



Impact of Covid-19 among members

July 2020

Overview

Methodology:

Sported enlisted voluntary support from a professional qualitative researcher, and conducted:

- 2 x 1.5 hour online groups
- 2 x follow-up conversations by phone with participants who pulled out or couldn't attend

Focus groups and interviews were recorded and later analysed by Sported's insight team

Participating groups are typical of Sported's membership; they use sport as tool to address other social outcome, often engaging participants who face disadvantage. All participants had a decision-making role and influence over the organisation they represent.

Main Activity	Organisation type	Years in operation
Multisport	Constituted Club	76
Football	Welfare Association	36
Cricket	Constituted Club	141
Trampolining	Constituted Club	8
Football	Charitable Incorporated Organisation	2
Exercise and Fitness	Community Interest Company	2
Cricket	Constituted Community Group	194

In order to maintain anonymity, locations of groups are listed separately; Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England (South East, London and North West.)

Summary of key findings

- COVID-19 has had a **devastating impact on young people**, Sported members are showing serious concern on their behalf, particularly isolation and confusion
- Creating a 'change model' is complicated, but there was a simple model of a group's journey which felt appropriate for the range of groups. This included a '**learnt**' **emergency phase**, and an 'adjusted normal' phase which may flux between virtual and face-to-face delivery
- 'Planning' and 'Education' were new themes that emerged since May, in terms of challenges. Key solutions were around **knowing planned dates of return, clearer understanding of messaging, clear guidance and packages of support**
- Groups **felt greater inequalities when comparing themselves to other community organisations, or traditional sports organisations**, rather than inequalities in terms of protected characteristics.
- In general, **groups feel quite connected**. They feel confident establishing local partnerships where they see the value, but would like **support establishing partnerships with specialist organisations**, such as in engaging certain disabled participants
- Groups would like to a **joined up approach from government; acknowledging and communicating the benefits of sport and physical activity**, and a visible commitment to this
- Groups are happy feeding back on Sported and appreciate being listened to. Sported strengths are in the **broad content** of support offered, the **accessible nature of resources**, and the **personal touch that comes with support**. Areas for improvement are increasing awareness of our membership offer, and exploring peer learning & sharing between members.

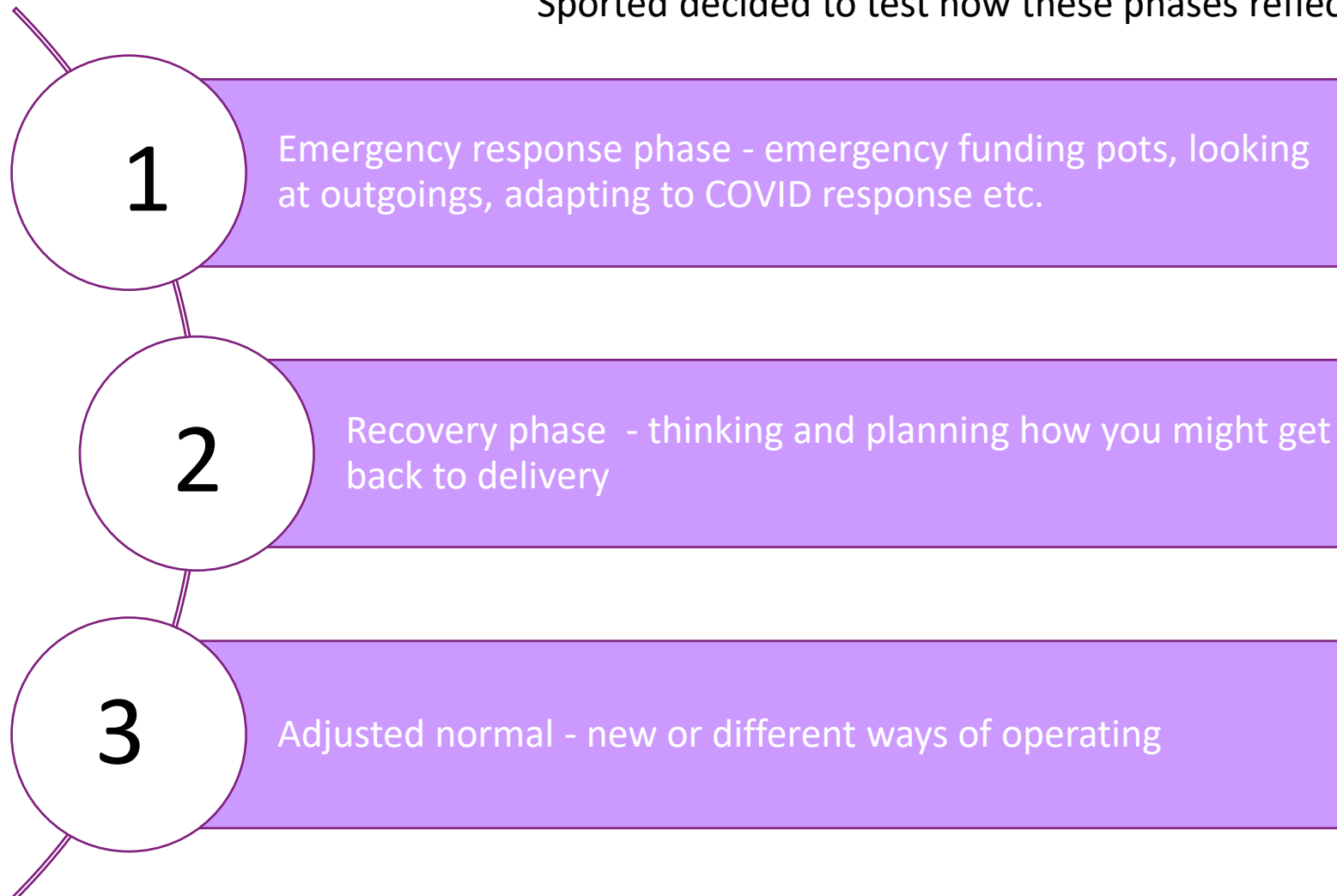
Impact on young people – as seen through members



Findings:

- > Common themes emerging irrespective of location, type of membership organisation.
- > Real concerns that the young people supported are feeling more and more isolated.
- > Inconsistent messaging and their world in state of flux is resulting in a growth in mental health issues, which is compounded by the reduction in physical activity

The phases below are regularly referenced by the S4D and third sector. Sported decided to test how these phases reflected our groups experience.



Key:

Suggested phases

Group's comments on phases

★ Where groups say they are

Which phase are you in?

“could go anywhere, another lockdown and could easily go back to phase 1”

1 Emergency response phase - emergency funding pots, looking at outgoings, adapting to COVID response etc.

“we’ve learnt from before, it won’t be all the way back to phase 1.”

“We’re in a separate phase, just dealing with domestic abuse, skeleton staff & volunteers – not got emergency funding for it.”

2 Recovery phase - thinking and planning how you might get back to delivery

“it’s such a complex thing. You could write a 50-page document on this and there’d still be things missing, so actually it needs to be simple.”

“phase 3, but with phase 1 in the rear-view mirror”

3 Adjusted normal - new or different ways of operating

Phases of Recovery - findings

- > Very fluid, groups could move between different phases quite quickly, and some aspect of group are in different phases
- > Most have moved from emergency phase to 'adjusted normal' phase. This may be 'virtual' or 'in person' or a mix. Most groups are currently in that flux at phase 2
- > Not at recovery phase, more about a 'planned adjusted normal' which feels more comfortable and could continue
- > An Emergency phase could be reverted to at any point in time (not linear phases), if restrictions are brought back in place but learnings taken from first time around would help
- > The process of change is different for each member group; i.e. location and COVID status, type of young people supported, type of sport, extent of health vulnerability

Example: "if the news isn't what we're hoping for, and we're not able to open then that's another £6,000 we're going to have to spend without any revenue. If we're not able to operate, we'll be looking for emergency funding and if we don't get it our physical premises may be in doubt."

Example: "if this breaks out again, there's going to be significant changes to how we deliver our services."

Challenges and solutions - reopening



Planning – a new area since the May focus group

Challenges

- Unsure of dates certain things allowed, including in schools, so can't plan
- Facilities not opening yet, staff furloughed (at facilities, or support orgs) so not responding
- Unsure how many participants will come back
- Winter – fear that will be able to start again just as weather gets bad

Needs

- Knowledge of dates of return
- Information & communication
- Good weather
- Affordable facilities
- Sports centres to answer phone/ emails so groups can at least make bookings for the future
- Clarity over whether outside groups will be able to go into schools

Solutions

- Could start generating income with pre-paid memberships
- Government to support those who can't open yet
- Government to acknowledge that grassroots sports haven't had the same support as other sectors (arts/theatre)
- Build flexibility into revised strategic plans

Challenges and solutions - reopening



Education – a new area since the May focus group

Challenges

- Overcoming conspiracy theories & disbelief about Covid-19
- Vulnerable people more vulnerable to being scammed
- Difficult to gauge understanding over zoom, so hard to overcome any misunderstanding
- Lack of understanding of safety messages
- People struggling to understand support & benefits available from government

Needs

- Clarity and authority on Covid-19, facts
- Clear & consistent messaging about why rules are changing
- Advanced warning that rules are changing, e.g. before people have travelled for Eid celebrations

Solutions

- Doing roadshows e.g. information and fact sharing about Covid-19, handing out masks and sanitiser, and sharing information about safety
- Providing guidelines in several languages
- Supported staff to apply for self-employed grant from HMRC & other benefits

Challenges and solutions - reopening



Rules and regulations

Challenges

- Mixed messages – first they delayed action, then we were told to fear the virus,, now we're told to go out
- Confusing messaging - can play 15-a-side Gaelic Football, but can't play 1 on 1 Handball inside (NI)
- Giving messages about how things are valued: e.g. able to go to the pub but can't play sport
- Can't share kit, excludes those who can't afford kit and would borrow
- Regulations not acknowledging that clubs and groups are not all the same
- COVID compliance – track and trace is a big task (different people dropping off / picking up)

Needs

- Clarity around what they can/ can't open & rules to be consistent
- To understand what conditions would need to be (e.g. indoor gym)
- want to talk about getting close to 'old normal' not 'new normal'
- Strategies to deal with uncertainty
- Understanding of social/support element that comes with sport – regulations need to accommodate those – not just turn up, train and leave
- Help on implementation of rules, or flexibility over rules on spectators

Solutions

- Funding (e.g. 'Be Active' fund) designed for equality, e.g. to fund kit for those who can't afford it
- Clear 'return to play' guidance (e.g. through Cricket Ireland, from Sport Ireland), which was done through consultation with governing bodies
- Clear guidance from FA
- 'Return to play' packs – game from British Gymnastics, but they came a bit late
- Working with local council to convey safety messages to isolated and vulnerable people, aiming to prevent another lockdown

Challenges and solutions - reopening



Support and wellbeing

Challenges

- social isolation & loss of youth identity, increase in anti-social behaviour
- Lower performance after long break – knock to confidence & leads to frustration
- Losing a generation of kids, with the gap they haven't had the intuitive starting point (to try certain activities)
- Walking and cycling not the same release/outlet as other activities (such as boxing)
- Missing all the advantages of taking part in something in a group setting
- Fear from family members to let them attend

Needs

- Clear messaging from government about the risk
- Accreditation system to say the group is 'COVID safe'
- Find mechanisms to reach those 'hard to reach' people they would usually reach through sport
- Understanding that some participants are protecting relatives – shouldn't be hard done by because of this
- Mental health training / support, to be able to support frustrated participants

Solutions

- If new numbers allowed together, could plan sessions & groups based on support needs, could make support group that will train together when they open
- Central approach, acknowledgement in high level government of the benefits of team sports and team activity

Challenges and solutions - reopening



Finances

Challenges

- Loss of income / state of finances
- Funding has been re-directed during COVID, but still need to finish those social programmes they started
- Those who planned well over last 2/3 years, now not the most 'needy' and not eligible for support
- Constant changing guidance, therefore changing priorities
- Corporate funders less forthcoming

Needs

- Support identifying priorities, doing Cost-Benefit-Analysis
- Information about funding opportunities
- Support with writing funding applications

Solutions

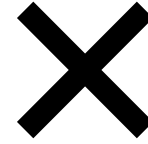
- Hardship funds with simple application fund, e.g. Hardship Fund from Sport NI
- Subsidised facilities, so that it can be affordable, and can be accessible at reasonable times

Community sport – who’s faired better or worse?



Those who faired better

- Those who are commercially driven, could more easily furlough staff and just pause
- Those ‘frontline’ with no reserves or advanced planning for emergencies – were an obvious case to get funding
- Charities
- Third sector in arts, theatre



Those who faired worse

- Those who are socially conscientious, felt they had to reach out and support participant’s wellbeing – couldn’t just walk away from that
- Those providing longer-term support, who had planned well and had reserves – weren’t an obvious case to get funding
- Those working with people living in poverty, those who have English as second language and those from BAME community. Particularly intersectionality of these characteristics
- Those who rely on donations
- Those not clued in about funding, or don’t have people dedicated to finding funds

Findings:

-> Question was about community sports organisations & asking who faired better or worse? (aiming to get at what we usually think of terms of inequalities)

-> For the most part, groups compared themselves to other community organisations (such as theatre, music etc), to traditional sports providers & sports clubs, or to those with other governance or funding models

-> only protected characteristic identified here was BAME

“We’ve still been reaching out, trying to support our clients, even though they’re not paying.”

Feedback to sport sector & government

“Doctors are saying ‘**get more exercise**’, but maybe that **person doesn’t know where to go**. We’re here, for years we’ve been talking about the benefits. More could be done to bring those things together. [Indoor Gym, CIC]

“A lot of what I’ve learnt during COVID is that [guidance] **documents are very long** and I can’t imagine there’s a lot of people actually reading them and actioning on them.” [Cricket Club]

“If I tell someone that cricket’s good for them, I’ve got a vested interest in it. **We need a central approach** [to S4D messaging] with good marketing behind it, I think that could have a really positive effect.” [Cricket club]

It’s about documents being too long, and how you **tailor your marketing** to reach the people that you want.”

“We got some resilience funding, but we only got a tiny bit. Because we got some other funding that just happened to come in at the same time. **Assessment shouldn’t be based on your cash flow right now**, it should be based on your cash flow over the past however many months, and predicted cashflow in the future. [Indoor Gym, CIC]

Findings:

-> guidance & support should be short, accessible and simple

-> need a joined up approach from government about why physical activity is good for you

-> new funding assessments to be transparent & based on the bigger picture, not the situation the group says they are in now

Recommendations for Sported

Main areas to continue – highly valued by members

- supporting groups to plan over the long-term – many still think about support they received 5/6 years ago
- creating new resources & making resources accessible
- the personal touch and emotional support
- focus groups – groups value sharing their thoughts & being listened to

Main areas to explore

- Partnerships with specialised partners – in delivering to certain participants such as disabled. Replicating Sported's work with Women & Girls
- Supporting groups to sign-up – helping them understand what the membership is and what it could do for them
- Different reputation in NI & Wales. NI – got groups from Dublin asking about membership (but not eligible), Wales members say many other orgs are eligible & would benefit but are not signing up. Explore whether this is the true beyond these members
- Peer to peer learning between groups
- Explore group's fears around Brexit & implications on funding (NI, Wales & Scotland)



THANK YOU!

To the group leaders who took part.

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