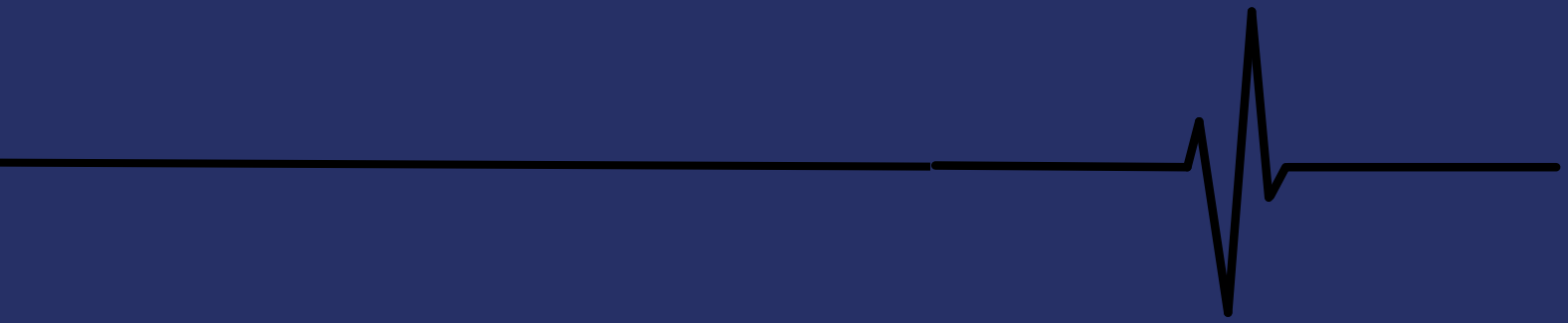


Community Pulse

Tracking the health, hopes, and hurdles of grassroots sport.



Introduction

The Community Pulse is Sported's longitudinal study of community groups across the UK who deliver sport and physical activity for underserved young people and adults. It covers the sustainability, needs, and ambitions of such groups, ensuring the voice of grassroots and smaller community organisations are heard.

It aims to:

- ⇒ Capture and reflect the experiences of our community organisations.
- ⇒ Explore the realities, needs and aspirations of these community organisations.
- ⇒ Provide an authentic, unbiased voice for our community organisations.
- ⇒ Help stakeholders make more informed decisions in relation to grassroots sport in the UK.



This report represents the voices of 278 community group leaders from across England, representing around 10% of the Sported network in that nation, between 6-21 October 2025. These groups reach around 115,373 people across England.



About Sported

Sported combats inequality through the UK's largest network of community sports groups, supporting over one million 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.

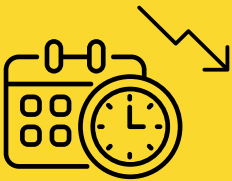

Our 5,000+ grassroots groups reaching more than 1 million people every year, provide safety, belonging and opportunity where it's needed most. Sported groups work within complex local contexts, often tackling some of society's biggest challenges. Around 50% are in areas that sit within the highest three indices of relative deprivation in the UK, around four-in-ten are volunteer-led, and a third have an annual turnover of less than £10,000.



Key Findings

Empowering groups in the short and long-term

Community groups are primarily focused on maintaining participation and stability in the short term, with engaging new participants the most common priority over the next six months. Securing funding, future planning, volunteer recruitment and participant retention also remain key immediate concerns. Looking ahead, these priorities continue, but long-term sustainability is increasingly shaped by financial pressures, with funding emerging as the dominant priority over the next three years. While most groups are confident about their short-term survival, confidence declines over time, highlighting growing uncertainty about the longer-term future.

	<p>Groups remain confident in their survival in the immediate future, but confidence decreases as they look beyond the next six months: 92% are confident in continuing to exist in six months time, compared to 74% who are confident in continuing to exist in three years' time.</p>
	<p>Engaging new participants is the most common priority over the next six months, with 75% of group leaders reporting this. Over the longer-term funding is the most common priority for groups, with 66% saying its a priority over the next three years.</p>
<p>Other key strategic priorities over the next six months include:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing funding (74%) • Planning for the future (64%) • Volunteer recruitment/retention (63%) • Retaining participants (62%)



Fighting inactivity



Most community groups play a vital role in activating inactive young people and adults, with 83% supporting youth and 69% engaging inactive adults. Leaders highlight inclusive provision, effective marketing, and diverse activities as key success factors. However, affordability and travel remain significant barriers, with over half of groups reporting young people reducing participation due to cost, and nearly half citing travel difficulties. These challenges mirror last year's findings, underscoring ongoing obstacles to sustained engagement in physical activity.

69%

Two thirds of groups are getting inactive adults active.

83%

More than three quarters of groups told us they are getting inactive young people active.



The most common approaches that work well in getting young people active include:

- ✓ Offering inclusive provision (e.g. girls sessions, different abilities).
- ✓ Marketing and community reach/partnerships.
- ✓ Offering a range of activities.
- ✓ Reducing financial barriers to taking part.



But the cost of and ability to get to activities is limiting young people's participation:



Over half of respondents (59%) say 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 almost half of group leaders (49%) saying being able to travel to activities was a factor in young people limiting or stopping participation recently.



The reasons for disengaging from physical activity mirror last year's Pulse, with affordability and travel as the most common factors.

Mental Health

Mental health is identified as the top challenge facing both young people (73%) and adults (73%) in their communities, alongside a lack of opportunities and financial hardship. Economic inequality also significantly affects adults, underscoring the complex social issues these groups are navigating. More than half of group leaders (60%) have recently been approached by young people with mental health concerns, highlighting the urgent need for better support. To address this, leaders emphasize the importance of funding for mental health initiatives, specialised training for coaches, and access to professional advice.



Mental health is the most reported challenge that young people (73%) and adults (73%) are facing in their community at this time.

60%

More than half of leaders said they had been approached by young people with mental health concerns in the last 12 months.

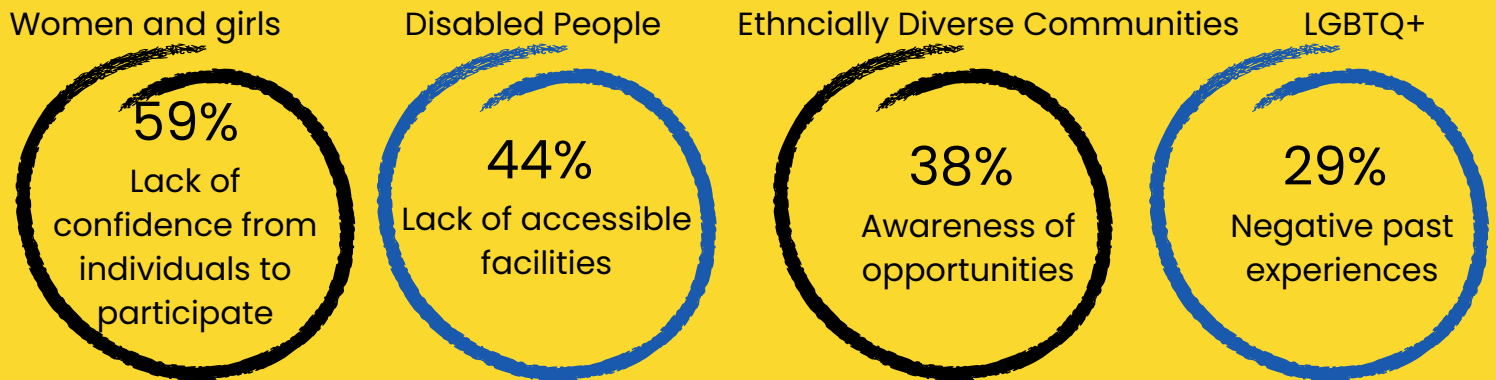




To be able to support young people better with their mental health, group leaders say they need:	
53%	Funding for mental health initiatives
48%	Training specifically for coaches
44%	Access to specialist advice or professionals



The most commonly reported issues affecting participation and engagement were:



Across different groups, leaders highlight a range of barriers that limit participation in sport and physical activity. Below highlights other commonly reported issues for these participants include:

Women & Girls	Cost Awareness
Disabled People	Transport Confidence
Ethnically Diverse Communities	Financial barriers Communication barriers
LGBTQ+	Discrimination Confidence Lack of role models

Opportunities for getting young people active

Group leaders see clear opportunities to increase young people's participation in the coming year by diversifying activities, forming new partnerships, and improving facilities.



Group leaders reflected on what opportunities they see for engaging young people in sport and physical activity in the next 12 months:



Diversifying activities



I hope to offer more opportunities, we are approved Centre for sports quals lv 1,2,3 and working towards a partnership with ex England lioness Jess Clarke growing connections would be vital. (Cyclones revolution CIC - West Midlands)



We see significant opportunities to engage young people particularly from migrant and refugee backgrounds through culturally inclusive and community-led sports and wellbeing activities. (Calm Minds UK - London)



Increasing partnerships



We were recently successful in getting a community fund grant from Sport England. We are using this funding to train more coaches, officials and volunteers. In addition it has enabled us to hire more facilities. (Isle of Wight Basketball Club - South East)



Funding

Supporting groups to succeed in these opportunities

More funding

Better access to facilities




Partnerships

88%

Of groups in England said they would be interested in working as part of a place-based approach.

To capitalise on these opportunities, groups emphasise the need for increased funding, better facilities, and stronger partnerships. Funding is most often needed for venue hire, coaching fees, and core costs. However, group leaders note challenges around limited capacity for grant writing and intense competition for resources.

More funding is vital for groups to support with:

	Facility hire/access to venues (47%)
	Coach and instructor fees (41%)
	Core costs (e.g. heating, staff salaries) (41%)

Why this matters to our young people and groups

“We have young people competing to become youth volunteers. We use this as a tool to get them to make better choices at school and liaise with the school to ensure they meet their targets”

“We are situated in the 55th most deprived area in the UK. This means that access to high quality and sustainable sport is limited. As such, as a club we have been successful in providing 9 of our athletes the opportunity to be successful in County and Netball Super League pathways in the 2025/6 season.”

“We have made positive impacts on the young people by offering the service for free. We are able to reduce the costs barriers. This has made a impact as now the young person can meet other local young people in a safe environment, creating and helping to support positive relationships.”

We asked group leaders what they'd like to raise with England's Sports Minister, they mentioned:

- ▶ Funding and financial support - including requests for more funding for facilities, maintenance and equipment.
- ▶ Facilities and infrastructure, making them more inclusive, affordable and available for community use.
- ▶ Inclusion and accessibility- including sports programmes, engagement, consultation and training and support for coaches and volunteers.





Our response

The findings from this year's Pulse give us a clear picture in England: community sport groups remain focused on sustaining participation and stability, and groups are playing a vital role in supporting physical activity and wellbeing, particularly for inactive young people. But they are operating under financial pressures, and growing challenges around mental health.

Groups remain confident in their survival in the immediate future, but this significantly declines over time. Our operational focus will continue to offer bespoke funding searches to groups, and follow up application support from staff and volunteers where needed, including bid writing clinics. We will also continue providing an increased number of unrestricted and flexible grants to groups through our partnerships. Projects that focus on operational resilience, facilitating connections and networking opportunities with peers and funders will be prioritised.

There are opportunities to work more on place based initiatives, working with systems partners to engage groups and increase the number of connected communities in England to better understand and identify common local priority issues and solutions together.

Ultimately, our response in England is focused on ensuring that community sport remains accessible, inclusive, and resilient. By supporting groups to secure funding, build operational capacity, and connect with peers, partners and local networks, we aim to strengthen the long-term sustainability of grassroots sport. This work will help remove barriers to participation, address inequalities, and create more opportunities for all particularly inactive young people and underrepresented groups to benefit from the physical, social and mental health advantages that community sport can provide.



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