



ring



Findings from April 2024 surveys



Community Pulse

London

Report made from responses
from 50 community groups
across London



Throughout the Pulse look out for these symbols which indicate particularly shocking statistics.



Introduction

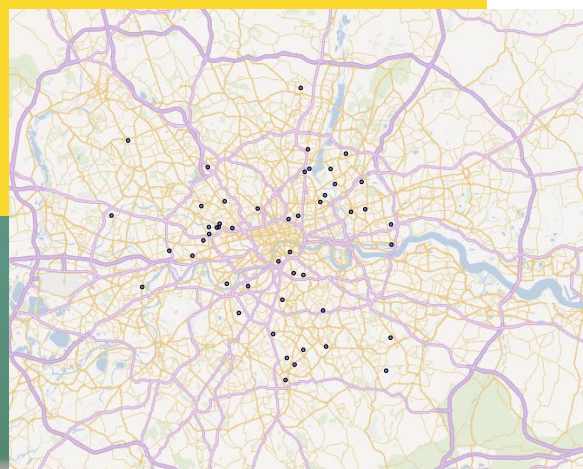
The Community Pulse is a longitudinal study of Sported members on the sustainability, needs, and ambitions of grassroots groups throughout the UK.

It ensures the voices of small community organisations are heard.
It aims to:

- Inform others about the issues and opportunities facing community sports groups
- Increase awareness of funding and resources available for such organisations
- Help stakeholders make more informed decisions in relation to grassroots sport in the UK
- Fill an insight gap on behalf of those who aren't 'traditional' sports clubs or who don't work as commercial or leisure providers

This report represents the voices of 50 community group leaders from across London, representing around 13% of Sported groups in the capital, between **15 – 29 April 2024**.

These groups reach around 10,300 young people across London





Sported & its network

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. Our role is to empower the local heroes running these groups by providing much needed professional expertise, resources, and operational support, free of charge, to help their group survive and young people thrive.

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, almost **two-thirds are volunteer-led**, and a **third** have an annual turnover of **less than £10,000**.



Key Findings

Community groups are confident in the short-term of continuing to be able to deliver for their communities, but there's an indication that they are less sure of survival when looking ahead in the years to come. With funding remaining the most common priority for community groups, supporting groups with more funding, delivered in more flexible and innovative ways that best meet their needs and capacity, is key to ensuring their long-term sustainability.

While groups generally remain confident in their survival, **confidence reduced as they look beyond the short-term:**

81% are confident in continuing to exist in three years' time compared to 94% in six months' time.

Funding continues to be the most common priority for community groups, with 92% of leaders saying it's a priority for the next six months.



The most common challenges in accessing funding for community groups include:

- Limited staff capacity and lack of experience
- Burdensome and complex application processes
- Funding not reflective of the work or needs of community groups



Groups tell us that more innovative ways of delivering funding to the community sport sector include:

- More flexible and easier-to-manage application processes (such as less complex paperwork)
- Dialogue between funders and groups beyond the written bid
- A focus on supporting existing as well as new programmes
- Partnership-building to support bids and elevate the voice of community groups within the process

Mental Health

Sported groups can play an important role in supporting the mental health of young people in underserved communities, especially at a time when mental health issues remain a clear concern for our groups and the communities they serve.

There's growing pressure on the mental wellbeing of those running community groups in London and mental health issues continuing to impact on their participant, but Sported group leaders see the importance of the activities they deliver for their participant's mental health and physical wellbeing.



88%

More than three quarters of respondents agreed that **running a community organisation has become more stressful** over the last two years.

25%

A quarter of respondents said **mental health issues** are a challenge for young people in their communities.





"Since Covid-19 we have seen a drop off of participants especially in the 12+ age group, making it more stressful for recruitment and retention of that age group."

Dalmain Athletic Girls

"Trying to find funds is very stressful: what is needed is investment or sponsorship. This will help us become more sustainable."

Community Switch

"We would need funding to be able to employ more qualified staff to deliver the work."

Youth Action Alliance

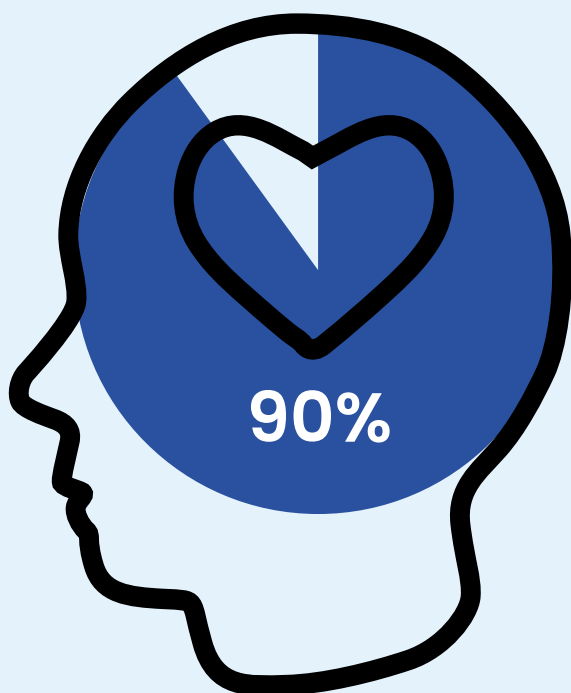


Reasons for added stress for groups include:

- Dealing with a precarious funding landscape for their groups
- Declining staff levels and the extra burden this can place on those remaining
- The continuing impact of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis



Mental Health



Community group leaders recognise the benefits of community sport and physical activity in supporting the mental health of their participants:

Almost every respondent agreed that it had a role to play in preventing mental health issues for young people (90%), with the same proportion saying it has a role in improving young people's mental health.



Group leaders could reach more young people with mental health issues if they had support around:



Upskilling existing staff and volunteers around mental health and/or recruiting more staff for such activities



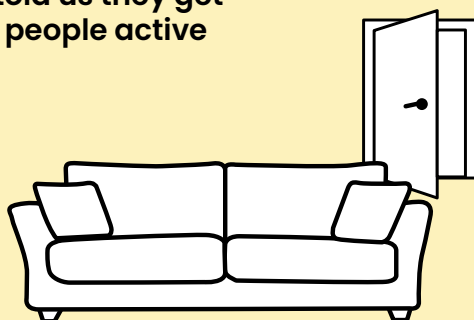
Accessing more spaces and facilities to deliver sessions to support these young people



"We support individuals to become volunteers, coaches, officials so they in turn can support us in running a community club or the opportunity of doing paid coaching."
Black Arrows Badminton Club



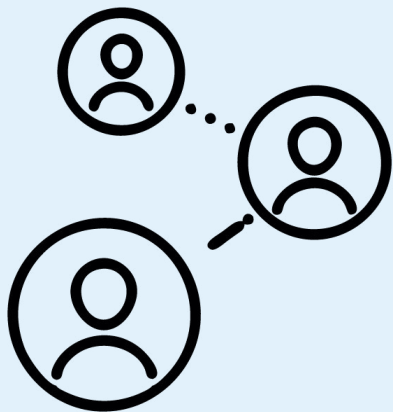
80% of groups told us they get inactive young people active





Community groups are closely connected and feel a sense of agency within their local neighbourhoods, but we know our groups are looking for even more ways to build partnerships with similar organisations in their area to continue delivering for their communities – not least in generating funding.

The most common reason **why groups have connected with other community organisations in their area** is **to engage participants**, with two thirds of groups reporting this connection (68%). Nearly half have connected to share facilities (44%).



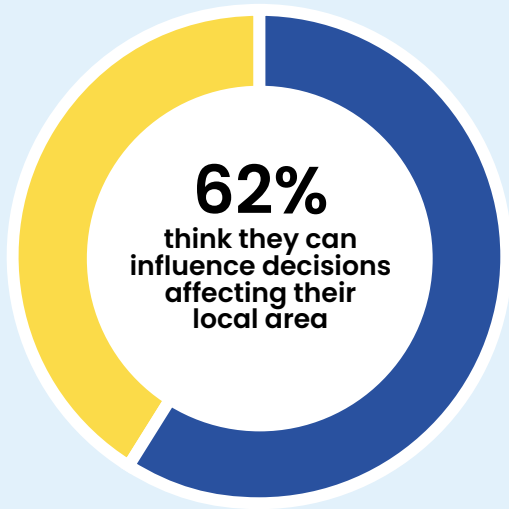
Groups are least likely to have connected with others in their area to share equipment (18%) or engage in peer-to-peer support (26%).

Groups most want to connect with others in their area to engage new participants, with over half seeking to do so (60%). Half of respondents said they want to work on joint funding bids with other groups (50%), share learning (52%), and/or share facilities (48%).



Half of groups (52%) say that **place-based working is an approach they've noticed in their community**.

Area & Community



Nearly two thirds of respondents agree (definitely or tend to) that **they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area** (62%). 38% disagree that they can do so.

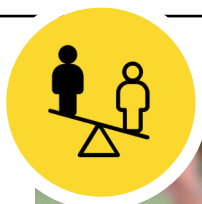




Lack of Representation

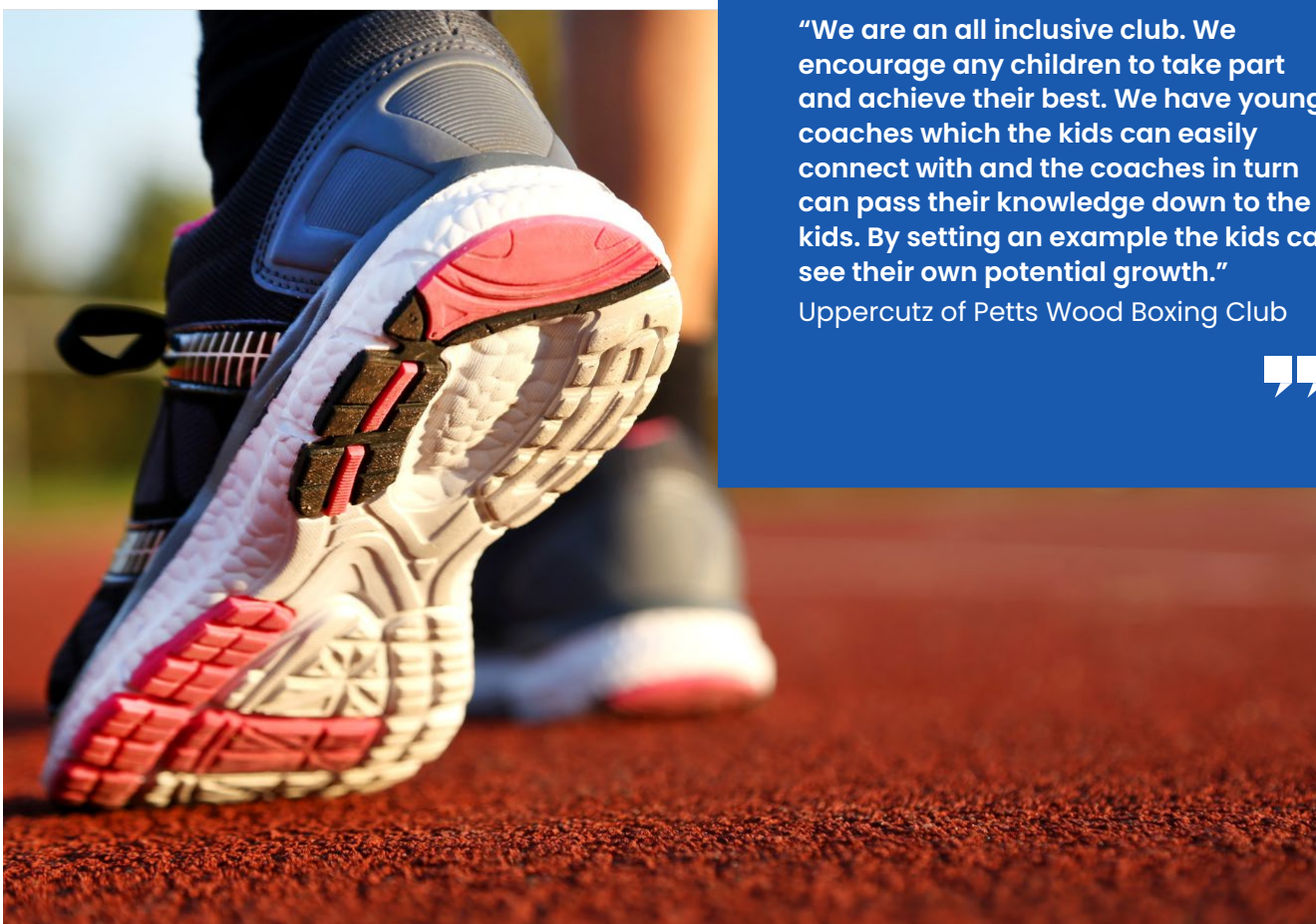
More than three-quarters of groups said the **lack of representation of minoritised groups** within sport impacts on young people from their community taking part (to a great extent or somewhat).

80%



"We are an all inclusive club. We encourage any children to take part and achieve their best. We have young coaches which the kids can easily connect with and the coaches in turn can pass their knowledge down to the kids. By setting an example the kids can see their own potential growth."

Uppercutz of Petts Wood Boxing Club





Elite Sports

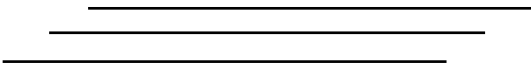


Community groups are generally optimistic about the focus on elite sport, such as the Olympics, Paralympics, and other major sporting events, impacting positively in community sport. However there are challenges in supporting young people in underserved communities to achieve their potential in elite sport, including around the cost to do so and a lack of satisfactory facilities.



Groups disagreed that big sports events in the UK increase enquiries, membership, or engagement for their group from young people: 26% said they do, but nearly half (46%) said they don't.

Nearly half of groups (44%) agree (strongly agree or agree) that the investment made into success at Olympics and Paralympics impacts positively on grassroots sport. 12% of respondents disagreed.





Cost-of-living Pressures



"Young people are not coming to sessions, because they can't afford drinks and snacks."

Community Switch Sports CIC

"Food poverty is a big issue. Many young people are coming to youth club hungry, and several of them don't have a hot meal provided after school."

Sidings Community Centre

"Parents that can't afford or have time to get them to activities."

Actonians Girls FC

"We would need funding to be able to employ more qualified staff to deliver the work."

Youth Action Alliance



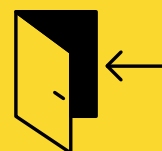
90% The most common reasons groups cited for why **young people at their group who want to progress in elite sport aren't able to do so** were the **cost of participation** and a **lack of satisfactory facilities** (54%).



Cost-of-living increases continue to be detrimental to the lives of young people in underserved communities, reducing their ability to participate in sport and physical activity.

Immediate financial hardship, including the effects of cost-of-living pressures, continues to be the most reported challenge for young people: two thirds of group leaders (65%) told us it's impacting on young people.

45% Nearly half of respondents (45%) said **young people at their group disengaged from/reduced participation in sport and physical activity because of cost-of-living pressures** in the last six months.



Empowering Young People

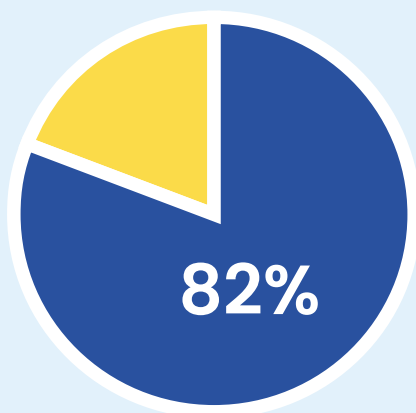


Our groups are vital in empowering young people in their communities to shape the opportunities available to them in sport and physical activity, but they need extra support to elevate the voice of even more young people this way – for example, through additional staff and volunteer capacity, partnership-building in their local area, and good practice guides and resources.



“Our staff go above and beyond to make sure every one of our members feels included.”

Progressay Impact CIC



More than three quarters of groups (82%) involve young people in shaping what the group delivers.



What Are Groups Looking For?

Groups are looking for additional support in increasing young people's role in shaping delivery through extra staff and volunteers, external facilitators, good practice guides and training resources, help around building partnerships in their local areas, and in marketing to engage new participants.

Conclusion

Why Are Community Groups So Great?

Supporting community groups in this way would help them do what they do best, creating incredible opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity for underserved communities across London, building young people's physical and mental wellbeing through a model of working that includes:

- Being inclusive and accessible for all, across all ages, abilities, and backgrounds
- Providing safe spaces where young people can socialise with their peers
- Being driven by the needs of young people in communities, empowering their voice to shape what groups deliver
- A focus on sport and physical activity but also mentoring and personal support
- Having staff and volunteers that understand their communities and are representative of them

Our Response

Each edition of the Ring / Sported Pulse allows us to:

- > Understand the current needs, issues and jeopardy surrounding community sport to allow us to better define Sported's offer to our members. In 2023-2024, we distributed £1.63m in grants thanks to funders including Barclays, Sport England, P&G, CVC and Vodafone.
- > Engage every parliamentarian across the UK, as well as key agencies, and advocate on behalf of our groups, highlighting the huge collective impact they make on their communities and on young people in tandem with calls for further support and engagement from all branches of government. This includes illustrating the stark impacts of cost-of-living increases, maintaining the traction gained in our ['Keep the Doors Open'](#) campaign.
- > Deepen our connections in the Statutory sector, among devolved governments, regional agencies and other charities in order to highlight the effective and revenue-efficient role that community organisations can play in delivering local solutions to local problems through channels of activity which reach audiences who are either hard to reach or simply over-looked.
- > To engage the national and regional media to amplify the issues at stake surrounding grassroots sport and young people, spotlighting the research and, significantly, telling the powerful stories of our community groups and allowing their voice to be heard.
- > To open doors for new or extended conversations with the business sector, illustrating how communities and the lives of young people can be transformed through investment driven by corporate social responsibility and sponsorship.



[Additional context: On average, groups completing Pulse in London are engaging around 200 young people, with around two thirds (64%) based in areas of high relative deprivation (IMD 1-3). More than half (56%) are entirely volunteer-led and a quarter (24%) have an annual turnover of less than £10,000]