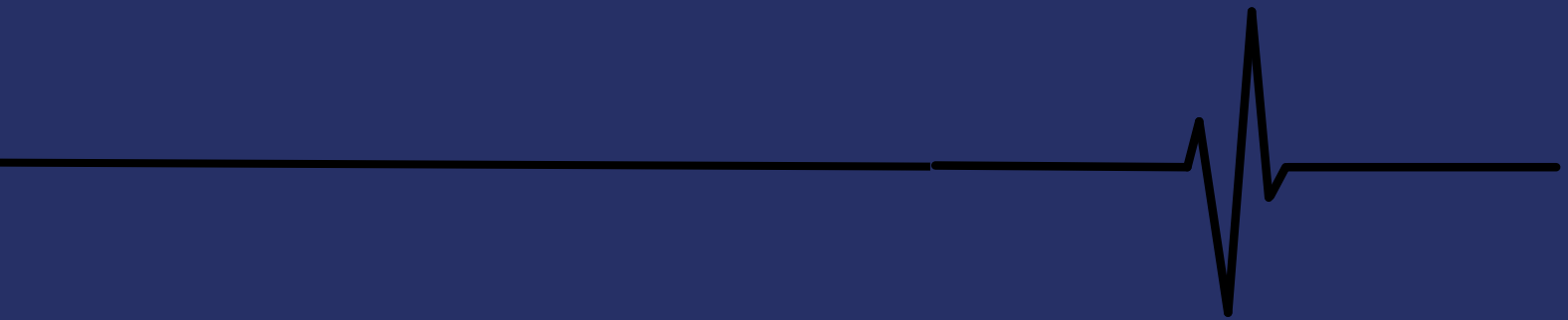


# Community Pulse

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





# 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.

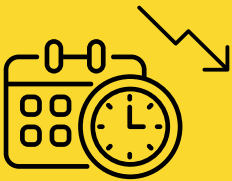
Our 5,000+ grassroots groups reaching more than 1 million people every year, provide safety, belonging and opportunity where it's needed most. Sported groups work within complex local contexts, often tackling some of society's biggest challenges. Around 50% are in areas that sit within the highest three 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

Funding remains the top priority for community groups, with over 70% of leaders focused on it in the next six months and nearly two-thirds over the next three years. Other key short-term priorities include engaging new participants, future planning, participant retention, and volunteer recruitment. These priorities largely persist over the longer term, with engaging new participants remaining central. While confidence in groups' immediate survival is high, it notably declines when looking three years ahead, reflecting growing uncertainty about their long-term sustainability.

	<p>Groups remain confident in their survival in the immediate future, but <b>confidence slightly decreases as they look beyond the next six months</b>: 96% are confident they will continue to exist in six months time compared with 74% who are confident in continuing to exist in three years' time.</p>
	<p>As has been the case for the past three years, <b>funding is the most common priority for community groups</b>, with 72% of leaders saying its a priority over the next six months, and 63% of leaders saying it's 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"> <li>• Engaging new participants (67%)</li> <li>• Planning for the future (63%)</li> <li>• retaining participants (58%)</li> <li>• Volunteer recruitment/retention (54%)</li> </ul>



# 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 57 community group leaders from across Scotland, representing around 12% of the Sported network, between 6-21 October 2025. These groups reach around 19,381 people across Scotland.**

# Fighting inactivity



Almost all groups actively work to get inactive young people moving, with inclusive provision, marketing, and diverse activities cited as effective approaches. However, cost remains a major barrier, with 44% reporting reduced youth participation due to affordability, alongside travel difficulties and decreased confidence. More than three quarters (77%) of groups engage inactive adults, emphasising inclusive provision, financial support, and activity variety as key to success.

77%

More than three quarters are getting inactive adults active.

89%

Nearly every group 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.



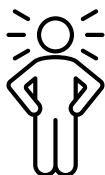
## But the cost of participation and difficulties in getting to activities is limiting young people's participation:



Over a third (44%) 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.



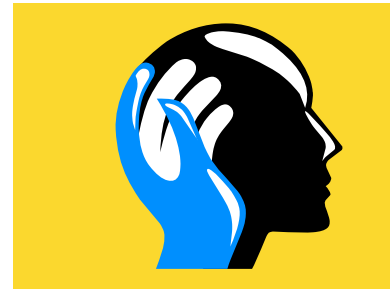
Young people are also struggling to get to activities, with over half of group leaders (54%) saying being unable to travel to activities was a factor in young people limiting or stopping participation recently.



Just under half also said reduced confidence in taking part was also a factor (46%).

# Mental Health

More than half of group leaders (61%) have been approached by young people with mental health concerns in the past year. To better support these needs, leaders highlight the importance of access to specialist professionals, clear local service information, and targeted training for coaches and young people. Key challenges facing children and young people include lack of opportunities, mental health issues, and unequal access to sport. Adults face similar concerns, with mental health, financial hardship, employment opportunities, and economic inequality among the top challenges.



Mental health is the second most reported challenge that young people (68%) are facing in the community at this time, and the highest for adults (63%).

**61%**  
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:**

<b>53%</b>	<b>Access to specialist advice and professionals</b>
<b>47%</b>	<b>Clear information on local services</b>
<b>46%</b>	<b>Training specifically for coaches</b>
<b>46%</b>	<b>Workshops/toolkits for young people</b>



# Inequalities

The most commonly reported issues affecting participation and engagement were:

Women and girls

Disabled People

Ethnically Diverse Communities

LGBTQ+

58%

Lack of confidence from individuals to participate

44%

Lack of accessible facilities

37%

Awareness of opportunities

26%

Awareness of opportunities

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	Awareness of opportunities Cost Negative past experiences
Disabled People	Transport difficulties Cost
Ethnically Diverse Communities	Transport difficulties Cost
LGBTQ+	Negative past experiences Discrimination or prejudice

# Opportunities for getting young people active

Group leaders see strong opportunities to engage young people over the next year through diversifying activities, enhancing facilities, and building partnerships.



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



Diversifying activities



We are currently exploring an alternative education programme to engage with children who are disenfranchised with the current school curriculum. (East Fife Community Football Group - Scotland)



We are actively in the process of securing our own facility which will allow an expansion of our work. (Cowden in the Community - Scotland)



Enhancing Facilities



Increasing partnerships



We are now in partnership with a new School next to our hub. We can give many kids opportunities to volunteer and receive training from us in many aspects. (Fairfield community sports hub - Scotland).



# Supporting groups to succeed in these opportunities





More funding

Better access to facilities

More staff

To maximise these opportunities, leaders emphasise the critical need for increased funding, better facilities, and more staff. Funding is primarily needed for core costs, venue hire, coaching, and participant transport. However, intense competition for limited funding, lack of bid-writing expertise, and restrictive criteria hinder many groups' success in accessing funding.

## More funding is vital for groups to support with:

	Core costs e.g. heating, staff salaries (32%)
	Facility hire/access to venues (29%)
	Coach or instructor fees (29%)
	Transport for participants or teams (26%)

## Scotland Opportunities

Just over half of group leaders believe the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow will positively impact grassroots sport in their communities. Just over half of respondents also feel well connected to local organisations and partners, strengthening collaborative efforts.



52%

of leaders agree that the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow will have a positive impact on grassroots sport in their community



53%

of groups are well connected to other local organisations or community partners






## Why this matters to our young people and groups

"The impact is visible in the smiles, friendships, and renewed energy of those who attend. From adults finding companionship to younger participants discovering new interests, the project empowers individuals and strengthens the social fabric of our neighborhood."

"Some of our young people used to hang about in the street and now they come to training instead."

"Our girls section is thriving with dedicated coaches and we provide employment opportunities for the young people within the club."

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

-  Youth development and participation, including better access to sports in schools.
-  More funding and investment for grassroots and community organisations.
-  Infrastructure and sustainability, including facility cost and availability.





## Our response

The findings from this year's report give us a clear mandate: community sport in Scotland is resilient and ambitious, but it is operating under financial pressure and facing widening inequalities in access and participation.

With 96% of groups confident in their short-term future but significantly lower confidence over three years, our operational focus will centre on long-term sustainability. We will prioritise strengthening funding readiness, improving bid-writing confidence, and supporting access to a broader and more diverse range of income opportunities.

Affordability remains a dominant pressure. We will work with partners to reduce barriers to participation through practical solutions such as transport support, shared facilities and collaborative delivery models. Alongside this, we will deliver webinars with key funders and support organisations to help groups become investment-ready and more confident in securing resources.

Ultimately, our response is focused on ensuring that community sport can continue to play its vital role in creating fairer access to physical activity across Scotland. By strengthening the capacity and sustainability of grassroots groups, improving their ability to secure funding, and working with partners to reduce practical barriers such as cost, transport and access to facilities, we aim to ensure that opportunities to take part in sport are not limited by background, income or geography. Through this work, and by leveraging opportunities such as the 2026 Commonwealth Games, we will support communities to build stronger, more inclusive local sport provision so that everyone has the chance to participate, benefit and belong.



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