

London / Winter 2024-25

# The Pulse

Issues facing grassroots sport and the communities and young people it serves



# Introduction

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The Spotted x Ring Pulse is a bi-annual research report into the community sport sector right across the UK, based on surveying groups and organisations at a grassroots level who deliver physical activity for young people. It explores the needs, challenges and sustainability of these clubs, highlighting the issues they face and informing decisions by ensuring their voices 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 **33** community group leaders from across London, representing around 8% of Spotted groups in the capital, between **11 – 28 November 2024**. These groups reach around 7,000 young people across London.





# About Sported

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As the UK's largest grassroots sports charity, Sported resources groups in communities across the country, supporting around a million young people each year to overcome barriers to reach their full potential. The groups which Sported supports are deeply rooted within their communities and led by highly committed, passionate local people who often give up their time voluntarily to run initiatives that help young people to succeed. However, grassroots groups are often under-funded and under-resourced. As a charity, our role is to champion and 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 thrive.

Sported's groups work within complex local contexts, often tackling some of society's biggest challenges. Around 51% 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

## Empowering groups in the long-term

Community groups are confident of continuing to deliver for their communities in the upcoming six months, but their confidence in longer-term survival over the next few years is lower. With securing funding and planning for the future common priorities for community groups, continuing to support them with access to funding and capacity-building resources is critical in developing their resilience and ensuring longer-term sustainability.

	<p>Groups remain confident in their survival in the immediate future, but <b>confidence decreases as they look beyond the next six months</b>: 71% are confident in continuing to exist in three years' time compared with 94% in six months' time.</p>
	<p><b>Securing funding remains the most common priority for community groups</b>, with 97% of leaders saying it's a priority for the next six months.</p>
<p>Other key strategic priorities over the next six months include:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ <b>planning for the future (73%)</b></li><li>→ <b>engaging new participants (64%)</b></li><li>→ <b>retaining participants (48%)</b></li><li>→ <b>and responding to local challenges faced by young people (48%).</b></li></ul> 



## Supporting physical and mental health for young people

Community groups are vital in helping young people from under-served communities to get active, delivering both physical and broader wellbeing benefits for their participants. However, mental health remains an issue for young people within our groups' local areas, and challenges around the cost of activities and young people's ability to get to activities are causing some young people to disengage from sport and physical activity. It's therefore critical to support and empower community groups as they deliver accessible activities for young people and bring such positive outcomes for their wellbeing.











**82%**



More than three quarters of respondents told us **their group helps get inactive young people active.**

Beside the physical benefits of sport and physical activity, group leaders see young people benefiting from

	Improved mental health		Increased sense of belonging
	Improved confidence and self-esteem		Stronger sense of discipline and structure
	Reduced loneliness and isolation		Increased resilience

through taking part at community groups.



## But the cost of taking part is affecting young people:

- **immediate financial hardship**, including cost-of-living increases, was the most reported challenge for young people in their communities according to groups (37%), with nearly half of respondents (48%) saying **young people at their group disengaged from/reduced participation in sport and physical activity in the last six months because of not being able to afford it.**
- **Young people are also struggling to get to activities**, with around half of group leaders (45%) saying being unable to travel to activities was a factor in young people limiting or stopping participation recently.





**Increases wellbeing, reduces loneliness, increases resilience and confidence, and opens horizons.**

- City Kids Surfing



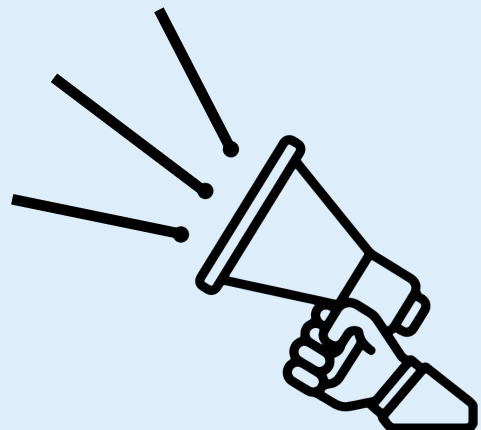
**Their mental wellbeing is improved and allows them to be able to express themselves without the fear of being judged.**

-Trapped in Zone One



**Builds community spirit, gives young people a sense of belonging, aids good communication as they have to speak (in public), actively listen to others, be inclusive mixing with others from different cultures, beliefs and backgrounds.**

- Pedro Club



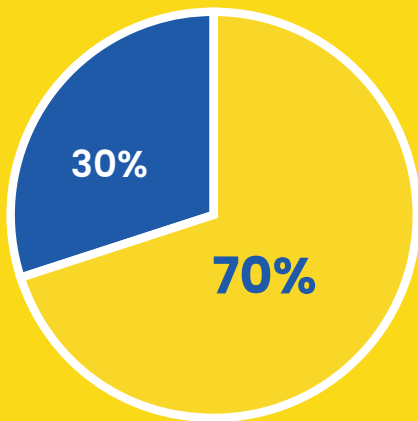


## Empowering communities

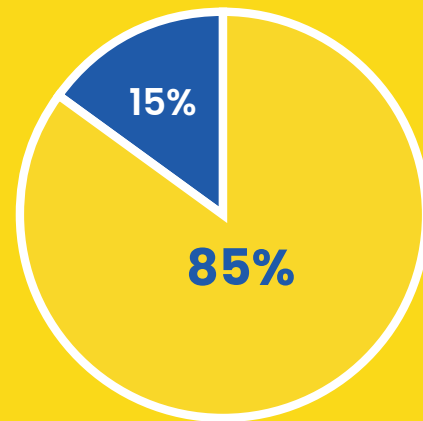


### Empowering communities

Groups are connected and part of decision-making within their communities but feel that their communities are missing out on investment in sport and physical activity given the positive and long-lasting impact it has for local areas. Community group leaders are keen to encourage sports ministers across the UK to support more investment into community sport and physical activity, ensuring the benefits are accessible for all young people regardless of background and circumstances.



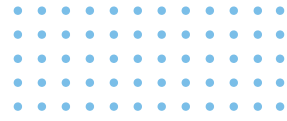
More than two-thirds of respondents agree (definitely or tend to) that **they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area** (70%). 30% disagree that they can do so.



The majority of groups (85%) say **there isn't enough government investment into grassroots sport to back its impact at community level**. The rest (15%) weren't sure, with no groups agreeing there is enough investment.



## Empowering communities



### Asked what they'd like to raise with their nation's Sports Minister, groups mentioned:

- Increasing funding for grassroots and community sport
- Creating a more equitable funding model with more focus on community groups and their needs (as well as a wider variety of activities and sports)
- The affordability and accessibility of venues and facilities
- Expanding opportunities for participation across communities for under-served young people
- Increasing government understanding of the broader benefits that community groups deliver for their participants and their local area

### ? What people want to ask the Nations Sport Ministers

**"How will you ensure that under-privileged youth have the same access to organised sports?"**

**"Could we please have more funding so that every council estate has a detached sports team, to encourage young people to get active?"**

**These areas need sports workers to facilitate organised activities, and to motivate young people to engage."**

**"How will the low-income households in deprived neighbourhoods with high levels of youth at risk be engaged and retained in organised sports?"**



## Impact of climate change



Community groups are seeing the impact of climate change on their activities, with flooded and waterlogged pitches/venues and adverse weather impacting on activities in the last six months.

The most common issues are around flooded or **waterlogged venues/pitches** and **adverse weather** affecting participation and activities.

**A quarter of respondents (24%) said their group's activities were impacted by climate change in the past six months.**

76% said they weren't.



### Hear how climate change affects our members



**We could not provide football sessions for the whole of March this year as the local park was unusable due to torrential rain.**

- Techniques Football Development C.I.C



**Flooding of our cricket ground - a persistent and increasing problem, causing loss of training sessions and matches, and an inferior playing surface.**

- South Loughton Cricket Club



**Extreme weather can impact attendance to the sessions.**

- Track Academy



## Venues and facilities

Safe, secure and good quality venues and spaces are vital for groups to deliver for young people in their communities. However, groups face challenges around the availability of facilities and spaces, as well as the costs of running, owning, and maintaining such venues. Supporting groups with these challenges, especially in developing financially sustainable spaces, will help ensure they can continue to support young people within their communities over the long term.

**55%**

Half of respondents (55%) told us that **running cost for those owning** and/or **affordability for those renting** are significant challenges facing groups.

**45%**

**Availability of facilities**

**29%**

**Limited Space**

were also reported as significant challenges by respondents.

## Groups are most interested in support around:



**58%**

**financial sustainability and revenue generation**

for their facilities and venues,



**32%**

with a third of respondents looking for **assistance around facility management and maintenance**



**32%**

and/or **lease management/ negotiation**



**29%**

Around a quarter of respondents are looking for support around **capital project planning**



**26%**

**planning applications and tendering processes**



**26%**

and/or **moving from renting to owning.**



# Our response

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Our Spring 2024 edition of Pulse allowed us to:

- Understand the current needs, issues and jeopardy surrounding grassroots sport and its impact in our communities – and how Sported best supports that.
- Engage every parliamentarian across the UK, as well as key parts of local and national government, 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.
- Deepen our connections in the Statutory sector, among devolved government, regional agencies and other charities in order to highlight the effective and revenue-efficient role that community-focused 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 members and allowing their voices to be heard.
- To open doors for new or extended conversations with corporate partners, illustrating the difference they can make by supporting the sport for development sector and the areas of involvement open to them.





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