

Time in  
Mind

# Time in Mind

Learning from practices in  
mental health support for  
young people in community  
sports groups

December 2021

**Hayley Jarvis, Head of Physical Activity at Mind:** "Sported's *Time in Mind* report is a timely and insightful window into the important role community sports groups play in supporting young people's mental health. The report shows how projects run by sport and physical activity groups can help in a variety of ways. From upskilling staff and empowering young people to build social networks with friends and peers, to providing safe spaces for them to talk about their wellbeing, and ultimately helping achieve positive change in their lives.

"We know from our research at Mind that the sport community can play a powerful role in supporting mental health. In our recent *Physical Activity Impact Report 2018-2021* we recommended promoting success stories and examples of good practice in this sphere. The *Time in Mind* report does just that, revealing the brilliant work done by the project groups and exploring key learnings that can – and we hope will – inform other models of mental health support among community groups in the future. We have free support resources available and they can be found on our website: [www.mind.org.uk/sport](http://www.mind.org.uk/sport)."

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# Executive Summary

## Setting the scene

The Covid-19 pandemic has, in the words of the Children's Commissioner for England, **'turned the lives of children upside down'**.<sup>1</sup>

This has exacerbated an existing mental health crisis among young people in the UK, which has over a number of years seen growing rates of mental health disorders and increasing demand on public services. In England, for example, rates of probable mental health disorders among young people are now roughly 17.4% for 6–16 years olds (up from 11.6% in 2017) and 17.4% for 17–19 year olds (up from 10.1% in 2017).<sup>2</sup> In Scotland, the quarter ending June 2021 saw an 11.1% increase in children and young people starting treatment at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) compared with the previous quarter, and an increase of 28.3% from the same quarter in 2020.<sup>3</sup> These statistics, as well as those from charities from across the UK, are a real cause for concern.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, evidence shows that participation in sport and physical activity supports positive mental health outcomes for children and young adults. Physically active young people have six times better levels of resilience compared to non-active peers, a 25% decreased risk of anxiety, and 52% lower levels of depression.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, community sport groups are seen as having a critically important role to play in providing safe spaces for young people to connect with their peers and engage with trusted adults.<sup>6</sup>

## Sported's grassroots groups and their communities' mental health

Sported works closely with organisations who provide such important spaces, empowering the local heroes running these groups by providing professional expertise, resources, and operational support, free of charge, to help their group survive and thrive. Our network of community sport groups is fully aware of the difficulties young people face with their mental health. In our recent Pulse survey (October 2021) of our membership, 27% of group leaders identified mental health as the biggest challenge facing young people in their communities, making it the most frequently cited cause for concern.<sup>7</sup> Recognising this, and understanding that mental health support is a key priority across our network of community sport groups, Sported created the Time in Mind project to help our groups improve their knowledge, understanding, and confidence so that they could create the

<sup>1</sup> Children's Commissioner, [The state of children's mental health services 2019/20 – January 2021](#).

<sup>2</sup> NHS Digital, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 – wave 2 follow up to 2017 survey](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Public Health Scotland, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) waiting times – Quarter ending 30 June 2021](#).

<sup>4</sup> Young Minds, [Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs – Survey 4, February 2021](#), The Mix, [Quarterly Trends Q1 and Q2 of 2021](#), and Kooth, [Pulse Report 2021](#).

<sup>5</sup> Made By Sport, [Why We Do It](#).

<sup>6</sup> Street Games, [Sport for Better Mental Health](#).

<sup>7</sup> Sported, [Community Pulse – October 2021](#).

appropriate environment and support mechanisms to benefit young people's mental health.

## Time in Mind project

Time in Mind saw 23 pilot projects trial different approaches to supporting young people's mental health in their communities. The groups were based across all four nations of the UK, and their projects worked with young people from a range of age groups, ethnicities, economic and social backgrounds, and mental health needs. Community groups' main sport and physical activities were wide-ranging, from football to table-tennis, boxing to basketball, through to surfing, equestrian, and multi-sports.



Training for coaches, designating young people as Mental Health Champions, providing mental health support booklets for young people, and delivery of CAMHS sessions.



Training for volunteers/coaches, mental health leaflets and info for young people, and guest speakers for mental health sessions.



Boxing sessions and digital wellbeing sessions delivered by a life coach (and boxing coach).

Bringing young people together after lockdown through sports sessions and using this participation to help young people access one-to-one support and mentoring.



Therapy through surfing activities

Walk and talk sessions with ethnically diverse young women.



Working with South Asian young men to design and produce a comic around mental health problems in the community.

Expansion of football sessions to provide safe space and promote inclusion and friendships for young people, as well as the opportunity for conversations with coaches around problems.

Employing a behavioural psychologist to upskill volunteers in mental health support, discuss problems, and develop strategies for coping.

Combining mindfulness, creative art, healthy cooking, and sports to support mental health.

Support for less academic young people and those struggling due to Covid-19.



Drop-in sessions for young people and volunteer training using the Emotional Logic Model.



Provision of counselling hours and development of community space for future support.



Delivering a targeted social media campaign and providing additional mental health training sessions aimed at young offenders.

Youth mental health first aid awareness training and workshop.



Wellbeing-focused dance sessions for girls.



Use of indoor space to increase frequency of activity sessions, and also developing more information sharing.

Support for young people at difficult stages in their lives through one-to-one mentoring with young people who pass along table-tennis skills to their mentor.



Working with a local football club to deliver mental health support for young people.



Post-lockdown wellbeing re-start programme with four one-hour sessions focused on mindfulness, empowerment, nutrition, and physical activity.

Working with a third-party mental health support provider to design and deliver a programme incorporating equine activity and mental health support.

Tailored mental health support programme, working with 12 young people through physical activity sessions and sessions focused on identify, bullying, friendships, etc.

## Purpose of the research and research methodology

The purpose of this research was to capture the outcomes and learning from the Time in Mind project groups to identify those elements of the projects that might usefully inform a model of good practice for other community groups interested in developing mental health support structures. It then aimed to propose a potential model of good practice based on this learning for consideration and use by the sector.

A short desk research exercise established existing insight into the current need for mental health support for young people in the UK and the roles community sport groups play in supporting mental health in their communities. Primary research was also conducted through the completion of 16 in-depth interviews with community group leaders and two with third-party service providers involved in their respective projects. We also carried out one focus group with young people from a Time in Mind project and one with a group of young people from a non-Time in Mind mental health support project.

We recognise that language around mental health can be confusing, particularly as different organisations use different wording. Quotes included in this report and taken from the primary research reflect the language deployed by group leaders. Elsewhere in this document we use the phrase “mental health problems”, as many people feel this is helpful for them.

## Key findings

### Outcomes for young people and community group leaders:

- Increased confidence among young people to engage in conversations about mental health, supported young people to recognise where their friends and peers are struggling with mental health problems, and helped build peer-to-peer support structures.
- Increased young people’s resilience, self-confidence, and motivation for physical activity and other parts of their life, and improved team building and communication skills.
- Empowered young people to identify and replicate mechanisms for mental health care in their every-day life, supporting longer-term positive mental health impact.
- Upskilled community sport group staff, increasing their knowledge and understanding of mental health support and growing their groups’ capacity to help young people achieve positive mental health outcomes.



## A potential model of good practice could include:

- **Consideration of how implicit and explicit forms of mental health support can be used, recognising that both are of value, either singularly or combined:** some activities favoured more explicit models of support, with support involving the active disclosure and discussion of problems, or where young people were encouraged, or felt safe to approach community group staff with requests for support. However, implicit forms of support were also effective approaches. This occurred where sessions did not require a specific focus on mental health or direct engagement between young people and staff to achieve positive mental health outcomes. The simple act of attending a trusted space and participating in group activities can demonstrate to young people their position in a network of valued others. The positive emotional response to this, rather than an explicit intervention or discussion of their problems, can produce beneficial health outcomes. This approach may be especially useful as young people re-connect following lockdowns or other periods of isolation, because it helps them find emotional comfort through group interaction that may have previously been missing.
- **Identify specific needs within a group in advance and continue to monitor activities to ensure they adapt to new issues:** the success of the Time in Mind projects was rooted in the way community sport groups responded to their local context and the community's needs. They learned about these issues through several avenues, including drawing on the deep knowledge of group leaders, feedback from young people, and input from parents. Understanding the needs of the community in which groups operate through regular feedback processes will not only help create effectively targeted programmes for mental health support but ensures those programmes can adapt to the changing needs of participants on an ongoing basis. To determine the efficacy of projects, Mind recommends the use of validated mental health outcome measures. Examples of such measures are available through [Mind's tools for measuring changes in mental health and wellbeing](#).
- **Ensure sessions are of a size that promotes interactivity among participants and allows them to feel comfortable in contributing:** many Time in Mind groups reported positive outcomes where sessions and activities were conducted with small numbers of participants or on a one-to-one scale. In smaller groups, participants feel more at ease and better able to connect with those around them, whether this is their peers, group leaders and staff, or external mental health mentors and coaches. It also allows those charged with supporting the activities more capacity to direct attention to those with particular needs, especially where resources are limited.



I think for some young people, they don't really want to do that [talk about issues] and they're just there to play football. But other kids see that this is the only positive interaction they have with adults during their week. I think it provides a good escape for them."

**Group Leader**





[We] get them to work in the small groups that they're very comfortable with, and then it will lead onto them having all sorts of discussions amongst themselves: shopping, cooking, clothing, concerns about family overseas because of Covid-19, or other health issues and concerns. And then they really come up with solutions amongst themselves, because their confidence was developing amongst themselves."

**Group Leader**



- **Empower young people to contribute to support structures through defined roles or processes that incorporate and recognise their contributions:**

children and young adults who took on the mantle of mental health champions at their groups, or who felt they were giving back to those helping support them, gained confidence, self-belief, and satisfaction. An effective model of support puts young people at the heart of activities, entrusting them to help those around them, providing spaces for their skills and talents to drive projects, and allowing their contributions to build self-confidence and self-worth. It can also empower young people through creating environments where power is balanced between the young person and the mental health professional. Where young people are encouraged to take on roles relating to mental health support, training and ongoing support should be provided to ensure they are fully supported with these responsibilities.



The young people are more aware of not only their own well-being but also their peers, so when they see somebody around them they can pick up on these little soft hints that we've talked about. It has a hundred percent raised the knowledge and understanding and signposting. They are now young people who can signpost to professionals, for example in their schools. Then the schools bring other people like us in."

**Group Leader**



- **Involve third-party service providers where specific expertise, extra capacity, or a new perspective is helpful:** many Time in Mind group leaders and staff had existing knowledge of mental health problems and solutions, developed formally through training resources and informally through lived experience in their groups. Third-party support, however, plays an important role in providing more specialist knowledge and experience. It can also build opportunities to develop existing, or create new ways of supporting mental health by having a fresh perspective on activities. It is also critical to develop relationships with external organisations for signposting young people to further mental health support outside the community sport group environment. Therefore, where resources allow for it, consider drawing on outside support to design, implement, and/or evaluate models of support.
- **Frame mental health support in the language and lived experience of participants and their community:** doing so increases accessibility for



participants and better connects solutions to their day-to-day lives.

- **Give participants time to acclimatise to activities and conversations around mental health:** many of the Time in Mind projects demonstrated that building confidence levels among young people to discuss difficult problems takes time. Community sport groups already have the benefit of providing a trusted space for young people, but opening up about mental health problems can nevertheless be challenging for children and young adults. The implicit support that community groups provide for young people in ensuring a safe space for them to engage with trusted adults is already an important first step in supporting mental health within the community, but building on that foundation and empowering young people to achieve positive mental health outcomes can take time and patience.

## Introduction

### Young people's mental health

The Covid-19 pandemic has, in the words of the Children's Commissioner for England, 'turned the lives of children upside down', restricting their ability to connect with their friends and families and limiting opportunities for physical activity and play.<sup>8</sup> It has exacerbated an existing mental health crisis among young people in the UK, which has over a number of years seen growing rates of mental health disorders among young people and increasing demand on charities and free-to-access support such as CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services).<sup>9</sup> In England alone, rates of probable mental health disorders among young people now stand at roughly 17.4% for 6-16 years olds (up from 11.6% in 2017) and 17.4% for 17-19 year olds (up from 10.1% in 2017).<sup>10</sup> In Scotland, the quarter ending June 2021 saw an 11.1% increase in children and young people starting treatment at CAMHS compared with the previous quarter, and an increase of 28.3% from the same quarter in 2020.<sup>11</sup> Across the UK, more young people are facing mental health problems and the growing challenge of accessing the services that can best support their mental health.

### The role of community sport groups in supporting mental health

Community sport groups can – and do – play a positive role in supporting young people's mental health. Partly this is through the benefits of sport and physical activity for positive mental health outcomes: physically active young people have six times better levels of resilience compared to non-active peers, a 25% decreased risk of anxiety, and 52% lower levels of depression.<sup>12</sup> As Mind's recent Get Set to Go programme illustrates, 61% of

<sup>8</sup> Children's Commissioner, [The state of children's mental health services 2019/20 – January 2021](#).

<sup>9</sup> Young Minds, [Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs – Survey 4, February 2021](#), The Mix, [Quarterly Trends Q1 and Q2 of 2021](#), and Kooth, [Pulse Report 2021](#).

<sup>10</sup> NHS Digital, [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2021 – wave 2 follow up to 2017 survey](#).

<sup>11</sup> [Public Health Scotland, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) waiting times – Quarter ending 30 June 2021](#).

<sup>12</sup> Made By Sport, [Why We Do It](#).

participants reported higher quality of life scores after just three months of taking part in physical activity<sup>13</sup>. Particularly for young people, who often find it difficult or are reluctant to seek help about mental health problems, research suggests sport and physical activity are promising non-stigmatising interventions to promote positive mental health outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

It is not just the act of taking part in physical activity that benefits young people at community sport groups. The nature of activities within these groups – such as learning with peers and responsibility-taking – have been linked to positive mental health outcomes for those most vulnerable in society.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the safe spaces that community sport groups provide for young people offer them a place to turn for emotional support and personal advice. In its Better Mental Health report, StreetGames noted that nearly half of young people it had previously surveyed said they would turn to a sports coach or activity leader for emotional support and personal advice. For those from less affluent backgrounds, this support was even more important. More 14–25 year-olds living in households with an income of less than £20,000 reported they would confide in their community sport leader or coach than those from wealthier backgrounds – a particularly pertinent statistic when considering the ever-growing demands on free-to-access mental health services in the UK.<sup>16</sup>

Research therefore indicates that community sport groups are an important space in which young people's mental health can be supported, both through participation in physical activities and the positive health outcomes that can entail but also through several associated effects of being in a community sport group environment. This latter category includes connecting with peers and receiving emotional support from feeling value through membership of such a group, taking on responsibility in a gradual and supported space, and developing connections with trusted adults who, for many young people, represent their first port of call if they face worries or difficulties in their lives.

## Sported and the Time in Mind project

Sported works closely with organisations who provide such important spaces, empowering the local heroes running these groups by providing professional expertise, resources, and operational support, free of charge, to help their group survive and thrive. Our network of over 2,500 community sport groups is acutely aware of the mental health problems affecting their younger participants. Through 2020–2021 they have told us that anxiety over participants' health was their main concern, and in our most recent Pulse survey, in October 2021, group leaders reported that mental health is the main challenge facing young people in our groups' communities.<sup>17</sup> This chimes with the findings of the

<sup>13</sup> Mind, [Moving towards better mental health: Mind's Physical Activity Impact Report, 2018–2021](#).

<sup>14</sup> Pascoe M, Bailey AP, Craike M, *et al*, 'Physical activity and exercise in youth mental health promotion: a scoping review,' *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*, 6:1 (2020), doi:[10.1136/bmjsem-2019-000677](#).

<sup>15</sup> Van der Veken, K., Lauwerier, E. & Willems, S.J., 'How community sport programs may improve the health of vulnerable population groups: a program theory,' *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 19 (2020), doi: [10.1186/s12939-020-01177-5](#).

<sup>16</sup> Street Games, [Sport for Better Mental Health](#).

<sup>17</sup> Spoted, [Community Pulse – October 2021](#), and Spoted, [Surviving a Pandemic: Community sports groups and COVID-19](#).

Sport for Development Sector more widely, where responses gathered from organisations across this field reported that the largest negative impact of the pandemic has been on mental health.<sup>18</sup>

It is within this context, and believing that community sport groups provide a trusted, positive environment for young people to tackle mental health problems, that Sported created the Time in Mind project in order to improve the knowledge, skill, and confidence of our community sport groups leaders so that they could create the appropriate environment and support mechanisms that ultimately benefit young people's mental health. The project consisted of three elements: Access, Awareness, and Application.

**Access and Awareness:** Sported connected groups with resources to build their knowledge, skill, and confidence in mental health support. This included online training – e.g. Mental Health First Aid – and examples of best practice

**Application:** £23,000 was awarded equally among 23 Sported groups so they could design, develop, and implement a local solution to the challenge of young people's mental health. While they deployed their funding in a variety of ways, all groups focused on the goal of developing a local solution for enhancing mental health support structures in their community. Some emphasised an explicit form of mental health support, creating interventions that involved active disclosure and discussion of problems, or where young people were encouraged, or felt safe to approach community group staff with requests for support. Others steered closer to implicit support, ensuring that environments were created – or maintained – in which the benefits for young people's mental health were derived not from a specific focus on mental health or direct engagement between young people and staff but rather from the simple act of attending a trusted space and participating in group activities. This helped demonstrate to young people that they were part of a network of valued others, generating emotional comfort from the experience, an outcome observed in other areas of social and mental health support.<sup>19</sup>

Projects were delivered by Sported members across all four nations of the UK and worked with young people from a range age groups, ethnicities, economic and social backgrounds, and mental health needs. Community groups' main sports and physical activities were also wide-ranging, from football to table-tennis, boxing to basketball, through to surfing, equestrian, and multi-sports.

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<sup>18</sup> Sport for Development Coalition, [Impact of COVID-19 on the Sport for Development Sector](#).

<sup>19</sup> Roberts ME, Bernstein MH, Colby SM, 'The effects of eliciting implicit versus explicit social support among youths susceptible for late-onset smoking,' *Addict Behav* 62 (2016), doi: [10.1016/j.addbeh.2016.06.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2016.06.017), and Yang JP, Leu J, Simoni JM, Chen WT, Shiu CS, Zhao H, "Please Don't Make Me Ask for Help": Implicit Social Support and Mental Health in Chinese Individuals Living with HIV,' *AIDS Behav*. 19(8) (2015), doi: [10.1007/s10461-015-1041-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-015-1041-y).

## Projects included:



Training for coaches, designating young people as Mental Health Champions, providing mental health support booklets for young people, and delivery of CAMHS sessions.



Training for volunteers/coaches, mental health leaflets and info for young people, and guest speakers for mental health sessions.

Bringing young people together after lockdown through sports sessions and using this participation to help young people access one-to-one support and mentoring.



Therapy through surfing activities



Boxing sessions and digital wellbeing sessions delivered by a life coach (and boxing coach).



Working with South Asian young men to design and produce a comic around mental health problems in the community.



Expansion of football sessions to provide safe space and promote inclusion and friendships for young people, as well as the opportunity for conversations with coaches around problems.

Walk and talk sessions with ethnically diverse young women.

Employing a behavioural psychologist to upskill volunteers in mental health support, discuss problems, and develop strategies for coping.



Combining mindfulness, creative art, healthy cooking, and sports to support mental health.

Support for less academic young people and those struggling due to COVID-19.



Drop-in sessions for young people and volunteer training using the Emotional Logic Model.



Provision of counselling hours and development of community space for future support.



Delivering a targeted social media campaign and providing additional mental health training sessions aimed at young offenders.

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Use of indoor space to increase frequency of activity sessions, and also developing more information sharing.

Support for young people at difficult stages in their lives through one-to-one mentoring with young people who pass along table-tennis skills to their mentor.



Working with a local football club to deliver mental health support for young people.



Post-lockdown wellbeing re-start programme with four one-hour sessions focused on mindfulness, empowerment, nutrition, and physical activity.

Working with a third-party mental health support provider to design and deliver a programme incorporating equine activity and mental health support.

Tailored mental health support programme, working with 12 young people through physical activity sessions and sessions focused on identify, bullying, friendships, etc.

## Purpose of the research and our methodology

The Time in Mind research aimed to establish the outcomes and learning from the project groups in order to identify those elements of the projects that might usefully inform a model of good practice for other community groups interested in developing mental health support structures, and then propose a potential model of good practice based on this learning for consideration and use by the sector.

A short desk research exercise established existing insight into the current need for mental health support for young people in the UK and the roles community sport groups play in supporting mental health in their communities. Primary research was also conducted through the completion of 16 in-depth interviews with community group leaders and two with third-party service providers involved in the projects. We also conducted one focus group with young people from a Time in Mind project and one with a group of young people from a non-Time in Mind mental health support project.

We recognise that language around mental health can be confusing, particularly as different organisations use different wording. Quotes included in this report and taken from the primary research reflect the language deployed by group leaders. Elsewhere in this document we use the phrase “mental health problems”, as many people feel this is helpful for them.

## Thought Leadership Piece

This report outlines the outcomes and learning from the Time in Mind groups, and, drawing on these findings, proposes a series of elements that can inform a model of good practice for other community groups – both in the sports sphere and beyond – to consider when looking to deliver mental health support mechanisms in their local area. It also includes a series of questions aimed at stimulating further research into the experience of community groups supporting mental health for young people, with the aim of developing knowledge in this area that may benefit community groups, funding bodies, governing bodies, local and national government, and other interested parties.



The young people are more aware of not only their own well-being but also their peers, so when they see somebody around them they can pick up on these little soft hints that we've talked about. It has a hundred percent raised the knowledge and understanding and signposting. They are now young people who can signpost to professionals, for example in their schools. Then the schools bring other people like us in.”

**Group Leader**



“

[We] get them to work in the small groups that they're very comfortable with, and then it will lead onto them having all sorts of discussions amongst themselves: shopping, cooking, clothing, concerns about family overseas because of COVID, or other health issues and concerns. And then they really come up with solutions amongst themselves, because their confidence was developing amongst themselves.”

**Group Leader**

“

'I think for some young people, they don't really want to do that [talk about issues] and they're just there to play football. But other kids see that this is the only positive interaction they have with adults during their week. I think it provides a good escape for them.”

**Group Leader**

## Outcomes for young people and community sports groups

The Time in Mind projects achieved several positive outcomes in supporting mental health solutions within their communities. The following section of the report describes these outcomes, including those for young people and community sport group leaders. Where such evidence was available, it also details the indications of the longer-term impact of the projects for participants. The information below is provided primarily from the perspective of the community group leaders but also includes material taken directly from young people.

Groups reported **increased confidence among young people to engage in conversations about mental health**, both with adult group leaders/support staff and their families and friends. Projects lowered the barriers around the topic of mental health through safe spaces that allowed young people to feel more comfortable engaging with difficult topics. In many cases, this was directly related to the context of a familiar sports session or physical activity. By providing opportunities to discuss mental health problems while taking part in something they knew, or by building on the already-acknowledged mental health benefits of physical activity, groups created environments that helped people talk about their problems in a more natural and comfortable way.

“

It raised some of the women's awareness in terms of getting involved with the activities.”

**Group Leader**

“

It definitely has created a route for other young people to not suffer in silence.”

**Group Leader**



The young people are more aware of not only their own well-being but also their peers, so when they see somebody around them they can pick up on these little soft hints that we've talked about. It has a hundred percent raised the knowledge and understanding and signposting. They are now young people who can signpost to professionals, for example in their schools. Then the schools bring other people like us in."

**Group Leader**



The young people are more aware of the mentoring and the behaviour, and the staff are also aware of it. There is definitely more conversation happening in the schools, in the corridors of schools, at home, around the dinner table, and at mosques where we are."

**Group Leader**

**Supported young people to recognise where their friends and peers are struggling with mental health problems and helped build peer-to-peer support structures.** In building activities that developed understanding of mental health problems and the signs associated with it, and in bringing young people into the processes of supporting mental health, groups strengthened the network of individuals within their communities who could look out for and help those around them. For several group leaders in the Time in Mind projects, the benefit for young people lay in bringing participants together after lockdown, back to the trusted space of their community sport group. In this environment, and being able to engage with each other in person again, young people could support each other in more direct, explicit interventions – through conversation and requests for help, for example – and through the more implicit care of generating emotional comfort through being part of a team or group once more.



I feel that they had a lot of issues that they couldn't have dealt with if we didn't have this group. The sessions helped them feel good because they could see they're not the only ones who have issues, and they could chat to each other and talk to each other."

**Group Leader**

**Increased resilience, self-confidence, and motivation** among young people to participate in physical activity and, in some cases, to re-engage with other areas of their lives. Projects also saw young people achieve **better team building and communication skills**. These outcomes were especially relevant because group leaders identified these as significant areas of concern given higher rates of isolation and loneliness among young people during the UK's COVID-19 lockdowns. Moreover, as restrictions lifted, community group leaders reported increased anxiety among their participants about re-integrating into everyday life. In delivering their Time in Mind project, community groups were able to respond to these issues, supporting their participants in building – or rebuilding – their sense of resilience and self-confidence.

The context of community sport was noted in several group leaders' responses. They pointed out that re-engaging with sport and physical activity increased motivation levels for young people who had struggled with this in the face of severely limited or non-existent opportunities for exercise during the UK's lockdowns. The sheer act of participating in a favourite sport or returning to physical activity led to renewed purpose and drive for young people. This not only manifested itself during the sessions, in terms of engaging more with physical activity again, but also cascaded into increased motivation for some participants outside the group environment. Some young people increased their physical activity outside of the group – turning walks into jogs, for example – while for others it motivated them to increase their focus on schoolwork and/or other important aspects of their life.

### Case study:

A young person struggling with motivation after the lengthy spells of lockdown was motivated to re-engage with physical activity in the community sport group setting by joining the group's sports sessions. As a result, they built up a sense of purpose that translated into more energy and focus for other areas in their life too – including schoolwork.

As the group leader pointed out, “[the young person] was really struggling with motivation. They just said that, since the lockdown, they just feel they can't be bothered to do anything, and they've got into a state where they've just been used to being around the house not doing much. So actually coming and doing some physical exercise has motivated them then to go home and actually do some more work... they feel that they're awake and motivated and ready to tackle some of their other problems at home.”



‘The first few days the girls weren't even talking to each other. They weren't even talking to us, and we're thinking, “oh gosh, what's going on here? They're not taking part.” But slowly it started building the confidence. They thoroughly enjoyed it.’

**Group Leader**



The feedback that we got from the mothers and girls was about wanting to carry on all summer and all through the year. They really want to come back to this programme.”

**Group Leader**



When the young people first came to the sessions, they were very quiet, they weren't talking to each other, they felt their confidence was so low. But by the time they left the project they wanted to extend it. They were talking to each other and they were smiling. You could see the smile on their faces.”

**Group Leader**



Social interaction is a massive thing, and so post-Covid everyone has been socially isolated for so long. They come here to be able to mix with different groups, different genders, different ethnicities.”

**Group Leader**



“it's giving them the emotional therapy, comfort, confidence building, and looking at things from an alternative perspective as well.”

**Group Leader**

**Young people have been empowered to identify and replicate mechanisms for mental health care in their everyday life** outside of the community group environment. Several projects included activities specifically designed to encourage good habits for supporting mental health over the long-term, and young people reported that such sessions increased their understanding of the ideas and techniques available to them to assist their mental health. In some cases, participants reported they had already built these tips into their daily lives, and, in doing so, had seen a positive outcome on their mental health.

### **Case study:**

Through attending learning workshops at their group, one young person was empowered to enact small but significant steps outside of the community group setting to support their mental health.

Through these sessions, and particularly those on mindfulness and empowerment, the young person was able to develop their own toolkit for mental health support. For the young person, part of the benefits of the session was in revealing new ways of approaching mental health support: **“I thought it was just meditation but you do loads of little things – even little things like the empowerment talk, where they got us to write down what we're proud of.”**

The result was an action the young person could take in their homelife to better support their mental health:

**“I’ve stuck it to my fridge so that every morning I read it and it’s had a positive impact. It’s stuck with us I think.”**



They’d go away and do something, and then a couple of weeks later, they’d email me and say, “I tried that and it kind of worked and I’m feeling good.”

**Group Leader**

## Outcomes for community group leaders and staff

**Upskilled community sport group staff, increased knowledge and understanding of mental health support,** and **enhanced capacity for groups to help young people** with their mental health. For the most part this was achieved through the application stage of Time in Mind, as groups spent funding on resources – training modules, additional staff, third-party service support – that supported building this knowledge, understanding, and capacity. For example, several projects employed third-party organisations and individuals with expertise in mental health support to provide training and guidance to community sport group staff or to deliver specific activities with young people.

The application stage of the projects also delivered these outcomes through group leaders observing and interacting with young people during the activities. Several group leaders noted that drawing on feedback from participants and observing the ways in which young people responded to the projects – sometimes in surprising ways – helped them develop a better understanding of mental health support and the most effective ways of achieving positive health outcomes.

Finally, while the Access and Awareness stages of Time in Mind did not appear in most group leaders’ responses, one group pointed specifically to the training resources made available to them through Sported.



At times I think it’s a case of we [the staff] end up learning more from the cohorts because they’re doing things that we didn’t even anticipate.’

**Group Leader**



It allowed us to get another coach in for those sessions, so there was still enough manpower to look after the session whilst it was running.”

**Group Leader**

## Learning from the Projects

In the following section we outline key learning from the Time in Mind projects, focusing on the models of support developed by the community groups and the various elements that contributed to the achievement of positive mental health outcomes for young people. We also explore the role third-party service providers played in the delivery of the Application element of the projects.

**The projects were a mix of implicit and explicit forms of mental health support, and both are of value, either singularly or combined.** Several activities leaned toward more explicit models of support – that is, where the support involved the active disclosure and discussion of problems, or where young people were encouraged, or felt safe to approach community group staff with requests for support. However, learning from the projects indicates the powerful role of implicit support within the community group context. Sessions did not require a specific focus on mental health or direct engagement between young people and staff to achieve positive mental health outcomes. In several cases, the simple act of attending a trusted space and participating in group activities demonstrated to young people their position in a network of valued others. It was the positive emotional response to this, rather than an explicit intervention or discussion of their problems, that generated positive health outcomes. It is an especially relevant model of support given the context of young people re-engaging with each other after lockdown: being able to find that emotional comfort through connecting with others after such prolonged periods of isolation is an important part of many Time in Mind stories.

**In-person sessions were identified as especially effective** for supporting young people's mental health within community groups. Groups reported that this format was a welcome change for young people after long periods of Covid-19 lockdowns where rates of isolation and loneliness increased dramatically, and where communication was almost exclusively conducted online (if it was available at all). By providing these spaces in which young people could interact with each other face-to-face, groups helped participants rebuild confidence in their social skills and facilitated renewed, or new, connections and friendships.

Some groups deliberately emphasised in-person activities that fostered mixing among young people of different backgrounds – age groups, affluency, ethnicity, etc. – and among those who they had not met before. This helped young people increase their confidence in approaching new situations and develop friendships with peers from different walks of life. Finally, group leaders and young people noted the importance of in-person contact in driving better and more inclusive conversations, especially when compared to online calls. Participants found this format of conversation or activity more open and welcoming, and felt better able to contribute to discussions because of it.





Our key thing was to engage and do something softly-softly to give them a purpose, but also for them to mix with a group. Maybe some of the people they met with they didn't know prior to coming to us, and they formed friendships. That was pretty key."

**Group Leader**



I think you can get a better understanding of what they're talking about. With the empowerment talk we were writing things down, we were having a proper chat. I think it was definitely better to be in person for that."

**Young Person**



It's better face to face."

**Young Person**



It worked because it was interactive, it was in person."

**Group Leader**

## Case study

A multisport group hosted four one-hour small-group workshops – on empowerment, mindfulness, healthy eating, and team-building – which were led by external mental health care experts. This provided the young people, aged sixteen to twenty-four, with the opportunity to interact with their peers, discuss their problems, and (re)build skills and confidence lost during long periods of Covid-19 lockdown. The in-person small group setting was critical in the success of the sessions. It helped make participants feel comfortable and encouraged interactions among the groups.

As the group leader noted, for young people who had been isolated and unemployed, "to actually have an opportunity to work with other people, it was really powerful". Young people who took part in the workshops praised the in-person format for building connections: "it's better face to face", one reported, while another recalled the empowerment session where "we were having a proper chat. I think it was definitely better to be in person for that."

Just as importantly, however, the workshops also empowered young people to build their own mental health support through actions and ideas they could take away from the session and implement in their everyday lives. "We gave opportunities for young people to take stuff away and do in their own time and to support them further", the group leader reported.

**Groups largely focused on small group or one-to-one formats.** This had several benefits for supporting mental health outcomes. Group leaders reported that it made it easier to encourage interactivity among young people during activities and for them to build connections with those around them. It also created less pressured environments in which to discuss mental health problems or other sensitive topics. As many of the projects were designed to promote informal conversations and lighter-touch mental wellbeing check-ins, smaller numbers of participants made participants feel more at ease in talking more openly about such matters. This was especially the case in those projects where support was developed through one-to-one mentoring.

Smaller group sizes also facilitated more effective follow-on support, as community group staff – often operating with limited time and resources – were able to focus on those who needed help the most. For example, one group took advantage of the limited number of participants in their sessions to ensure a follow-up phone call was placed to each young person. It should be noted, however, that in some cases COVID-19 restrictions imposed limited numbers on activities rather than them being included as deliberate programme choices by the community groups.



The one-to-one sessions allowed us to go a little deeper with people.”

**Group Leader**



It enabled those conversations to happen and people to interact, rather than do it to fifty people and not everyone gets a chance to get involved.”

**Group Leader**



“I liked that everyone was able to contribute and have their ideas in the open.”

**Young Person**



[We] get them to work in the small groups that they're very comfortable with, and then it will lead onto them having all sorts of discussions amongst themselves: shopping, cooking, clothing, concerns about family overseas because of COVID, or other health issues and concerns. And then they really come up with solutions amongst themselves, because their confidence was developing amongst themselves.”

**Group Leader**



When we had forty children in a session, you feel like you've done a good job, and you feel like you've got lots of young people there. But what is the impact, and how deep was the impact? Having these smaller sessions where we're not just doing sports but we're talking with young people about mental health, and you can see that young person's progression because you know them a little bit more and you know the problems they've had, that was a lot more rewarding for us as an organisation."

**Group Leader**

**Providing informal safe spaces where young people feel they can discuss their problems is an effective form of support.**

The success of Time in Mind projects did not always stem from a separate mental health activity or session, or from sessions explicitly advertised as supporting mental wellbeing. In several cases, groups simply ensured they were providing spaces where young people felt able to talk openly and where staff had the time to listen – for example, following regular sports sessions or in a clubhouse environment. This indicates that ensuring an atmosphere conducive to supporting mental health is just as important as delivering more targeted interventions.



Through the nature of the work, you end up having informal conversations with the young people, and then I guess it's just a case of when they feel comfortable to open up to you, taking them to the side and potentially staying after the sessions and speaking to them."

**Group Leader**



I think for some young people, they don't really want to do that [talk about issues] and they're just there to play football. But other kids see that this is the only positive interaction they have with adults during their week. I think it provides a good escape for them."

**Group Leader**

### **Case study:**

Informal safe spaces were put into place during an open football project to provide room for conversations with a trusted adult should the young people want to talk about any problems worrying them. The football project emphasised casual play and camaraderie over competitive matches, and therefore already fostered a friendly, low-pressure environment.

The group's Time in Mind project ensured the project could put aside time during the football sessions to give players a chance to talk with an experienced sports coach if they wanted to. There was no expectation on the young people to do so, but by using the Time in Mind funding to ensure there was always one coach available to talk with a young person away from the football session, the group created an informal, implicit support structure. In this case, as the group reported, young people benefited from existing good relationships with the coaches. This provided the context in which the participants felt at ease interacting with the coaches in conversation around difficult topics or worries they had.

### **Case study:**

A multi-sports summer camp, delivering a few hours of physical activity twice a week, provided young people with an opportunity to reconnect with each other in-person following the COVID-19 lockdowns.

"It was for them to get their confidence back and it was the gentle approach", said the group leader, who praised the more low-key approach for creating a friendly environment where everyone was welcome and where support came from the team-ethos of the camp. Everyone at the activities was encouraged to lend a hand to their friends and peers, so that, in the words of the group leader, the atmosphere was one of, "you can do this, you can participate in this, and we don't care how long it's going to take you to do it, we're all going to cheer."

**Empowering young people to take ownership of sessions and activities or building roles for them within mental health support structures** was a prominent feature in several Time in Mind projects. This was achieved in a variety of ways across the projects, including:

- Designating young people as 'mental health champions' or as part of 'investor' groups so that they could act as an initial point of contact for friends and peers with mental health problems, represent their activity group in conversation with community group leaders, and inform the content of support mechanisms on an ongoing basis.
- Drawing on the specialist academic knowledge or lived experiences of young people to shape support mechanisms and encouraging young people to use their skills and knowledge for the benefit of the wider group.

- Encouraging young people to influence the purpose and content of support structures by incorporating their ideas, wants, and needs into the planning of activities, and then ensuring regular check-ins and feedback to ensure support continued to meet their needs.
- Harnessing the creative and practical energies of young people so that not only did creative sessions provide scope to discuss mental health problems but that they also developed skills and self-confidence through the act of creating.

This approach of empowering young people within the model of support, rather than simply making them recipients of mental health support in a top-down approach, not only delivered positive mental health outcomes for participants but also generated higher levels of investment among the young people in the activities. It improved feelings of self-worth by valuing their contributions to their group. Finally, where young people were involved as contact points for friends and peers to discuss problems they were having, it allowed group leaders to target support more effectively because they had a trusted channel of communication about problems affecting those in the wider group.

### **Case study:**

A comic, designed and created by young men from the South Asian community, revealed the story of mental health problems faced by members of that community in their day-to-day lives. Devised by members of a multi-sports community group, participants were initially asked what they would most like to work on, thereby investing participants in the project from the very start.

Creative sessions with an art team provided an opportunity for these mentors to spend time with the young people involved in the comic and to chat with them in an informal environment about any problems they were facing .

As the group leader noted, “the biggest thing for us was that while they were doing the comic a conversation started about understanding who they really are.”

At the same time, the young people developed creative skills and increased their self-confidence through their work on the comic and through becoming mental health champions at their school. While the group leader noted that participation levels fell over the course of the project, a core group of young people saw the comic through from start to finish. The comic stimulated conversations not just among the group but at the participants’ schools, with their family members, and among the community’s religious leaders, many of whom had previously been unaware of the problems affecting the community. The group leaders are now rolling out the project with a second set of participants, this time working with girls and young women.

### Case study:

Table-tennis sessions provided an opportunity for young people to connect across the table with a mentor who talked with them, in an informal sporting environment, about any problems they were facing. Crucially, however, the session was designed to give the young table-tennis players the chance to contribute too, by drawing on their sporting prowess to teach their mentor table tennis skills. As the group leader noted, the groups “wanted it to be side by side, with the idea that it is give and take on both sides – it’s not a top-down activity. Then it benefits both sides; both parties feel like they’re giving something and receiving something.”

Young people’s mental health not only benefited from the conversation around problems they were facing but from the feeling of giving back: “If they can contribute through playing and teaching, and the younger ones love to share what they’ve learned, they’re really excited.” The project suggests the positive outcomes that can be achieved where conversations are underpinned by the power of mutual exchange.

### Intergenerational projects, or support structures that actively connected with parents and other family members, were recognised as particularly positive.

These activities often challenged assumptions among parents or helped create a new, or increased, awareness of mental health problems faced by their children and young people more generally. In some cases, children and young adults specifically identified a lack of mental health support for parents in contrast to the dedicated service they were receiving. One community group acted upon this information to invite parents and their children to join together in the conversation in the same room at the same time, thus providing a support mechanism not only for their group participants but also parents too.



We asked the parents and we asked the girls beforehand, “would you want to come and join the project?”

**Group Leader**



We’ve worked with parents and they’ve requested the one-to-one support, so that’s been really good.”

**Group Leader**



‘We had quite a lot of parents engaged. We invited the parents and the children to come together, so we could have that joint conversation in the room. Because sometimes the kids have felt that they’ve got support but that some of the parents haven’t. They didn’t feel anyone was there for their parents to help them deal with issues.’

**Group Leader**





The biggest impact is that we shared this with their mums, and they didn't realise the amount of pressure the young person was under and what their triggers were: why did they have a real lack of self-esteem, where is it coming from?"

**Group Leader**

### **Case study:**

Harnessing the mental health benefits of both social interaction and physical activity, an outdoors walk-and-talk project from a multi-sports community group brought together members of an ethnically diverse community, particularly in the south Asian-Pakistani community.

With concerns expressed by members of the community about their physical health, and with limited access to facilities in their local area, group leaders focused on the simple and familiar activity of walking. It provided a safe space where, guided by experienced external coaches, participants could meet and talk with others – both in their group and with passers-by – while at the same time improving their physical fitness.

As the group leader pointed out, **“just that simple interaction... they could uplift someone, they're recognised, and it gives them value and worth.”**

The project also focused on drawing upon the lived experience of young people to build mental health support for participants and their family members. Group leaders and the external coaches encouraged young people to think about how their own day-to-day experiences could be translated into support for others, and there was a particular emphasis on discussing mental health problems and solutions in language that the community was familiar and comfortable with. For the group leader, this was a key element of the project: “it's about identifying resources that speak the language, and connect with them.”

**Tailoring support to the specific requirements of each group increases effectiveness and accessibility.** This was achieved through conversations with participants and interested parties – most often parents – in advance of projects, so that group leaders understood the kinds of problems facing those they were looking to support. By doing so at an early stage in the lifetime of the project, groups were able to create activities and support mechanisms that responded to the needs of their communities. Moreover, groups that continued to talk with the community through the length of the project, or who built in evaluation processes, were able to determine if their work continued to meet those needs. This meant they could then adapt where appropriate.

Ensuring accessibility was also a critical element in the Time in Mind projects. Successful projects ensured that support was delivered using resources in the language(s) of their communities, and in terms that best connected with their audiences. For many, this involved avoiding the academic framing of mental health support, and instead emphasised how young people can be supported through solutions grounded in everyday lived experience.



We've actually adapted our sports sessions, because the feedback we've got is that coming out of lockdown they felt it's weird integrating back into a group. They've just been used to communicating online. For a few of our sessions we really worked on the teamwork aspect and communicated about the skills to integrate not just into the sport sessions but outside again. And about feeling comfortable again, being around other people, being able to talk. It really helped in that way.'

**Group Leader**



What [the external support provider] is constantly reminding me of is the need to explain things in the language of individuals. So, we did a talk about mental toughness, but we talked about that in the context of: "Talk about some people who you think are tough, who you think are mentally tough." We were using the language that a lot of the young people were used to using."

**Group Leader**



"One of the benefits we observed was pulling in understanding and experiences from the online tools of what really transpires: the lived reality, as opposed to something educational in a formal context. We used very, very informal learning, putting things in their language at the grass roots level."

**Group Leader**

### **Case study:**

Using conversations and feedback from parents about concerns for their children, a combined healthy-eating and physical activity programme was developed that specifically responded to the post-lockdown problems facing special needs young women and girls in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities.

The project showed the benefit of early engagement with those who understand the problems affecting young people – in this case, their parents – so that the activities could be tailored to meet specific requirements. It also allowed group leaders to identify those most in need in their community and target the support accordingly, including by bringing on board specialist external support.

The group leader noted that ‘we put the program together based on what the interest was for the girls, and skills and knowledge that the youth workers brought.’ Interactive cooking and soap-making sessions with a chef were run alongside sports activities (including football, running, and ball games specific to Pakistani and Indian cultures).

### **Case study:**

Time in Mind funding was utilised to advertise the work of a group more widely in their specific community, drawing greater attention to the mental health support available for young people through the provision of physical activities, such as boxing. Advertising took place in several different places, including local shops, but it was especially effective when done on the premises of a local not-for-profit social enterprise focused on mental health support.

Building connections to this external partner and making visitors to that organisation aware of the extra support available through the community sport group, meant the group could connect with young people already seeking support. It also resulted in informal conversations with that organisation, increasing understanding of mental health, particular around what pointers to look for amongst young people.

As the group leader noted, chatting with an experienced external organisation “just gives you a little bit more of an insight into what they [young people] might be thinking, and helps us look for signs and symptoms of poor mental health.

The community group also developed a social media campaign, targeted at young people.

Through these campaigns, the group has raised its profile and become integral to the network of local organisations supporting young people’s mental health. The group leader summed this up in pointing out that, through building their profile and developing their learning, “we seem to be the go-to people for [the] local authority.”

**External support through third-party service providers (whether individuals or groups) was critical** for many groups in delivering effective mental health support

activities. Young people and group leaders valued the mental health expertise of such providers, and their depth of knowledge on specific elements of mental health support – such as empowerment, resilience, and mindfulness – lent additional credibility to conversations around these topics. While some group leaders had existing experience or training in mental health support, they recognised the value of drawing on outside professionals to provide additional knowledge or to bring new perspectives and tools to their projects. In some cases, group leaders praised the role of third-party providers for simply being there to bounce ideas off or offer an extra viewpoint on how groups were already supporting mental health. In these examples, the conversation around support was just as beneficial to the group leaders as the actual delivery of the activities.



I just think the presenters, they made you feel confident. It was quite mellow.”

**Young person**



It’s that different face, different style of communication and their enthusiasm that someone they see on a day-to-day basis can’t better basically.”

**Group Leader**



We work with a lot of people with mental health issues anyhow, but I think having training like that and having input from other people, it makes you really look at stuff. That’s really useful in itself, just getting another person’s eyes on it all.”

**Group Leader**



“The external deliverers were fantastic, they were worth their weight in gold. They pitched it at the right level and that was because we knew who we were working with to some extent.”

**Group Leader**



[Third-party support worker] is trained. He’s got all the insurances in place. He’s highly qualified, and the kids absolutely adore him.”

**Group Leader**



It’s helped me start to think about the activities that I do, and how I can adjust them and adapt them for people that are really coming with mental health issues.”

**Group Leader**

## Case study

By working with a third-party mental health support service, an assisted learning group that specialises in support in a supervised horse environment was better able to understand the effectiveness of their own approaches to mental health support, recognise the positives of existing approaches, and consider new ideas for solutions moving forward. Critical to the relationship between the two parties was an in-person visit by the third-party service to the group's facilities, so that they could deliver staff training and observe the existing model of support.

By developing a partnership with the external service and through the conversations that arose from it, the community group had increased confidence in the effectiveness of its model while also gaining valuable learning about how their model could be adapted, or how new approaches delivered, in the future. The result, as the group leader points out, is that "it makes you rethink what you know and look at ways to develop it... it's helpful in that it brings new eyes into looking at possibilities and ideas. It also reaffirms what you do."

**Upskilling staff in mental health support** or **bringing in additional staff where possible created greater capacity within groups to identify and respond to mental health problems among their young people**. More holistically, **providing support for staff to ensure they feel looked after and that their own mental health needs are being met is vital**. Developing a caring environment and/or employing interventions on their behalf, through regular check-ins, feedback mechanisms, and specific mental health coaching ensures that those looking after young people are looked after in return.

“

For me it's takes the pressure off having other people being able to do that as well, not just me taking responsibility on my own."

**Group Leader**

“

We have to look after ourselves first before our organisations and young people can go forwards."

**Group Leader**

“

There's a lot of bravado about leaders and volunteers. There's all this stuff about leaders eat last and all that stuff. I get it if you're in a great, big business and you need to be telling people how you want them to behave, but when most of the people you're dealing with are willing volunteers who just love what they're trying to do... and I think that we almost have a duty to make sure that they're in a great place before we set them out there."

**Third-party Support Provider.**

### **Case study:**

A community basketball group connected with a third-party support professional – an executive coach with a professional background in behavioural psychology, but also experienced as a basketball coach too – to deliver one-to-one online mental health coaching sessions for group staff as part of the group’s approach of encouraging young people to think differently about the challenges brought about by COVID-19 lockdowns.

Engaging directly with the coaches on a one-to-one basis provided room for the discussion to focus on their circumstances and problems, and, consequently, for the potential solutions to be tailored to them as individuals. As the third-party support provider noted, the idea was that ‘the simple tools that we gave them would help them to go away and just almost tick it off and say, “I know now I can think about that, or that’s reminding me, I ought to do this”’.

This was one of the few groups to use online engagement as part of their Time in Mind application project, but the advantage of this lay in the opportunity to connect the external coach and community group’s staff regardless of their location.

## **Developing a model for best practice**

A key aim of the Time in Mind project was to use learning from the community groups to help identify a potential model of good practice for mental health support for groups working with young people in their local area. As this report has outlined, several elements of the Time in Mind activities were effective in increasing understanding of mental health problems, building skills and capacity to deliver mental health support, and, ultimately, achieving positive mental health outcomes. In this final section, we propose a series of steps, based on this learning, that could form the foundations of a good practice model for community sport groups – or community groups more generally – looking to support young people’s mental health.

It’s important to note that the Time in Mind groups worked with different participants from each other, ranging in age group, ethnicity, language(s), social and economic background, and mental health needs. As we have stated elsewhere in this report, the success of the Time in Mind projects was in no small part down to the way in which community groups responded to their local needs: developing tailored support solutions shaped around the backgrounds and needs of their participants. As such, the steps outlined below may not suit all groups. However, we believe that the following elements represent the building blocks for an effective good practice model of mental health support for community groups.



**Consider how implicit and explicit forms of mental health support can be used, or built upon in the case of existing support, and recognise that both are of value, either singularly or combined:**

some activities favoured more explicit models of support, with support involving the active disclosure and discussion of problems, or where young people were encouraged, or felt safe to approach community group staff with requests for support. However, implicit forms of support were also effective approaches. This occurred where sessions did not require a specific focus on mental health or direct engagement between young people and staff to achieve positive mental health outcomes. The simple act of attending a trusted space and participating in group activities can demonstrate to young people their position in a network of valued others. The positive emotional response to this, rather than an explicit intervention or discussion of their problems, can produce beneficial health outcomes. This approach may be especially useful as young people re-connect following lockdowns or other periods of isolation, because it helps them find emotional comfort through group interaction that may have previously been missing.

**Identify specific needs within a group in advance and continue to monitor activities to ensure they adapt to new issues:**

the success of the Time in Mind projects was rooted in the way community sport groups responded to their local context and the community's needs. They learned about these issues through several avenues, including drawing on the deep knowledge of group leaders, feedback from young people, and input from parents. Understanding the needs of the community in which groups operate through regular feedback processes will not only help create effectively targeted programmes for mental health support but ensures those programmes can adapt to the changing needs of participants on an ongoing basis. To determine the efficacy of projects, Mind recommends the use of validated mental health outcome measures. Examples of such measures are available through Mind's [tools for measuring changes in mental health and wellbeing](#).

**Ensure sessions are of a size that promotes interactivity among participants and allows them to feel comfortable in contributing:**

many Time in Mind groups reported positive outcomes where sessions and activities were conducted with small numbers of participants or on a one-to-one scale. In smaller groups, participants feel more at ease and better able to connect with those around them, whether this is their peers, group leaders and staff, or external mental health mentors and coaches. It also allows those charged with supporting the activities more capacity to direct attention to those in particular need, especially where resources are limited.

**Empower young people to contribute to support structures through defined roles or processes that incorporate and recognise their contributions:**

children and young adults who took on the mantle of mental health champions at their groups, or who felt they were giving back to those helping support them, gained confidence, self-belief, and satisfaction. An effective model of support puts young people at the heart of activities, entrusting them to help those around them, providing spaces for their skills and talents to drive projects, and allowing their contributions to build self-confidence and self-worth. It can also empower young people through creating environments where power is

balanced between the young person and the mental health professional. Where young people are encouraged to take on roles relating to mental health support, training and ongoing support should be provided to ensure they are fully supported with these responsibilities.

**Involve third-party service providers where specific expertise, extra capacity, or a new perspective is helpful:** many Time in Mind group leaders and staff had existing knowledge of mental health problems and solutions, developed formally through training resources and informally through lived experience in their groups. Third-party support, however, plays an important role in providing more specialist knowledge and experience, and builds opportunities to develop existing, or create new ways of supporting mental health by having a fresh perspective on activities. It is also critical to develop relationships with external organisations for signposting young people to further mental health support outside the community sport group environment. Therefore, where resources allow for it, consider drawing on outside support to design, implement, and evaluate models of support.

**Frame mental health support in the language and lived experience of participants and their community:** doing so increases accessibility for participants and better connects solutions to their day-to-day lives.

**Give participants time to acclimatise to activities and conversations around on mental health:** many of the Time in Mind projects demonstrated that building confidence levels among young people to discuss difficult problems takes time. Community sport groups already have the benefit of providing a trusted space for young people, but opening up about mental health problems can nevertheless be challenging for children and young adults. The implicit support that community groups provide for young people in ensuring a safe space for them to engage with trusted adults is already an important first step in supporting mental within the community, but building on that foundation and empowering young people to achieve positive mental health outcomes can take time and patience.

## Further Research

The learning taken from our community groups provided valuable insight into the ways in which a potential model of good practice can be developed, but it also brought out several ideas and questions that may provoke further discussion and insight. In concluding this report, we wanted to outline a series of such questions, and suggest that they might form the basis for future research around the topic of community sport groups and their role in supporting positive mental health outcomes.

- How can awareness of, and access to mental health support resources build knowledge, understanding, and confidence for community group leaders looking to achieve positive mental health outcomes within their community?

- How can community groups achieve sustainable models of mental health support, and how can they be best supported in doing so?
- What are the long-term impacts for young people and community groups as a result of mental health support projects in a sporting environment?
- How can we better understand implicit and explicit structures of mental health support in the community sport group environment, and is one a more viable and effective approach for groups to adopt?



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