

# Insights Report: The role of kit in community sports



# Insights Report: The role of kit in community sports

## *Executive Summary*

This small research project had a clearly defined scope and aims to provide insights into:  
·the role sports/physical activity has for the self-confidence and self-esteem of children and young people.

- the impact that financial barriers to new/the correct kit may have on participation in sports/physical activities.
- an understanding of support community groups need with solutions to mitigate the barriers and prevent negative impacts of lack of kit.

This research project was commissioned by Cif, one of the UK's much-loved household cleaning brands. The aim is to provide insights for its Re-Kicks campaign, a nationwide initiative that is collecting second-hand, unused football boots and re-distributing them to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds across the UK.

This report delivers some key insights findings/that:

- show consistency with existing research literature and evidence.
- confirm the importance of sports/activities for young people's self-confidence and self-esteem and for their life skills in the short and long term.
- highlight the barrier that lack of correct kit plays in the participation in community sports.
- confirm negative impacts lack of correct kit can have on children and young people, such as embarrassment and shame.
- suggest financial barriers for families and clubs to support children and young people with kit are an issue.
- find that groups are facing increasing challenges in meet the demand for support with kit.
- welcome opportunities for Cif to support groups with solutions already in place or that they would like to establish.

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# Introduction

## Project Background

This research project is to support the Re-Kicks initiative, a nationwide campaign from Cif. The main objective of the research is to provide insights for the project, which will collect and clean second-hand football boots, re-distributing them to the young people across the UK who need them most.

Sported's role is as an expert organisation in community sports. Sported is the UK's largest network of community sports groups, supporting over half a million young people to overcome barriers to reach their full potential.

Sported's groups work within complex local contexts, often tackling some of society's biggest challenges. Around 50% are located in areas that sit within the highest three indices of relative deprivation in the UK, two-thirds are volunteer-led, and a third have an annual turnover of less than £10,000.

Sported's insight and research team were commissioned to deliver insights on three key research questions:

- Role of sport/physical activity on confidence and self-esteem of young people
- Significance of kit on participation
- Challenges communities face with cost of new kit, particularly football boots

## Literature Review and Research Background/Context

International literature consistently highlights the positive impacts participation in sports/local activities has for children and young people. For example, recent academic survey research in North America and in Europe has found that increased self-confidence is consistent across all groups within an age bracket (Yaylacı, Ünlü, Fakültesi, Kampüsü, & Yolu, 2021) and also increases with age for adolescents and teenagers (Yilmaz, 2023).

IUK research literature shows that community sport plays an important role for disadvantaged, minoritized, and marginalised groups including girls, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled children and those from low-income families or living in areas of material deprivation.

For example, researchers in England (Morgan, Parker, & Marturano, 2020) recently found that community-based sport and physical activity acts as a form of education to enhance employability. Participation in community activities helps to change negative perceptions held by adults that undermine self-esteem and act as a barrier to opportunities in education and work.

Sported and the University of Hertfordshire's survey-based research with 75 community sport and youth groups revealed findings on girls' participation. The researchers found that bespoke communication and support of girls in community sports increased engagement and had positive impacts on participation (Piggot & Pike, 2020).

In 2022, a systemic literature review found key themes in existing research on the benefits and barriers of sport for children from low-income settings (Nelson, Spurr, & Bally, 2022). The authors found recurring themes of the emotional and social benefits of sport participation with evidence of declining participation rates despite attempts to create sporting environments of psychological and social safety.

The research on the importance of community sport for children from low-income families and areas of material deprivation is even more relevant during a period of cost-of-living challenges.

Sported's most recent Community Pulse report (2023) included findings that 90% of survey respondents agreed that they were concerned about the impact on their group and that 61% have subsidised kit/equipment for their young people (621 Pulse survey respondents, approximately a quarter of Sported members). The response rates from the Community Pulse survey suggest that the financial barriers to participation in sport/physical activities include the cost of suitable kit and equipment.

This specific research into self-confidence and kit is a small project for a

specific purpose, to provide insights for a Cif programme with football boots. Yet it also sits within this wider context of knowledge and the financial challenges families face now.

The aims for this research project are to explore whether the cost of kit, including footwear such as football boots, provides a specific challenge currently to determine the need for support for community clubs with programmes to redistribute items.

## Methods

This was a short research project lasting four weeks, from the start of data collection to the final report. The project was delivered as a structured mixed methods social research study (Clark, Foster, Bryman, & Sloan, 2021), using a six-question survey to collect quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (textual) data and two semi-structured interviews to generate in-depth qualitative insights. The survey was sent to all Spotted members, approximately 3,000 groups, with a prize draw incentive of football boots. The survey communication included an invitation to express an interest in participating in a research interview with a specific incentive of football boots.

There were 240 respondents to the survey and 40 expressions of interest in an interview. Some of the responses were not from existing Spotted members, suggesting a few members had shared the survey with their contacts. The data analysed and results shown include all responses. The lead researcher selected two interview participants using criteria to ensure they had different regional and demographic bases.

The Spotted insights and research team analysed the quantitative survey data for numerical and percentage-based findings. The key findings presented in this report use the percentages for each question. The data was further analysed using the variable of those respondents who deliver football as a main activity. Where there were noticeable differences between the results for all respondents and those with football as a main activity, those findings are included in the key findings.

The insights and research team analysed the qualitative responses to the six questions for recurring themes. The lead researcher read all the responses and then formulated a list of key points and terms that were raised more than twice. The researcher used that list to identify the points that recurred most frequently to determine the key themes for each question. Those themes are listed in the results for each question as are samples of the responses, adding a context and depth to the quantitative percentages. Names and organisations are included with the qualitative data where permission was granted in the survey.

The lead researcher conducted the two interviews and analysed that data deductively. She used MAXQDA software to code the interviews using the themes from the survey data analysis. The coding was then used to find extracts that could be used to add detail and depth as key thematic findings. The interview findings are presented separately as the best approach for adding a clear and in-depth illustration of the key themes in relation to the research aims and questions. Both interviewees agreed that their details could be included in the report and shared with Cif for promotion and press materials.

The process of analysis and report drafting also involved key decisions on how to present the interview data. The extracts included in this report have been adjusted to remove redundant words and phrases to ensure clarity of the point the interviewee was making.

The discussion and conclusion section provides a synthesis and summary of the key findings from all data. That final part of the report presents the findings with direct reference to the projects objectives and aims.



# Key Findings

## Survey Findings

This section presents the key findings for each of the six survey questions. The quantitative results are shown as percentage of respondents and the qualitative results are presented as short lists of the key themes found. One or two extracts from the qualitative results for each question are included as illustrative findings.

There were 240 respondents to the survey which is approximately 8% of Sported's membership. Of the total respondents, 140 list football as their main activity.

### Question 1

**Q1: To what extent do you agree that sports and physical activities play an important role in building confidence and self-esteem in children:**

100% of respondents to this question either strongly agreed or agreed, with 98% strongly agreeing.

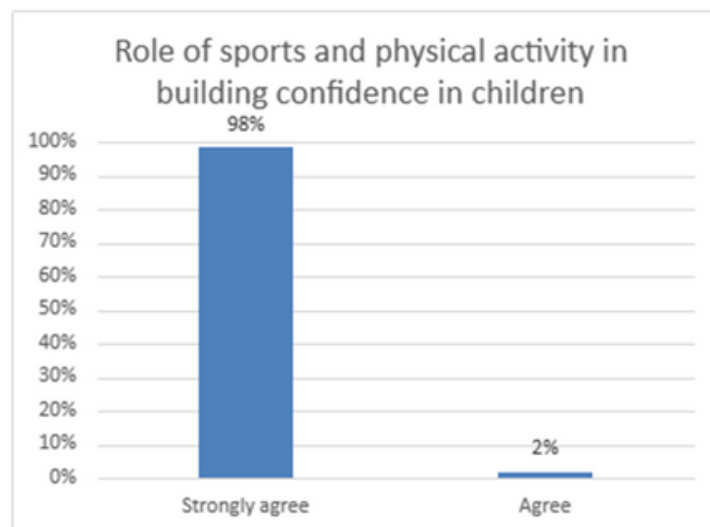


Figure 1

### Themes:

- Importance for girls
- Importance for disabled children

- Development of skills such as teamwork, social relationships, resilience, developing and meeting goals/targets
- Emphasis on importance for wellbeing, a sense of belonging, and mental health as well as the more obvious role for physical health

*"They become leaders, movers and shakers!"* - David Roughan, Our Barn Community, London

*"For some kids it's the space where they can forget all their worries with school or with family and just be themselves, be kids, and shine"* - Club in SE England

## Question 2

**Q2. To what extent do you agree that young people at your group are confident when taking part in physical activities/sports at your group:**

100% of respondents to this question either strongly agreed or agreed, with 98% strongly agreeing.

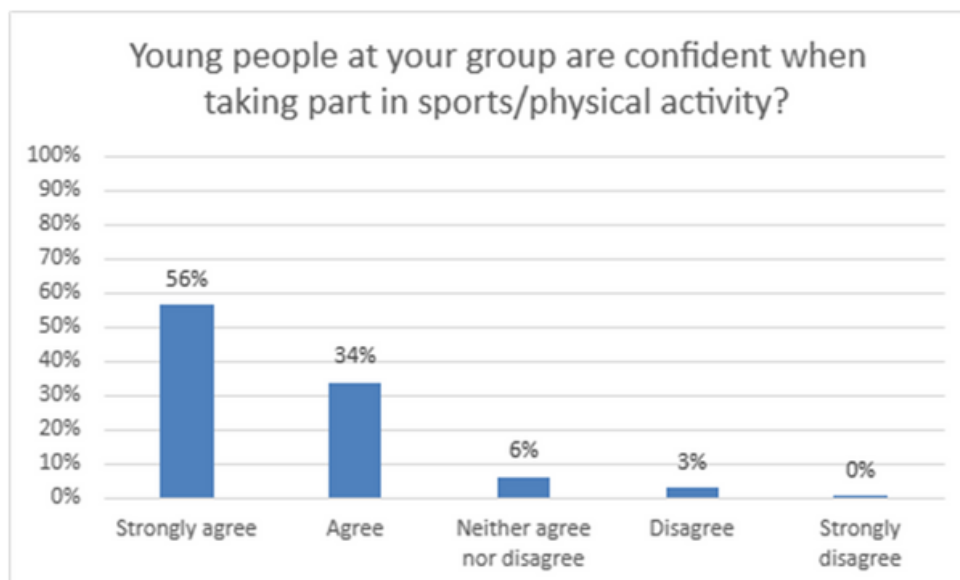


Figure 2

(Only one respondent strongly disagreed, which rounded to 0%)

*"My group consists of teenage girls and they are a particularly vulnerable demographic with many insecurities. We make every effort to make them feel comfortable when at training and try to empower them to take that away with them to other areas in their lives as well" - Anon*

*"Their confidence grows in sessions but they don't always start with confidence. Our emphasis is team work and building relationships and that builds confidence" - Shirley Hart, Acorn FC, Yorkshire & Humber*

### Question 3

**Q3. To what extent do you agree that young people at your group are more confident taking part in physical activities/sports when they have the right kit to play in:**

82% of respondents strongly agreed and 15% agreed with this statement.

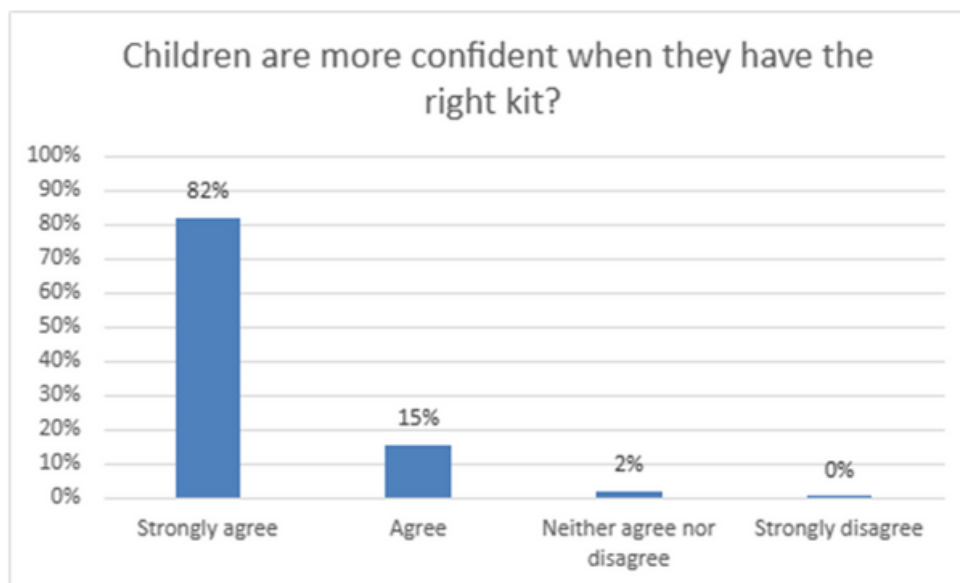


Figure 3

(Only one respondent strongly disagreed, which rounded to 0%)

When football is the main activity the percentage of those who strongly agreed with question three increases to 88%.

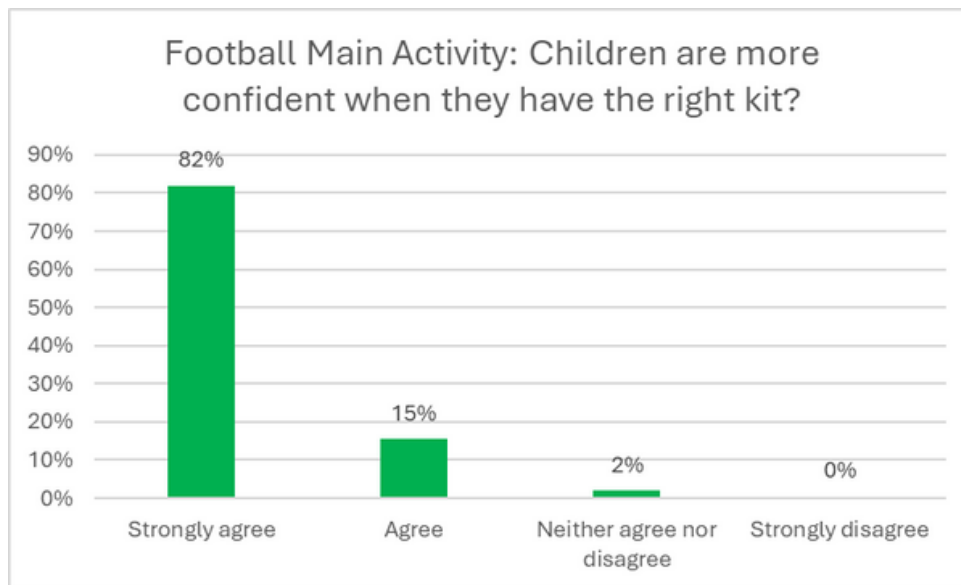


Figure 4

**Themes:**

- Sense of belonging
- Boost to confidence
- Increasing participation
- Sense of identity
- Ensuring appropriate kit/clothing

*“They love having a kit, they feel they belong and are part of an important unit, all working together to achieve the same goal”* - Charlie Jones, Vision FC

*“It’s a point of pride and a massive contributor to the sense of belonging and fitting in and in turn inspiring confidence”* - Rebecca Adams, Accelerate Football Coaching, West Midlands

**Question 4**

**Q4. To what extent do you agree that young people at your group are less likely to participate in physical activities/sports when they don’t have the correct kit:**

The responses on this question were more evenly spread between strongly

agree and agree than on the previous questions, at 47% and 37% respectively.

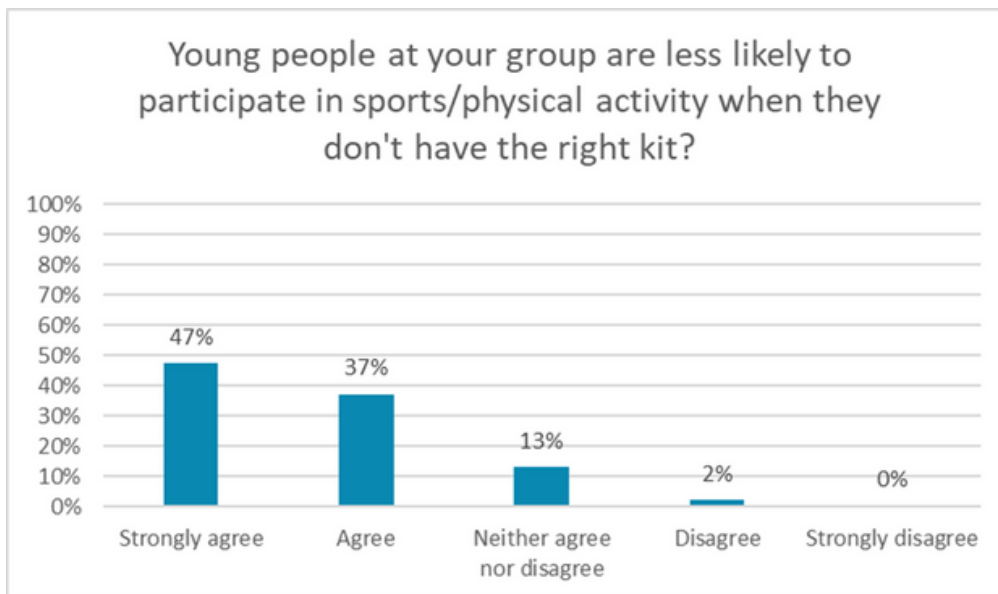


Figure 5

However, when we analysed the responses for the 140 respondents who listed their main activity as football, the results looked quite different.

49% and 41%, respectively, of those who list football as their main activity strongly agreed or agreed with the question.

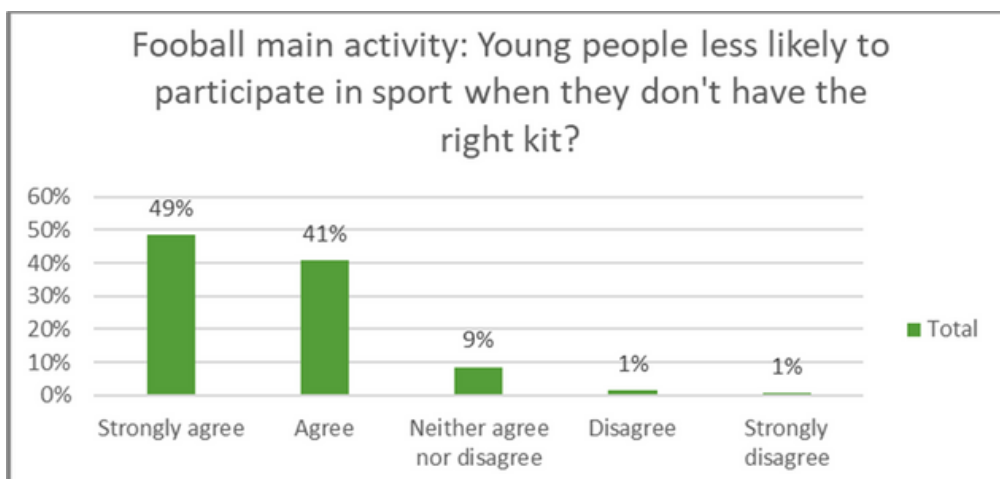


Figure 6

**Themes:**

- Specific impacts and barriers for girls
- Barriers to participation

- Impact on confidence
- Impact on sense of belonging
- Impact on friendships
- Cause of embarrassment

*“Without the right kit, children feel intimidated to join in, embarrassed in front of peers and less likely to play as they will not be able to perform as they wish to”* – Alice Frankel, The Dalgarno Trust, London

8 respondents highlighted the specific impacts for girls:

*“If kids, especially girls cant afford the same gear as their friends it can put them off playing. Girls also have the added pressure of periods and what they wear especially is shorts etc are white”* – Pauline Lavery, Naomh Mhuire CC, An Port Mor

*“It is so easy for girls to feel like they don't belong in football with it being a male dominated environment so looking the part makes a huge difference”*  
– Club in SE England.

### Question 5

**Q5. To what extent do you agree that there are families at your group who find it difficult to get the right kit:**

There was a very strong insight that families at respondent’s groups find it difficult to get the right kit, with 85% either strongly agreeing (73%) or agreeing (22%).

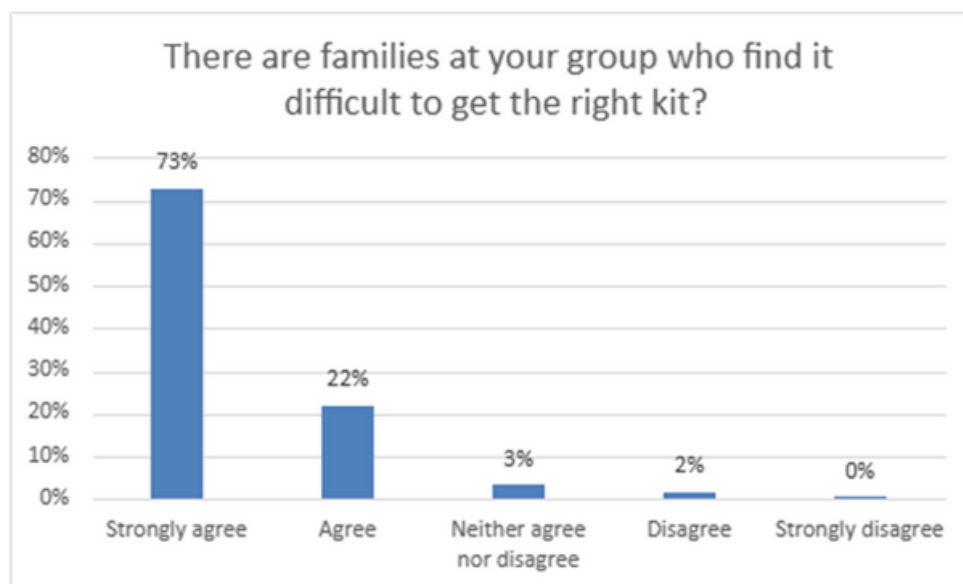


Figure 7

Interestingly, the difference in responses from football groups and all groups reduced to just 2 percentage points between football groups for this question, as shown in Figure 8 below.

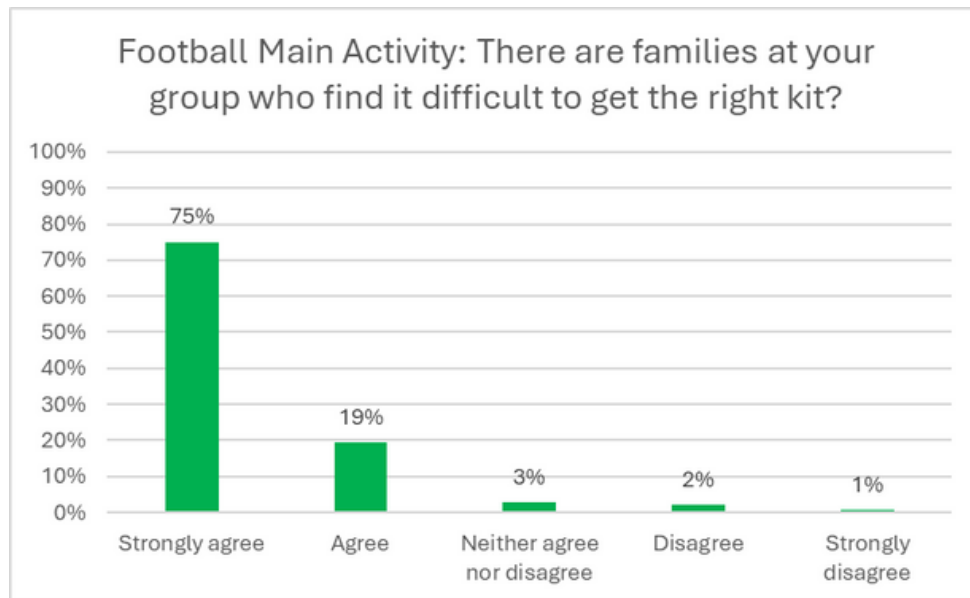


Figure 8

### Themes:

- Deprivation
- Families struggling with income
- The cost-of-living crisis
- Barriers to inclusion in sport
- Challenges of club/organisation resources

One club in NE England stated that “85% of families in our group cannot afford one [kit]”.

*“We have a high cohort of low income families who struggle to find the 3 to attend each week let alone have the equipment that give them the confidence to look like other”* - Lisa Etches, The Club pe2, East of England

### Question 6

**Q6. To what extent do you agree that the cost of new specialised footwear, such as football boots, is a cost-of-living challenge for families at your group:**

99% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with this question, with 87% in strong agreement.

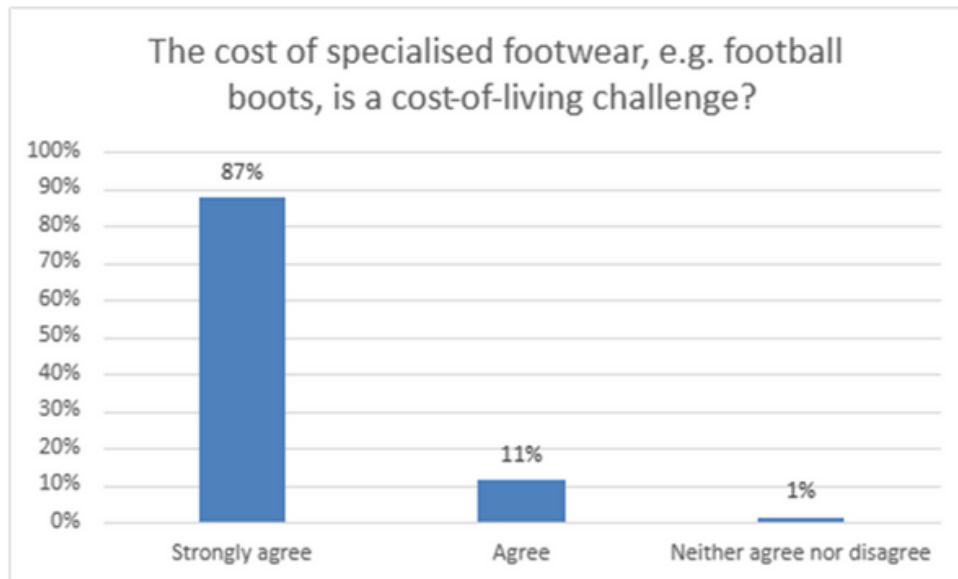


Figure 9

When we looked at the results for the football groups only, we found that the proportion who strongly agreed increased to 93% (with 99% in strongly agreeing or agreeing still).

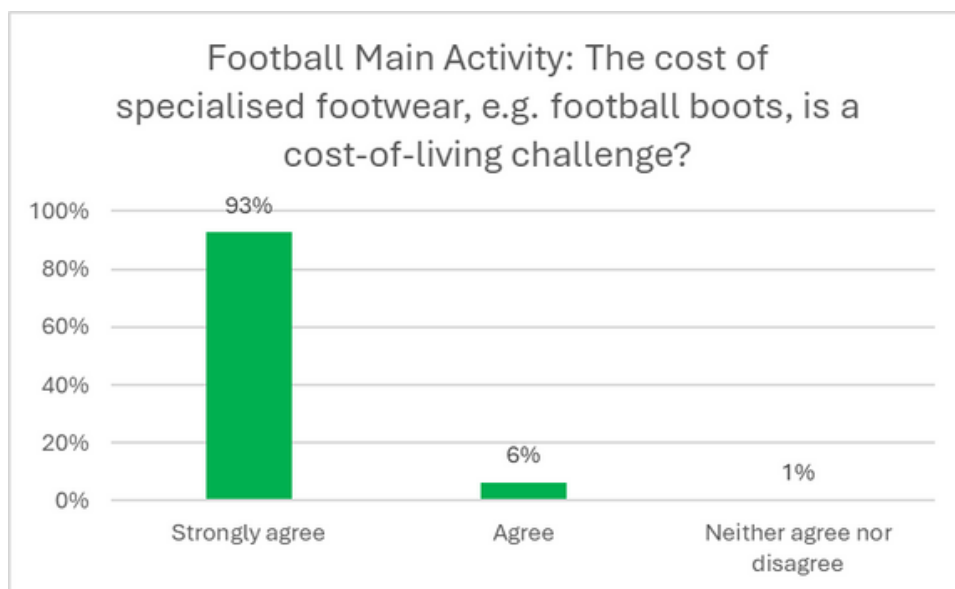


Figure 10

**Themes:**

- Expensive footwear
- Cost
- Affordability
- The challenges of paying for boots/specialised footwear when balanced against paying for food and core bills
- Exclusion from participating



*"Due to the cost of living crisis etc some families find it hard to buy kit for their children and some feel isolated within the group and at times leave due to this" - Andy Turner, Stafford Rangers In The Community, West Midlands*

## Interview Findings

There were two interviewees, as discussed in the Methods section. The details of the two groups are:

### 1 – Coventry Sports Cohesion Project

- West Midlands, England
- Area of Urban Deprivation
- Ethnically Diverse Area
- Project focused on inclusion in an area that is primarily a South Asian community

### 2 – Milford Youth Matters

- Pembrokeshire, Wales
- Area of Rural Deprivation
- Wider area is primarily a white British demographic
- Group supporting inclusion in a multi-cultural community

## Coventry

This is a small community group in a West Midlands city, Coventry, and in an ethnically diverse, primarily South Asian, and economically deprived area. The group focuses on younger children aged 5–12 years old. The group runs community/non-competitive weekly football sessions attended by about 30 children. The club had previously specifically focused on getting girls involved in football, reaching numbers of approximately 50 children a week at that time, 20–30 of whom were girls. Sadly, when the group lost its only woman coach the number of girls participating also dropped dramatically and the group has not yet been able to recruit a new woman coach. The coaches for the group are volunteers, usually young people, students, from the local university(ies). The group has a focus on inclusion and participation and football skills rather than competitive matches.

### **Confidence and Inclusion:**

Mo talked beyond individual cases and about the broader impact of sport and physical activity for children, impacts he has seen generally for the

in his football community. He discussed the positive impacts community football has for children in school as they take the skills and confidence they develop with his group back into the school environment for socialisation, wellbeing, and general health:

*"So going back to your question around sport, it gives people the confidence, you know, it gives them a head start. So sometimes you know it give them a head start so they're doing physical activity in school. They're already having that kind of work at the weekend. So we give them a good advantage over that. And the second thing obviously, as we all know it's support. It's not just about the activity. You know, you're talking to people, you know they're out they're not playing games, you know at home and stuck at home and doing things."*

### **Cost of kit & financial barriers to participation:**

Mo explained that the survey had prompted him to think more about the cost of kit for the children who played football with the group:

*"... if I be honest with you we overlooked the kit thing. I was questioning myself. I said that, you know, you know some of the questions you said, well are their boosts important and stuff."*

He said he considered this an oversight because he knows that:

*"some of the children. I mean they're from probably some challenging background if you know, the family might not be as affluent as everybody else who comes..."*

The financial challenges for some families are reflected in the subscription fees the group charges. Those fees need to cover venue hire, balls, and the coach's expenses. If there is more money available, the group will use it to hire a minibus and organise a trip.

*"We only charge £3 ... a session. So, it's a nominal amount really. Some places will probably charge about £5 or something, but we charge £3.00..."*

He explained that:

*"If we charge any more, any more money than this, we won't get people there. You know, people won't pay, will not be able to pay."*

We talked about whether families who cannot afford more than £3 a week for subscriptions are potentially going to struggle to pay for items of kit like trainers or astro turf boots. Mo expressed the view that families would struggle and this is why he should have considered issues with kit more previously. We then discussed solutions that would not make a child of their parents feel stigmatised. Mo talked about the mini-tournaments that they run at the end of each six week block of sessions. He thought there might be some opportunities there with prizes but there would be problems with distributing the right sizes – problems that should be overcome as boots would make excellent prizes for his group of children.

*“... before we have a break we have a competition just like a penalty or a football tournament and we give them a little prize on something. So, I'm just my thinking about it is, is it thinking on this is maybe looking at some boots or something that we can probably give them a good prize you know or something along those lines would be.”*

Mo was clear that collection and redistribution of boots was something he could see would be beneficial for the families in his group. He also expressed commitment to finding out more about the needs of the families and to implementing solutions such as the one described above.

## Milford

Community Youth Organisation that delivers football activities, amongst others, and has a pop-up shop where kit is collected and sold and also reused, redistributed, recycled. The organisation runs a number of activities for children and young people including an annual fundraising golfing event that young people organise themselves. One of the key activities is a weekly football session, attending by about 60 people in a local leisure centre, that provides a safe and free/cheap way for children to socialise.

### **Transferable skills: Employment:**

Community Leader, Dayle, had played football in the community himself and now works for MYM in a paid role, so his lived experience of the immediate and long-term benefits community support provides children and young people.

*"I attended football, but now, look, I'm actually being paid to support and deliver. And what better way is a youth charity?"*

Milford Youth Matters is a community organisation that clearly demonstrates the value of sports and physical activity for children and young people, football specifically.

Something (or 'some time'?) as seemingly simple as a regular friendly and safely organised kick-about has a positive impact for life, according to Dayle and he is an example of just how true that can be. He explained that football:

*" ... really does channel their energy positively. And what they don't see, what young people don't see is those life skills that they are building. You know, people go, you just play football. Yeah, yeah, we do admittedly. But there's so much hidden behind sport, those meaningful relationships, building those kind of skill sets which will aid them that teamwork, that communication, that problem solving."*

### **Self-confidence, self-esteem, belonging:**

Dayle highlighted key benefits including self-esteem and well-being, a sense of belonging and community, and the development of mental resilience. These are all benefits gained in a fun and social environment. As Dayle explained:

*"So that self esteem again young people involved it, it promotes that we're all in this together and it's not just on usable let's let's get involved. So these they have massive impacts for he said self-esteem and well-being because this regular physical activity promotes, you know just your overall health and well-being. It can be, you know, really does promote mental resilience as well, but also it promotes that social interaction and friendship amongst young people and different backgrounds. So actually, what we're doing is becoming more inclusive by using sport and football as a tool but also it's looking at how we do it in a supportive nature".*

Furthermore, community football fosters a sense of unity, community and belonging beyond the moments of playing football. Although MYM football is a social community activity and not a competitive club, they do still organise matches – often organised by and with young people themselves. Those events become community building events:

*"They, you know, they play a match. It's, you know, well attended actually on club grounds, you know, parents and everybody comes to watch. Then we go to the clubhouse afterwards and people will just sit and have food and they'll sit talking to businesses or talking to other communities. You know, the game against the mosque or the young people were then invited back to the mosque and they provided food. Well, that's much more than just football. That is that cultural diversity that's immersing people in our community and building those relationships. So it's not at them and us. It's we're Milford Haven. We're all in this together. **We are one community and that's what we want to do and that's something that we've done with football**" [bold added for emphasis by researcher].*

### **Cost of kits and financial barriers to participation and Barriers for clubs/groups**

Dayle explained that the financial challenges regarding kits are not just for families but for the groups too. He explained that at one time *"one in four grant applications were successful. Now it's I think one in 11, maybe one in 12. That has an impact"*.

So, groups face an increased demand in a situation where it is increasingly difficult for them to meet that demand.

### **Barriers for families and creative solutions**

Dayle also talked at length about the importance of kit and the creative solutions for helping families for whom costs are a challenge. The solutions in place so far are closely linked to an environment that fosters and develops self-esteem, pride, and transferable skills: the community sports pop-up shop that young people helped to create provides the perfect environment to connect redistribution of kit, including boots, alongside volunteering and awards and prizes.

*"the young people have that kind of sense of pride is that they go, well, I don't want it for free because there's that perception that other people are worse off than me. So how can I kind of earn it if somebody got a pair of, you know, shorts and stuff like that, they say, well, I'll come in and volunteer, I got this. So how can I help you back there is that level of pride. So, to address, to*

*address the kit needs and really it's a kind of conscious community effort in us ...".*

So by doing what we do, we actually just channel resources to young people.

The redistribution of kit and boots is also used via a reward system so that the children feel they have earned the item(s).

*"You know, you've won you know you you've been player of the month or so you've won these. So they're like, yeah, we don't feel like they're getting it for free. Yeah, they feel like they've earned it and we did that as well with vouchers for the shop, umm on Fridays and when we did Monday football we gave like players of the match, they basically a pop up shop vouchers that they could come spend in the shop then."*

Milford Youth Matters has created a place in the community that supports participation in community sports through a community pop-up shop. That shop provides an environment from which Dayle can deliver creative solutions for people to feel that they are paying for kit and boots without payment involving direct cash transactions and instead a combination of volunteering, prizes, and vouchers.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this research show some very clear results on the importance of sports/physical activity for children and young people and the financial challenges for families and clubs/groups with kit and equipment. These findings support those in academic research and Sported's previous research projects. They also align and add some further layers of nuance to Sported's latest Pulse report in October 2023 and members' responses on the cost-of-living crisis.

The responses to this project's survey showed an absolute agreement that sport/physical activity builds confidence and self-esteem in children, with 100% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing.

90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the children in their groups were confident when taking part. The qualitative responses indicated that the responses in the remaining 10% may reflect experiences that some children may arrive lacking in confidence and then gain it over time.

The importance of kit for self-confidence was a key finding with 97% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that children are more confident when they have the right kit/equipment. Furthermore 84% responded that children are less likely to participate if they don't have the right kit.

Difficulties and financial barriers with kit are clearly indicated with 95% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they have families who find it difficult to get the right kit. Additionally, 98% responded that the right footwear, e.g. football boots, was a cost-of-living challenge for their families.

When the data was analysed for groups who have football as their main activity there were some small but noticeable differences for the questions about kit, questions 3-6. These differences were most distinct in the responses of strong agreement. When the responses for strongly agree and agree were combined, the differences were no longer noticeable, with the exception of question 4. In summary:

- Question 3: Confidence with the right kit: strong agreement in 88% of responses from those with football as a main activity vs 82% of all responses



- Question 4: Less likely to participate if do not have the right kit: 49% in strong agreement vs 47%, which was a small difference, but the difference increased to 6 percentage points when the responses for strongly agree and agree were combined (90% vs 84%)
- Question 5: Families finding it difficult to get the right kit: 75% in strong agreement vs 73%, the smallest difference had the smallest difference at 73% vs 75%
- Question 6: Footwear is a cost-of-living challenge: 93% in strong agreement vs 87%, the biggest difference at 6 percentage points

The researchers found some very clear themes in the qualitative survey data which were further supported by the in-depth interviews. These key themes highlighted were:

- particular benefits of sports/physical activity
  - o Social skills
  - o Leadership skills
  - o Community pride
  - o Sense of belonging
  - o Positive impact on wellbeing
  - o Transferable skills into school and, in the future, the workplace
- specific challenges that the barrier to participation of lack of correct kit and footwear
  - o negative impact on all of the themes listed above
  - o a sense of shame or embarrassment
  - o stigma
- solutions clubs have or could have in place for those challenges with support for redistribution and reuse as finances for families and clubs are the key issue
  - o families are struggling with the cost of core bills, kit for children cannot be a priority
  - o increased demand for support from clubs/groups while they are faced with the challenge of increased difficulty of getting funds or sources of support to meet that demand. That results in an increased workload for groups too e.g. MYM one in four successful grant applications compared with one in eleven or twelve now.
  - o creative solutions for meeting the demand is encouraging donations of items and redistributing them as prizes or allowing non-monetary payment such as voluntary work.
  - o these solutions may counter-balance the negative impacts on families of not being able to buy new kit – pride, rather than shame, inclusion and contributing rather than exclusion.

The findings from this research project are aligned with the broader body of relevant research literature, further affirming the reliability of these specific research findings. Overall, this research provides a strong indication that there is a need, in community sports, for support and facilitation of collecting and redistributing kit such as football boots.

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