

Winter 2024-25

The Pulse

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



Introduction

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 **489** community group leaders from across the UK, representing around 15% of Spotted groups, between **11 – 28 November 2024**. These groups reach around 52,000 young people across the UK.





About Sported




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 long 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 their ongoing effectiveness and sustainability.

	<p>Groups remain confident in their survival in the immediate future, but confidence decreases as they look beyond the next six months: 74% are confident in continuing to exist in three years' time compared with 94% in six months' time.</p>
	<p>As has been the case for the past two and a half years, funding is the most common priority for community groups, with 82% 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"> • engaging new participants (71%) • planning for the future (64%) • retaining participants (56%) • and volunteer recruitment/retention (53%) 



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.





87%

Nearly every group told us they help 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 stress and anxiety		Increased resilience
	Reduced loneliness and isolation	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 (35%), with half of respondents (55%) 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 half of group leaders (53%) saying being unable to travel to activities was a factor in young people limiting or stopping participation recently.





These groups foster social connections, helping kids build friendships and develop teamwork skills. They also boost self-esteem and confidence as youngsters master new skills and overcome challenges.

– Diamondz School of Dance (East Midlands)



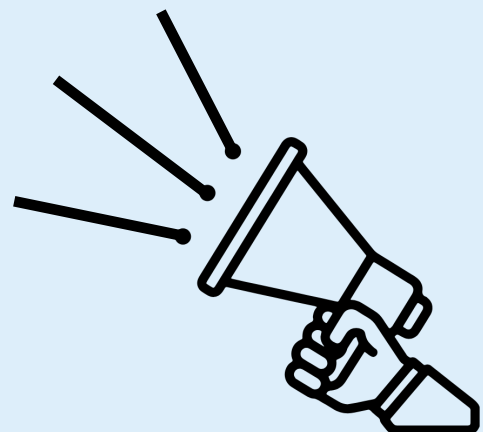
Engaging in community sports provides a holistic approach to youth development, benefiting their mental and emotional health.

– Oromo Community (Scotland)



Taking part in physical activity improves mental health amongst our young children, helps them get out and meet new people, improve social interaction, and build confidence that will help them in their daily lives.

– Whetley Juniors FC (Yorkshire and Humber)

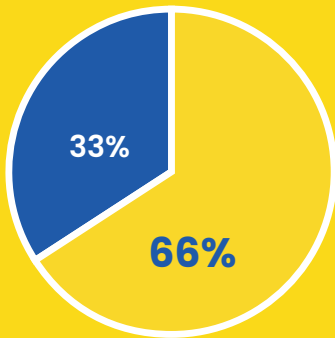


Empowering communities

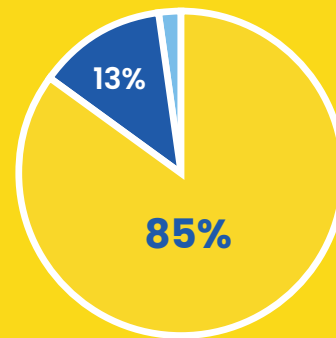


Empowering communities

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.



Two-thirds of respondents agree (definitely or tend to) that **they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area** (66%). 34% disagree that they can do so.

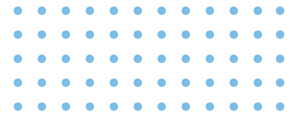


The majority of groups (85%) say **there isn't enough government investment into grassroots sport to back its impact at community level**. One in ten groups (13%) weren't sure, with 2% agreeing there is enough investment.

Nearly a fifth of groups (18%) said **young people in their communities face inequitable access to sport opportunities/activities**.



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.
- Government's awareness of the benefits of community sport and physical activity on all aspects of young people's lives.
- Expanding opportunities for participation across communities.



What people want to ask the Nations Sport Ministers

"What would happen to sport if volunteers gave up?"

"How can you make funding sustainable for sports projects over three years?"

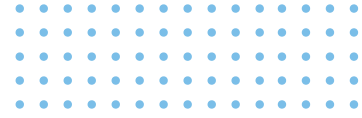
"Why are councils having to close sporting facilities when so many people need access to improve health and wellbeing?"

"How can you make local leisure centre provision cheaper and more accessible?"

"How are you making sports accessible for all?"



Impact of climate change



The most common issues are around flooded or waterlogged venues/pitches, adverse weather affecting participation and activities, and excessive heat (for both outdoor and indoor activities in the summer). A lack of indoor spaces and challenges with young people having suitable clothing for poor weather conditions was reported by several groups.

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

Around a third of groups (31%) said their group's activities were impacted by climate change in the past six months.

69% said they weren't.



Hear how climate change affects our members



Unseasonal volumes of rain meant lost days during our summer camps and also pitch postponements for matches.

– Thorn Athletic Community Trust
(Scotland)



Pitches have been unplayable later in the year than we might have expected. We have also had to cancel or curtail activities due to extreme heat which has not happened before, in living memory anyway.

– Con Magees GAC, Glenravel
(Northern Ireland)



The flooding and increased heavy rainfall makes it very hard for those with disabilities to engage in outdoor sporting activities.

– Winning Steps Southwest
(Work Skills South West CIC) (South West)



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.



48%

Half of respondents told us that the **availability of facilities** is a significant challenge facing their group.

46%

Affordability for those renting

44%

Maintenance and upkeep

43%

Running costs for those owning were also reported as significant challenges by nearly half of respondents.

Groups are most interested in support around:



55%

financial sustainability and revenue generation
for their facilities and venues,



37%

with just over a third of respondents looking for **capital project planning**



27%

Around a quarter of respondents are looking for support around **facility management and maintenance**



24%

moving from renting to owning



24%

making their spaces more accessible



22%

making their space more environmentally sustainable



Our response

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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