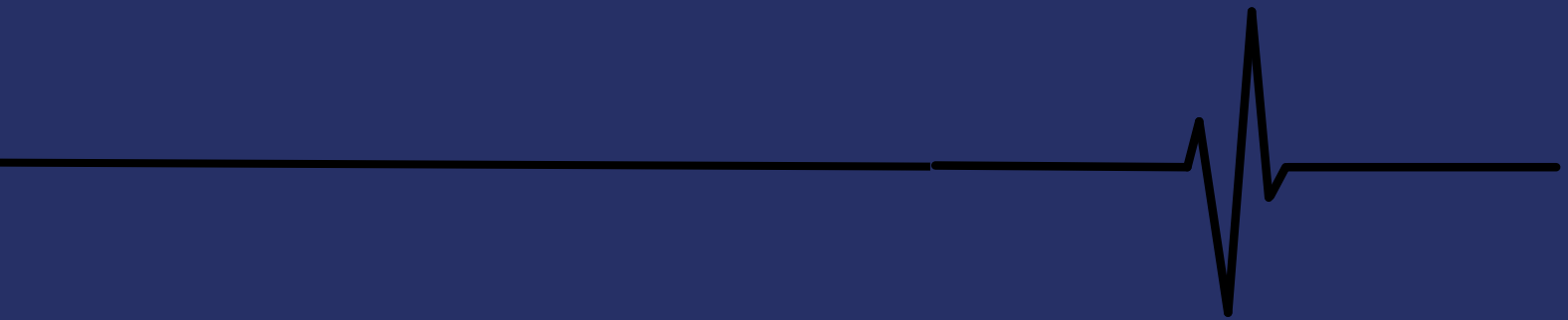


Winter 2025-26



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.

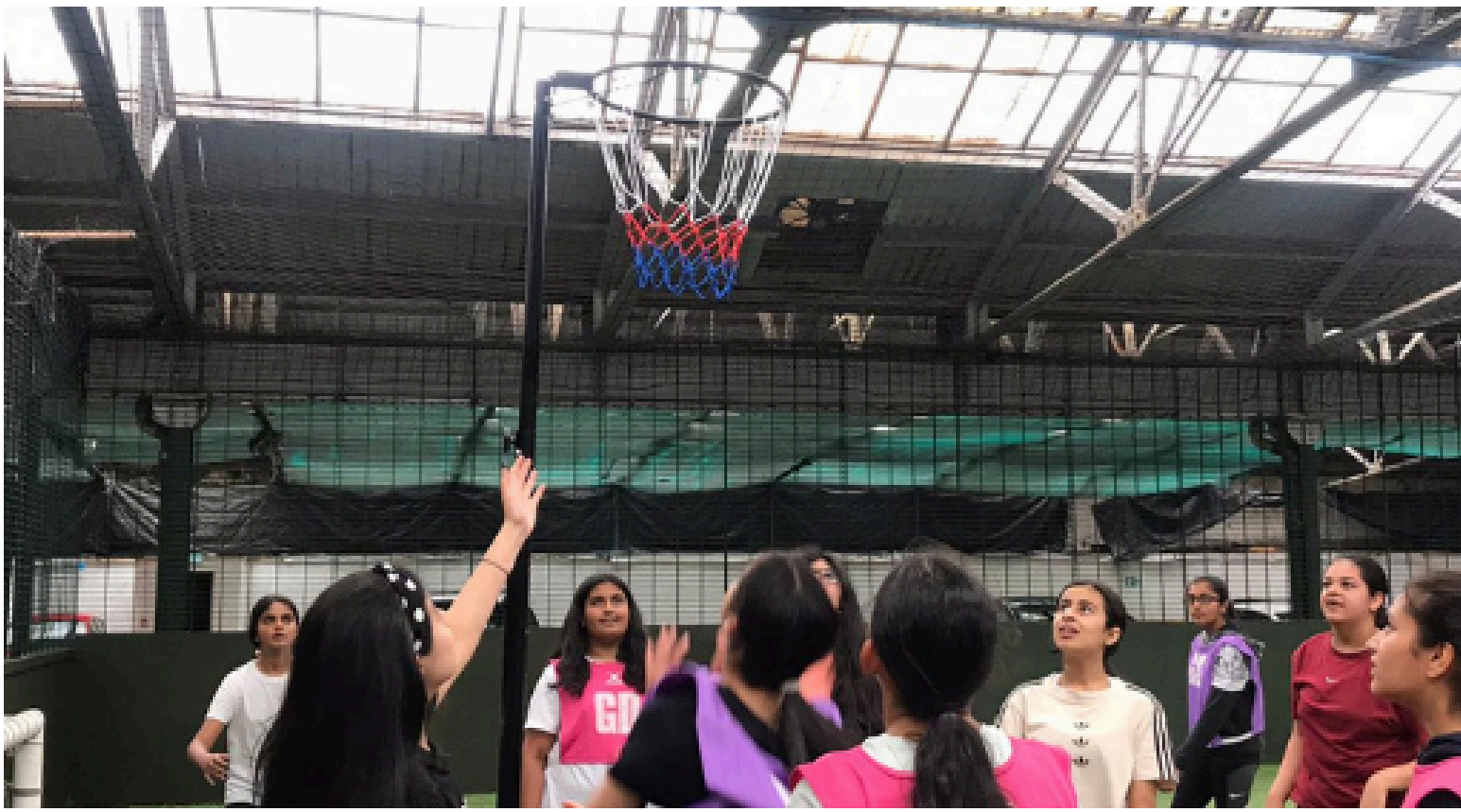
It aims to:

- ⇒ 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 385 community group leaders from across the UK, representing around 10 % of the Sported network, between 6-21 October 2025. These groups reach around 140,000 people across the UK.

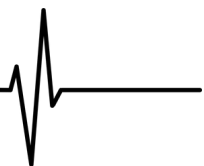




About Sported

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.

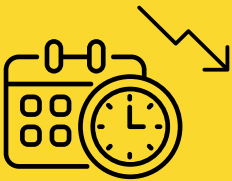

Our 5,000+ grassroots groups reaching more than 1 million people every year, provide safety, belonging and opportunity where it's needed most. Sported groups work within complex local contexts, often tackling some of society's biggest challenges. Around 50% are in areas that sit within the highest three 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 continue to prioritise securing funding above all else, both in the short and longer term, while also focusing on engaging new participants, planning for the future, and strengthening their volunteer base. Over the next three years, these priorities remain largely consistent, with an added emphasis on participant retention. Although most groups feel confident about their ability to operate in the near term, their confidence drops noticeably when looking further ahead.

	<p>Groups remain confident in their survival in the immediate future, but confidence decreases as they look beyond the next six months: 91% are confident they will exist in six months time, compared to 73% who are confident in continuing to exist in three years' time.</p>
	<p>As has been the case for the past three years, funding is the most common priority for community groups, with 82% of leaders saying its a priority over the next six months and 57% 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"> • Engaging new participants (72%) • Planning for the future (63%) • Volunteer recruitment/retention (62%) • Responding to local challenges faced by young people (58%)



Fighting inactivity



Most groups are successfully helping inactive young people and adults become active, particularly through inclusive provision, strong community outreach, and offering a variety of activities tailored to different needs. However, the same barriers continue to limit participation: many young people are being priced out of activities and nearly half struggle with travel, leading to reduced engagement. These challenges mirror last years' findings, showing that affordability and access remain the biggest obstacles to getting and keeping people active.

70%

Almost three quarters of groups are getting inactive adults active.

85%

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.



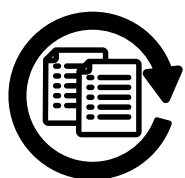
But the cost of and ability to get to activities is limiting young people's participation:



More than half of respondents (56%) 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.



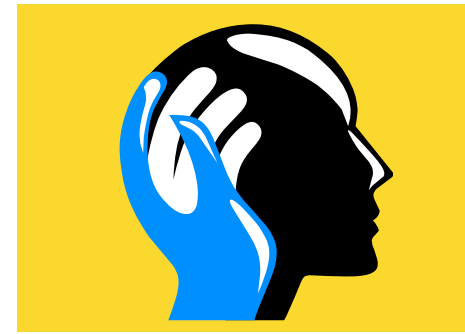
Young people are also struggling to get to activities, with almost half of group leaders (49%) saying being able to travel to activities was a factor in young people limiting or stopping participation recently.



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 remains the most reported significant challenge facing both young people and adults, alongside limited opportunities for young people, unequal access to sport, and increasing financial and economic pressures affecting adults. Many groups are seeing a growing need for mental health support, with most leaders approached by young people seeking help. To respond effectively, they say they need more funding, specialised training for coaches, and access to professional support.



Mental health is the most reported challenge that young people (74%) and adults (73%) are facing in their community at this time.

69%

Two thirds 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:

51%	Funding for mental health initiatives
49%	Training specifically for coaches
44%	Access to specialist advice or professionals



Inequalities

The most commonly reported issues affecting participation and engagement were:

Women and girls

Disabled People

Ethnically Diverse Communities

LGBTQ+



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	Accessible Facilities Confidence
Ethnically Diverse Communities	Limited awareness Communication barriers
LGBTQ+	Past negative experiences

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



We have also recently collaborated with a local martial arts school, which the young people thoroughly enjoyed. Therefore are currently in talks about how we could work together more frequently. We welcome any opportunity to be able to engage our young people in additional physical activity alongside our work. (The Wellbeing Junction CIC - East of England)



We also plan to run more community sessions and taster events aimed at young people who might not normally take part in sport. (Silverback Sports - West Midlands)



Increasing partnerships



A new 3G pitch at Hurst Cross can be utilised by our community and alternative education programme. It will provide a base for 1st team operations and allow junior squads to develop. (Ashton United in the Community - North West)



Facility enhancement

Supporting groups to succeed in these opportunities




More funding

Better access to facilities

Greater staff support

To realise these opportunities groups need more funding, better access to facilities, and greater staff support. Funding is critical, mainly for venue hire, core costs, and coach fees. However, group leaders note challenges around time constraints and limited confidence in completing funding applications and significant competition for limited funding opportunities

More funding is vital for groups to support with:

	Facility hire/access to venues (46%)
	Core costs (e.g. heating/staff salaries) (38%)
	Coach and instructor fees (38%)

"We have taken some children from a life of knife crime and gave them a different path to take through boxing which has taught them discipline and built their confidence."

"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."

"One of our participants, shared that before joining our group, she often felt isolated and lacked motivation. Through our sports and well-being activities, she found new friends, improved her self-esteem, and now volunteers to help younger members every week."

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

- ▶ Youth development and participation, including better access to sports.
- ▶ Funding investment for grassroots and community organisations.
- ▶ Infrastructure and sustainability – facilities cost and availability .
- ▶ Governance and integrity – including inclusivity and equal opportunities and better accountability for funding allocation.



Our Response



The findings from this year's report give us a clear mandate across the UK: community sport is resilient and plays a vital role in supporting physical activity, wellbeing and community connection, but it is under increasing pressure from financial constraints, volunteer capacity challenges, limited access to facilities and widening inequalities in participation, alongside growing mental health needs.

Our response will focus on strengthening long-term sustainability and capacity across grassroots sport. With funding a consistent priority, we will enhance our direct grant support, increase access to flexible funding, and provide tailored support to help groups diversify income and build confidence in bid writing and planning. We will also prioritise volunteer development and continue to advocate for more equitable investment, improved infrastructure and better access to facilities. Strengthening partnerships and place-based approaches will help groups collaborate and respond more effectively to local needs.

Reducing barriers to participation will remain central to our work. We will work with partners to improve access to affordable facilities, equipment and support, while helping groups expand inclusive provision for underrepresented communities. Alongside this, we will respond to rising mental health needs through improved signposting, training and advocacy for dedicated funding, while continuing to champion the role of sport in bringing communities together.

Ultimately, our response is focused on ensuring that community sport across the UK can continue to thrive while becoming more inclusive and accessible. By strengthening grassroots capacity and tackling the barriers that limit participation, we aim to create more equal opportunities so that everyone can take part, benefit and belong through sport.



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