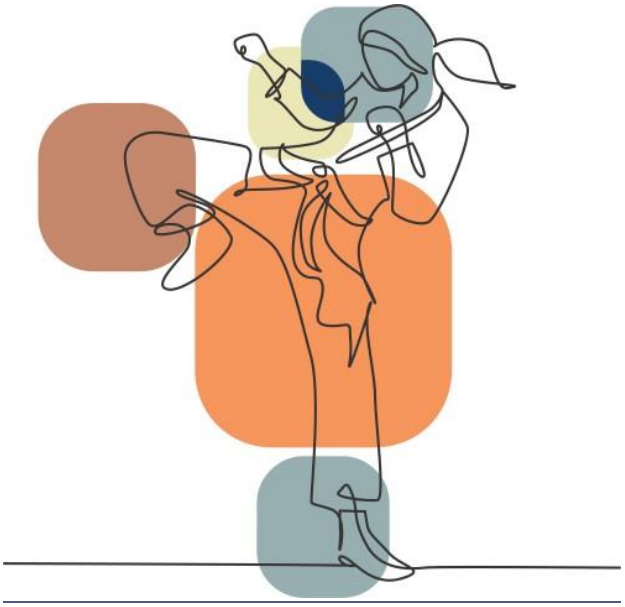
Activity Leader

Man Ko is an incredibly experienced martial artist, and has been teaching taekwondo for 30 years, Muay Thai for 15 years, and has refereed international tournaments as well as sat as a judge at the international championships in Taipei in 2018. While he was living in Hong Kong, he was a social worker and so has a passion for helping others and promoting good physical and mental health. He has only lived in Exeter for two years, but wanted to contribute something good and meaningful to the community that would bring people together. Man used his expertise to start the group in order to encourage and promote regular physical activity and good health, and believes strongly in an "investment in health". Man's extensive training and expertise is the key to the group's success and has allowed the group to flourish.

"I want to promote that everybody can establish a lifelong sport, for their physical health and for their mental health... I hope everybody can enhance their physical condition." (Activity Leader)

Promotion

Inclusive Exeter helped with the promotion of the group through flyers and social media posts on their Facebook and Instagram pages. However, the most successful form of promotion has been through word of mouth within the Hong Kong community. This has resulted in a vast majority of Hong Kongers in the class, and Man hopes to successfully promote the group more widely to attract people from lots of different communities.



Benefits and Impact

A key success of the group is the successful promotion and encouragement of physical activity – a core aim of Live and Move. Members have reported higher levels of fitness, and many have become regular members as they actively enjoy the class. However, the group has also

facilitated social interactions and has strengthened community bonds. Members have developed strong friendships with each other, and the group has become a space for socialising as well as physical activity.

"This is a very stable habit they have created and established. And I see everybody is very healthy and in very good physical condition." (Activity Leader)

Martial arts rely not just on the physical, but serves to enhance mental wellbeing as well as it requires a sense of calm and control. As a past social worker, Man finds this aspect of the class as equally important as partaking in physical exercise. He has seen how this has increased levels of confidence in group members, with higher levels of self-esteem that come with learning a self-defensive sport and the ability to protect oneself. This also requires teamwork and a level of discipline, and these skills have been improving too.

"They are more confident, I think their self image maybe a certain degree of enhanced. And the children – after training, the parents told me that discipline is getting better." (Activity Leader)

Challenges

Language has been identified as a particular barrier in the delivery of the group. Man worries that his English is not as fluent as he would like, and this might present a barrier to newcomers, especially those who might also have English as a second language. As the majority of participants are from Hong Kong, they regularly speak Cantonese which may further isolate newcomers. Having a large proportion of the group coming from one community may also put off other people from joining. They may feel excluded or isolated as people tend to group together in their known community groups. As a result, the group have had issues with retaining new members, but Man is attempting to remedy this by continuing to reach out across different minority communities to increase cross-cultural cohesion of the group.

Another challenge raised was that of visas. Man has only been living in the UK for the last two years which means he still has limitations on his visa, including not being able to be a professional coach or sportsman. This has prevented him from being a full-time professional coach or opening a martial arts school. However, given his extensive international qualifications, he has been able to register as a qualified instructor under the Taekwondo Association in the UK. This does require him to attend training courses run by the Taekwondo Association, but he is happy to do this if it allows him to teach martial arts officially.

"This is my expertise, and I want to contribute my ability to Exeter." (Activity Leader)

Future Directions

Man is looking to expand the group outside of the Hong Kong community. More promotion through social media could increase group numbers. The group has also been in contact with Devon County Council about promoting the group to asylum seekers as they believe that they would benefit from not only being more physically active, but reduce their social isolation and increase their mental wellbeing. This does present its own barriers such as arranging transport; however, group members have volunteered to organise and drive a bus for any asylum seekers that wish to attend and are unable to make their own way.

The martial arts group is currently funded by Inclusive Communities, but the group are looking at ways to become self-sustaining. This could see the class expand to two or three classes a week. Ways to do this could be through donations from the Hong Kong community, either directly to the class or to Inclusive Exeter more broadly to make more money available for other activities outside of just martial arts.

Case Study – Volleyball

About the Group

Volleyball has been running for five years, and holds its sessions at Riverside Leisure Centre in Exeter. Around 15 people attend each session and split the cost of the court between them. Volleyball attracts a mix of people, but the majority are Afghan and Bengali taxi drivers due to the schedule working well around their work times. Attendees enjoy the group and went on to win the volleyball tournament held at the Sports Fest event in August 2023. The team have taken part in the annual volleyball tournament held at the Coaver Club in Exeter and have won the tournament for the past three years.

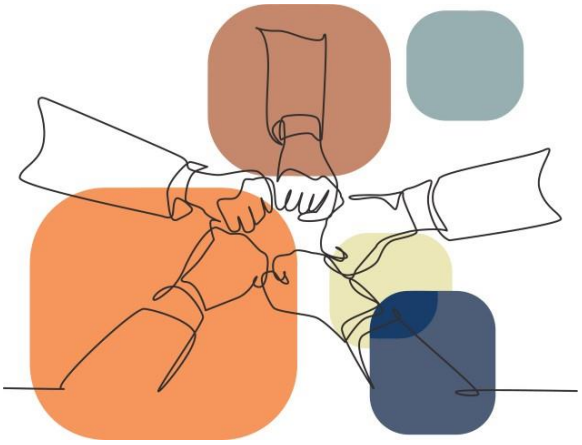
Activity Leader

The group is run by Fasihullah Hakimi, who also sits on the board of directors for Inclusive Exeter. He volunteered for volleyball as he is passionate about the sport and wanted to contribute his passion and his time to the community. He started the group to provide a way for the community to come together and exercise, and the group has now expanded to include a range of people from various backgrounds and professions. Live and Move supported Hakimi to move the group forward by booking courts at Riverside. The group had previously struggled with booking space and Hakimi believes the reason for this was their strong accents.

"Everybody loves it because they haven't got any other opportunity to do exercise. Their body fitness is better and they are improving." (Activity Leader)

Promotion

The volleyball group is advertised through the Inclusive Exeter webpage, and was further promoted during Sports Fest where they hosted a tournament, attracting a range of different teams.



Benefits and Impact

The main benefit has been an increase in physical activity, especially for those who have little opportunity to exercise. Hakimi works as a taxi driver, and knows his colleagues are sedentary for many hours of their working day as there is little opportunity for physical exercise due to their busy schedules and antisocial working hours. These sessions give people time in the week to partake in enjoyable and social exercise.

"Not only the physical body is improving, their fitness is improving, their mental health is improving. After COVID, lots of people were lonely and now when they come to volleyball they say we are waiting for that two hours for the whole week." (Activity Leader)

Volleyball was also started to reduce social isolation that came with the COVID pandemic in 2020. This was a particular concern of Inclusive Exeter at the time and was an aim of the group separate from Live and Move. The group have gained a strong sense of community amongst themselves, with the majority of participants attending every session. It has also benefited mental wellbeing more generally, and participants actively enjoy taking part in sessions and competitive matches.

Challenges

A challenge noted by Hakimi was that the group is currently operating at capacity due to being limited by space. This means, despite growing interest and an increase in enquiries, no new members can join. This not only prevents those people from getting a chance to play, but also hinders the growth of the group that it is aiming for. Cost can also be a particular barrier. The group is self-sustaining in that they split the cost of the court booking between whoever shows up to each session. However, this can get expensive for some attendees, especially if attendance to a particular session is low.

Future Directions

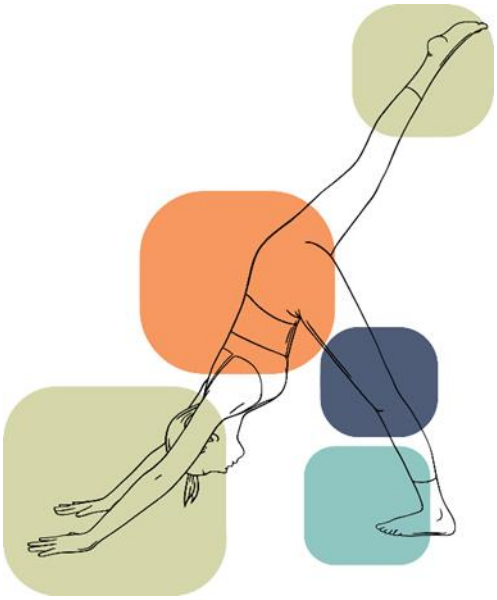
Volleyball is a self-sustaining group and have a weekly court booked that is paid for by the attendees for each session. It is hoped that the group can continue to grow and it is possible the group could expand to holding sessions twice a week in order to accommodate newcomers.

Case Study – Women's Only Yoga

About the Group

Live and Move funded the women's only yoga classes as part of the Inclusive Communities project after recognising a gap in the provision for women only activities in Exeter that are culturally inclusive. The class provided physical activity aimed at and specifically for women and those from diverse communities. To ensure women's only yoga was appropriate for the women, an accessible and private venue was chosen to ensure total privacy, and a well-known and respected instructor was hired.

The classes are free, but a donation is requested from those that can afford it to reduce barriers to engagement for other participants. In addition, one class is held in the morning and the other in the afternoon on different days. This helped to ensure that people with different working patterns, caring responsibilities, or other demands on their time were more likely to be able to attend.



Promotion

The group was promoted through flyers and through word of mouth by attendees. However, it was also advertised through The Nest – a CIC based in Exeter that offers informational, emotional, and social support for women. This insured the group was promoted to women who would most benefit from it, including those who would otherwise be challenging to reach.

Benefits and Impact

Yoga offers a multitude of physical benefits to all participants and is known for its ability to boost self-confidence and self-esteem. A women's only element enhances this effect by providing a supportive environment where participants can feel comfortable exploring their bodies, practicing yoga, and expressing themselves without judgement.

The class has had a positive impact for those women that attend on both a physical and social level. The women's only yoga class provides a safe and inclusive space for participants from diverse cultures. The environment encourages open dialogue, respect, understanding, and empowerment among women. It allows them to freely express themselves and connect with other women who share similar experiences and challenges.

The mixed culture aspect of the class allows participants to learn about and appreciate different cultures. This exchange can facilitate cross-cultural

understanding, breaking down of stereotypes, and building empathy. Participants are able to gain insights into different traditions, languages, and customs, fostering a sense of unity and harmony among participants. From a Muslim perspective the class allows women to actively engage in physical activity within a segregated environment, adhering to their religious and cultural traditions. The venue is specifically booked as it provides privacy, on the top floor and unable to be viewed. This allows Muslim women to participate without their hijabs if they wish and feel confident and able to relax and participate.

Future Directions

The positive impact and overall success of the group has meant that they are seeking ways to become self-sustaining to ensure the women attending continue to feel the benefits of the class.

Case Study – Zumba

About the Group

The Zumba® group started before the COVID-19 pandemic, however, was forced to stop due to repeated lockdowns and restrictions on group activities. It was successfully restarted by the Filipino Community Association in 2023 with monetary help from Inclusive Communities. It currently runs every Saturday at Newtown Community Centre and is open to all and attracts a diverse group of people from various nationalities.

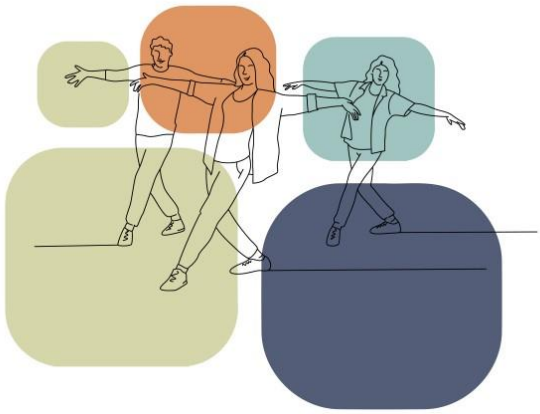
Activity Leader

The group was started and is led by Arlene Lewis who is also the lead chair of the Filipino Community Association in Exeter. Arlene volunteered to take charge of the group as she saw it as an opportunity to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of local residents. She felt this was particularly important post-pandemic as many people had experienced high levels of isolation and anxiety around coming out of lockdown, and so saw this as a way to guide people back into social and physical activities.

"I think the Zumba is something really important for the community. And it brings positive impact in the general wellbeing of people attending it." (Activity Leader)

Promotion

A lot of the promotion of Zumba was done online. This started on the Filipino Community Association Facebook page, however, has now expanded to being advertised and featured on the Inclusive Exeter and Live and Move website pages. Posters were also put up in community spaces, and the group has performed at community festivals as well as holding a taster session at the annual Sports Fest in August 2023. However, a large proportion of promotion has come through word of mouth of Zumba's members. Many like to bring their friends and, as a result, the group is currently operating at capacity.



Benefits and Impact

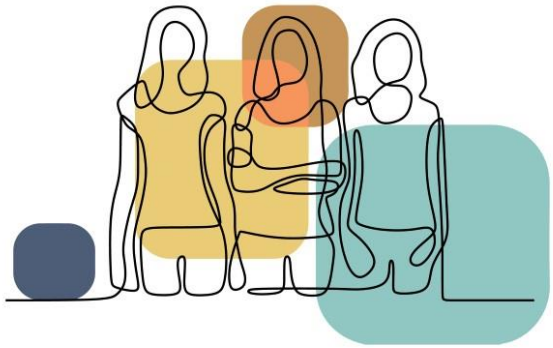
The obvious benefit is increased physical fitness – a core aim of the Live and Move and Inclusive Communities projects. Members have seen an increase in stamina, and feel continuously motivated to partake in weekly physical activity. They have also felt the other benefits that come with regular physical activity. Members have reported that they have less aches and pains, less stress, and feel much healthier overall.

However, the impact of the group extends beyond physical fitness. The group offers an opportunity for socialisation and the group members have become very close,

often meeting up outside of the class. Arlene spoke of how she has seen the difference in many of the members in regard to their mental wellbeing, with many emphasising how important the group is to them. Zumba has also improved the confidence of its members, with the group taking part in the Exeter Respect festival where they performed on stage. The class has become a recreational form of fitness with a strong emphasis on sociality and enjoyment.

"Now they become friends and every Saturday they meet up. And the week is not complete without meeting up for Zumba. Mainly is because they build their stamina, it's good for their health. It's good for the mental health. And socialising is important as well." (Activity Leader)

"Zumba is only one way of meeting, meeting people but the impact of that individually for people attending is massive." (Activity Leader)



The group has formed a close support network, and members often check in on each other and support each other when they are struggling. This has reduced social isolation which is particularly impactful for some members for whom it is difficult to get out and socialise. Whilst the group is open to anyone of any gender, it is mostly attended by women who struggle to find physical activity groups that they are comfortable attending. The group has become a supportive and safe space for its group members that, while focused on physical activity, is also a chance to socialise and connect with others.

"We can be able to link with other nationality, other ladies who are having a problem emotionally, psychologically, and maybe just needing someone to talk to." (Activity Leader)

Challenges

The biggest challenge for Zumba is cost. Part of the reason for this is the qualified Zumba instructor who has been central to the success of the group, but has to charge for her services. Arlene is reluctant to charge group members to attend as they are getting so many benefits from the group, but would not be able to afford to attend regularly. Zumba members are mostly from low-income households which was a key demographic Live and Move wanted to engage with, but this means that their monetary priorities may force them to stop attending the group if they are charged for sessions.

"It's just difficult to ask people to pay for their Zumba knowing that they are regularly enjoying it, but because of the lifestyle now everything is gone up... Every Saturday in a month is a lot - £25 out of their pocket." (Activity Leader)

Another challenge Zumba is experiencing is capacity. The group is incredibly popular; however, this has meant it is operating at capacity and newcomers are

unable to join the group. They plan to tackle this by either finding a different venue that would allow more members to join the sessions, or divide the group over more sessions per week. However, this would depend heavily on funding as both a new venue or increased sessions would cost more.

Future Directions

A core goal of Zumba going forward is to expand the group and reach out to more participants who could benefit from the group, with a focus on bringing together people from all communities. The cross-cultural cohesion has been a key success and Arlene spoke of the importance of maintaining the group's momentum to potentially grow into something bigger. However, the future of Zumba is heavily reliant on funding, and finding a way to make the group sustainable in the long-term to ensure it can continue to run and expand.

Case Study - Sports Fest

Introduction

Sports Fest was a two-day event organised by Inclusive Exeter CIC and funded by Live and Move. It was aimed at BAME communities in and around Exeter, with the goal of promoting and encouraging physical activity and exercise through sports. The event gave a space for people to play the sports they enjoy as well as try out new sports that they may not have had the opportunity to try out before. Through this physical activity, Inclusive Exeter hoped this would encourage people attending to socialise with new people and build a stronger BAME community in Exeter. The event was funded by Devon County Council, Live and Move, and Inclusive Exeter who funded £7,000 between them to cover costs.

Overview of Event

Sports Fest took place over a weekend, on Saturday 26th and Sunday 27th of August 2023. Its purpose was to bring together groups of ethnic minorities to take part in a two-day sports event held at the ISCA Academy in Exeter. It was attended by over 300 people on the Saturday, and over 200 on the Sunday, which highlights the popularity of the event. Attendees came from a range of nationalities, including Afghan, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Filipino, and refugees. The majority of attendees came from the Exeter area, however some had travelled from other areas of Devon, Somerset, and London.

It was also attended by government officials such as the Lord Mayor of Exeter, Kevin Mitchell. This shows the outreach of this event, with notable public figures getting involved to further increase the sense of social cohesion, integration, and community.

Players were given until the 20th July to register their teams for the competitive sports matches, however the event was free for anybody to attend and people were given the opportunity to try the different sports on offer. There were a range of sporting activities taking place for people of all ages and abilities and players in competitions were encouraged to also try out different sports whilst they attended the event.

Saturday 26th	Sunday 27th
Badminton	Men's Volleyball Tournament
Basketball	Women's Volleyball Tournament
Chess	
Children's games	
Martial Arts	
Rubik's Cube Competition	
Table Tennis	
Zumba	

These activities and games were hosted by the activity leads of different sports groups currently funded and supported by Live and Move. This not only encouraged a range of physical activity, but also helped promote those groups to the wider community. The groups are led by volunteers from various cultural backgrounds which helped cement the multicultural element of the event.

"I love how all the communities are coming together." (Organiser)

Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Sports Fest was primarily aimed at promoting and encouraging playing sport, in keeping with the goals of Live and Move and Sport England of getting people more physically active. Volunteers were united in this mission of wanting to inspire people to get more active and therefore lead healthier lifestyles.

"We need to stay active, and I think we don't promote sports enough and by doing this more and bringing more of the community, I think we can promote that even further." (Organiser)

"It's really inspired me to get fitter." (Organiser)

Organisers were also keen to emphasise the link between physical health and mental wellbeing as well as focus on creating a safe and inclusive atmosphere for all attending to take part. The link between physical health and mental wellbeing is well documented, and promoting this connection has been very successful.

"For both physical and mental wellbeing – sport is very useful." (Volunteer)

Community Inclusion

A big feature for the organisers and the attendees was the strong focus on cross-cultural cohesion and inclusion. A core aim of Live and Move was to address social isolation in BAME groups, particularly post-COVID. Inclusivity was a strong theme of the event and one that many attendees highlighted.

"We are the minority, so we had some problems with integrating with the community. Sports Fest is a very useful event to bring people together." (Volunteer)

"Devon is sometimes looked upon as particularly white, but this goes to prove that we are a melting pot." (Community Connector)

This community cohesion went beyond physical activity to include a sharing of cultures through games and food. This served to create stronger community links between different ethnic groups, and create a stronger sense of a cohesive BAME community. It is hoped that other minority communities would also get involved, and the event highlighted its inclusivity to all who otherwise struggle to find sporting events that suit their needs.

"I've never found it so easy to mix with people from other communities. I think the multicultural Sports Fest has brought everyone together on the same platform and so they feel like one." (Organiser)

"I'm loving the fact that this isn't just about sport; it's about culture, it's about cuisine, it's about people coming and bringing what they bring from their traditional background." (Community Connector)

Challenges

An area of improvement highlighted by the delivery team was the promotion of the event. It was successful in utilising social media to advertise the event and the number of attendees reflects this. However, they have identified that they could have used a broader range of social media platforms and reached out to different groups more widely. They also highlighted that greater support from local councils could aid in promoting the event through their official website or in widespread emails to reach more local residents. This would help Inclusive Exeter's aim of expanding the event and making it bigger and more well known.

"I think the other thing that we might try and do is promote it even more. I know it's been promoted really well within diverse communities, but I think more promotion might be something that we can think about. Different ways of promoting." (Community Connector)

A particular challenge of the event were issues surrounding capacity and time. This would be a particular challenge if Inclusive Exeter are successful in increasing the promotion of the event. They were also limited by time which had an impact on matches and events being held. The delivery team have noted that allowing for more time would encourage more attendees as it would allow them to organise more events.

"If we had more time, it would be fantastic because we'd have more teams and that means more people would join. So that's the thing I would improve, more time. More space." (Organiser)

Looking to the Future

Future Sports Fest events have been planned, and Inclusive Exeter are looking to make this an annual event. They are looking to expand year-on-year, with more venue space to accommodate more people. They also plan to advertise and promote the event more widely to ensure they are reaching out to more communities in and around Exeter.

"It'll be good to have more people joining, meaning we can make it a little bit bigger, and it just shows that we're all one community." (Organiser)

Badminton Event (Feb 2024)

Introduction

The Devon Bengali Association who run the badminton group hosted a Winter Badminton Tournament at the Wonford Sports Centre on the 24th and 25th of February 2024. They were supported in this event by Inclusive Exeter and Exeter City Council, and funded by Live and Move. The aim of the event was to promote physical activity as well as create strong community links through offering an event that was inclusive and diverse. Around 200 people attended across both days.

Data Collection

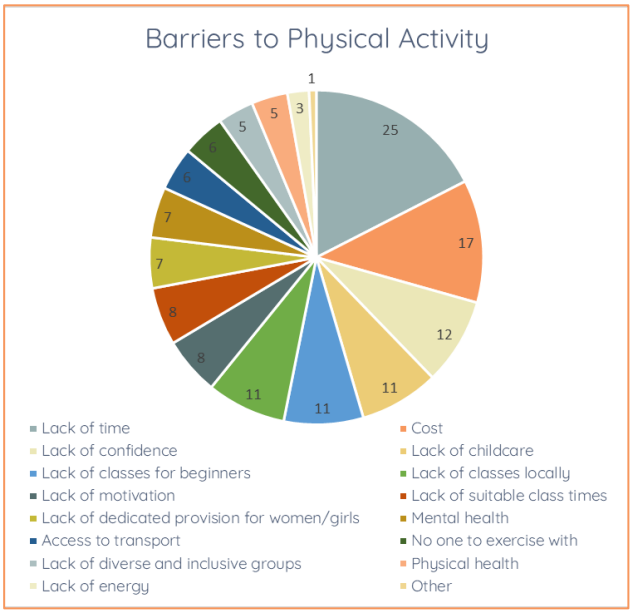
SERIO circulated a survey through the delivery team to attendees to find out their thoughts about the event, including what they enjoyed the most and any improvements that could be made. It also served to collect some demographic data to understand who attended the tournament; their age, gender, ethnicity and how active they are. This would show if the event had attracted the target audience.

The survey received 35 responses in total. The gender response rate was fairly even, with 54% female and 46% male, and most respondents were aged between 25 and 54. The majority identified themselves as Bangladeshi (34%) or Asian/Asian British (26%). This is not surprising as the event was hosted by the Devon Bangladeshi Association. However, other ethnicities identified included Indian, Chinese, Pakistani, White British, Arab, and Mixed.

Barriers to Physical Activity

Despite being a competitive event, around half of respondents attending (18) said they do less than 30 minutes exercise a week, and 12 said they do between 30 and 149 minutes weekly. This shows that the event was successful in its goal of attracting people with lower activity levels, as they aimed to inspire and encourage more physical activity.

When asked what prevented them from being physically active, respondents cited time as the biggest barrier to exercise (25 respondents). Cost (17) and lack of confidence (12) were also significant barriers.



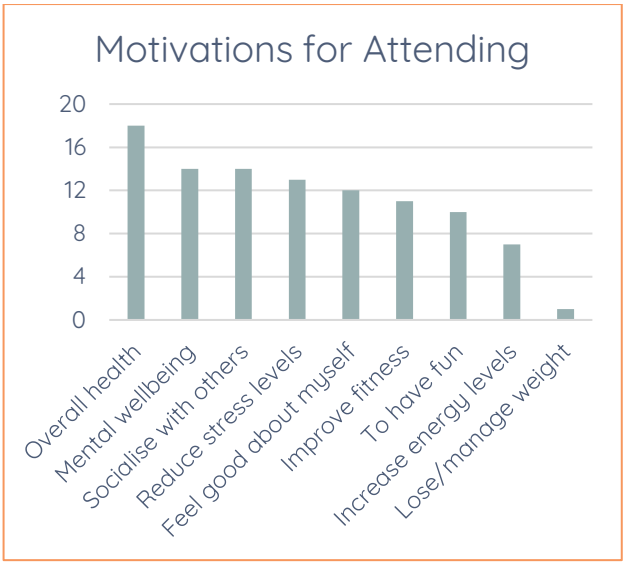
It is important to note that there was no limit on the number of barriers respondents could select, and most respondents (74%) selected 3 or more options, with two respondents selecting 11 out of 16 possible options. This shows that people are often facing numerous barriers

that need to be addressed, and include issues such as arranging childcare, issues with transport, and not enough classes for beginners or dedicated to women and girls.

"I am from Bangladesh and culturally we are not familiar with physical activities, especially as a Muslim woman we are restricted by so many barriers." (Participant)

Reasons for Attending

Respondents attended the event for a wide range of reasons. When asked for their top three, the most popular choice was to improve their overall health (18 respondents). However, the next most popular motivators (14 respondents each) were to improve mental wellbeing and as an opportunity to socialise with others. 13 respondents cited reducing stress levels, and 12 responded that they attended to help with feeling good about themselves. Only 11 chose improving fitness as a key motivator, suggesting that events such as these are seen as an opportunity to socialise and a form of recreation, rather than a focus on the exercise element.



Response to the Event

Respondents were asked to answer from a scale of "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" for the following statements:

- The event promoted inclusivity.
- The event promoted diversity.
- The event inspired me to be more active.
- I met with other participants from different cultures and communities.
- Attending the event increased my confidence to engage in physical activity/exercise.
- Attending the event increased my motivation to engage in physical activity/exercise.

No respondents answered with 'Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree' on any of the questions, however some answers were left blank.

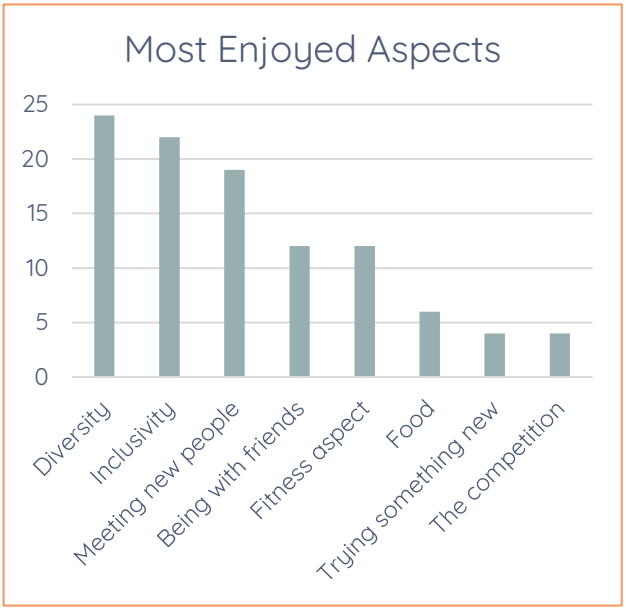
Inspiring Activity

A main goal of the event was to promote and inspire physical activity. 27 respondents said the event inspired them to be more active (20 strongly agree, 7 agree). Furthermore, 23 respondents 'strongly agreed' to the event increasing their motivation to exercise (with a further 7 selecting 'agree', and one neither agreeing nor disagreeing). 27 respondents also selected 'strongly agree' when asked if the event increased their confidence to partake in physical activity, with 2 more selecting 'agree'. This relates back to confidence being a key barrier to exercise and shows that the event had been successful in addressing this. These responses show there is a clear want for physical activity and that the event hit its

goal of inspiring and motivating people to exercise more.

Inclusivity and Diversity

As the event was hosted by Inclusive Exeter, the event also focused on inclusivity and diversity; 27 'strongly agreed' (and 6 'agreed') that the event promoted inclusivity, and a further 22 'strongly agreed' (and 4 'agreed', 1 neither agreed or disagreed) that it promoted diversity. This shows that this was a key element of the tournament for attendees, with it being highlighted as more important than the physical fitness aspect. Meeting people from different cultures (26 strongly agree, 1 agree, 1 neither agree or disagree), was also a key aspect for attendees, and shows that the goal of increased community and cross-cultural cohesion was achieved.



These responses are further reflected when asked what three aspects attendees most enjoyed about the event. Diversity (24), inclusivity (22) and meeting new people (19) were top picks for respondents to the survey. This highlights that events such as these are seen as opportunities to be social and connect with others. Food is a big part of socialising for the majority of ethnicities in attendance and this emphasis on food and socialisation is shown by the six respondents who selected this as an aspect they enjoyed the most.

"As a BAME woman, we have very few opportunities in Exeter, we get judged by our skin colour, clothing, and language barrier to accessing any mainstream activities. These kinds of events & activities are lifelines for people like us." (Participant)

"Well run event with accessibility for those of all skill levels and welcoming to all backgrounds." (Participant)

Improving the Event

When asked how the event could be improved, all participants who gave suggestions had the same theme of making local sporting tournaments more frequent. This shows there is an absolute want and need for events such as these regardless of whether or not attendees are playing in the tournament or spectating; people attended for more than just the sport. This could be something other physical activity groups under Live and Move and Inclusive Exeter look into

hosting for their own competitive sports to give more opportunities for the local community to come together.

"Fantastic event! Hoping for more other sports to join in!" (Participant)

It was also suggested that events such as these have more sessions and matches available for women and children. Whilst some women were playing as part of teams, some found going against all-male teams made the odds a little uneven and suggested that more women or women-only events would level the playing field.

"We want this kind of events more often." (Participant)

Looking to the Future

The Winter Badminton Tournament was a highly successful event with 100% of respondents saying that they would recommend the event to others. There is a definite want for more events like this in the future, and this event highlighted some key areas that should be focused on going forward.

Events such as these are particularly popular, not just because of the sporting element, but also as an opportunity to socialise and enjoy something with friends. By combining the physical activity offer with socialisation, events such as these could not only increase and motivate people to exercise, but also strengthen community bonds and increase cross-cultural cohesion.

The survey also highlighted multiple barriers to partaking in physical exercise faced by attendees, such as time, cost, and issues arranging transport and childcare. If these barriers can be addressed in future events, such as keeping events free, providing more games for children, and hosting in accessible venues, this could ensure events remain popular and well-attended.

"It would be wonderful if this carries on and we would love if Sports England funds these type of events so that people like us can participate and find our confidence." (Participant)

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