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# Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs

## Evaluation Report



ciste na  
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accounts fund

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# Foreword

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On behalf of Sport Ireland, I am pleased to welcome the publication of the Sport Ireland Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs Evaluation Report. These community-based initiatives, delivered through Sport Ireland's network of Local Sports Partnerships, have been a consistent presence in Sport Ireland's Dormant Accounts Funded projects since 2015.

The role of Sport Ireland and its Local Sports Partnerships is to co-ordinate and promote the development of sport at local level and increase levels of participation in sport and physical activity. Since their inception, the Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs have sought to achieve this by providing information, support and advice on a wide range of sports and physical activities to make it easier for people in disadvantaged areas to get involved and engage in a more active and healthier lifestyle.

The unique approach and development of each Community Sports and Physical Activity Hub, allowing for flexibility based on the informed needs of local communities reiterates our goal to provide national support to the advancement of sport and physical activity at a community level.

The success of the Community Sports and Physical Activity Hub model to date has seen their inclusion in significant Government of Ireland policy documents including 'The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland' and the recently released Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport 'National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027'. This acknowledgement is an endorsement of the success of the Community Sports and Physical Activity Hub model and of the Government's commitment to locally driven community sports development.

The insights gained through the development of this report have demonstrated the importance of robust evaluation systems throughout Sport Ireland's investment work. Sport Ireland is committed to ensuring that the appropriate level of monitoring, evaluation and research work is carried out to safeguard its investments and ensure a sustainable approach is taken across sport in Ireland.

I am pleased to note the broad range of local stakeholder organisations that were consulted as part of this evaluation process and thank them for their valued input.

I would like to acknowledge the staff within Sport Ireland who carried out this evaluation process and the work of the Local Sports Partnerships and local partner organisation who develop and deliver sport at community level. I would also like to acknowledge the investment made through the Dormant Accounts Fund since 2015 by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.



**John Treacy**  
Chief Executive  
Sport Ireland

# Abbreviations

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CCDA	Croom Community Development Association
CHSs	Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs
DAF	Dormant Account Funds
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
Ibid	ibidem (Meaning- referenced from the same place as above)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LSPs	Local Sports Partnerships
NPAP	National Physical Activity Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SSRP	Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership

# Executive Summary

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This report presents the findings of a qualitative evaluation of the Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs (CSHs) project which is funded by Sport Ireland through the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF). A CSH is a collection of progressive sports clubs and other local organisations that want to work together to improve sport offered in their local community. The Hubs provide information, support and advice on a wide range of sports and physical activities to make it easier for people in disadvantaged areas to engage in a more active lifestyle. The intended impact of a CSH is to increase the number of people of all ages participating in sport and physical activity in their communities, with a specific focus on adolescents/young people. This report presents findings from the evaluation of the first 9 CSHs initially funded in 2015. The Hubs are located in - Clare, Donegal, Limerick, Mayo, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, West Cork and Wexford and were selected through a competitive bid process in 2015.

The purpose of this evaluation was to understand whether Hubs have achieved their intended outputs, outcomes and impacts and if so, what contributed to their success. An evaluation framework was developed based on the aims and objectives of the programme as outlined in the original project guidelines. Success of a Hub is measured by the extent to which the 4 aims in the framework have been achieved; provision of a pathway, well-trained people, strong organisations and quality facilities. The framework was used to create data collection tools for the evaluation which were drafted, edited and finalised with input from Sport Ireland's Research team. Data was collected from three stakeholders of the CSH project- Hub/LSP Coordinators, key informants from partner organisations and community members. Hub/LSP coordinators and partner organisations were engaged through an online survey using Survey Monkey. Site visits took place to all 9 Hubs to engage with community members through focus group discussions (FGDs). All data was analysed using Nvivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software, with the evaluation framework serving as a key reference point. All findings of the evaluation have been reported under the broad headings of framework.



It was found that overall CSHs are perceived as being positive additions to communities. The data has demonstrated that opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity were limited in communities before the establishment of the Hubs. However, current opportunities to participate in Sport and Physical Activity, both within and outside the structures of the Hub, were perceived as being available. Specifically, there was positive feedback on the range of opportunities made available to communities across the Hubs. Some sports Hubs have not only offered opportunities for participation but have also assisted with training for progression and setting up clubs. While Hubs have been able to successfully provide a pathway into sport and through sport, lack of awareness came up as a barrier to participation. Rather than a lack of opportunities, the problem in communities is the lack of awareness of these opportunities, which takes many forms. The evaluation also pointed out that there is potential for an increase in levels of community engagement across all Hubs and lack of awareness is a big determinant of the current rates of engagement.

CSHs have succeeded in creating well-trained people to varying degrees. There is a need to clarify and further develop the role of a CSH in training and leadership development. With data from this evaluation bringing up the need for 'softer' skills, such as the ability to make a group of participants feel welcome and safe, the focus of training and development could be further refined.

It was found that sports Hubs have positively benefitted all clubs and organisations that they work with. Support provided by Hubs for creation of strong organisations took different forms - strategic support, support with venues and costs, support in training and finding coaches and support in bringing in new membership. Data has shown that the strongest area of Hub support is the dedicated funding support that local clubs receive from the Hubs.

The evaluation has found that communities have been able to access quality facilities at more affordable prices over the lifetime of a Hub. Many Hubs have used their funding to subsidise programme rates in order to enable those who might not have had a chance before to participate in sport. Quality facilities made available to the communities which had participated in a community consultation saw higher levels of participation and engagement. In other words, the provision of quality facilities alone will struggle to increase participation rates in isolation of broader coordinated community development projects.

In spite of the uniqueness of every Hub, there are some key success factors that were found to be consistent across all Hubs. Having a face of the Hub, creating community leadership and ownership, breaking down the barrier of lack of confidence and vulnerability, presence of professional expertise, pushing for awareness and endorsement, consistency and creation of welcome and safe spaces were all identified as factors common to Hubs that were critical for success.

The data collected through this evaluation indicates that Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs are a viable and useful model to increase levels of participation in sport and physical activity in a community. However, this evaluation cannot comment on the efficiency and viability of the Community Sports Hub model in comparison to other models. This is simply because sports Hubs have not been evaluated against any other model. The evaluation found that increased participation is best achieved when Hubs deliver on all 4 areas of the framework i.e. provision of a pathway, well-trained people, strong organisations and quality facilities. Those Hubs that have achieved success in multiple areas have seen better community engagement and, as an extension of that, better participation levels in sport and physical activity. This conclusion is based on the qualitative data gathered and would be strengthened from quantitative evidence to support it.

# Introduction

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This report presents the findings of a qualitative evaluation of the Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs (CSHs) project. The Hubs are funded by Sport Ireland through the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF). The DAF was established by legislation and enables unclaimed funds from accounts in credit institutions in Ireland<sup>1</sup> to be used towards projects for the development of disadvantaged areas. Under the Dormant Accounts Act 2012, the Minister for Rural and Community Development is responsible for the processes by which Government approves measures and projects to which funding may be disbursed under DAF<sup>2</sup>. Sport Ireland has worked with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to develop a series of measures under this in 2015, 2016 and 2017, with the CSH project being the first measure. The measures align with the National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP), a part of the Healthy Ireland National framework. CSHs have been referenced under action area 6 - Sport & Physical Activity in the Community of this document. Further, the CSH project has also been referenced in the recently released National Sports Policy 2018-2027. Action 11 under the policy states "We will use the Dormant Accounts Fund and other Exchequer funding to roll out initiatives such as the Community Sports Hubs on a nationwide basis..."<sup>3</sup> CSHs have also been mentioned under Action 14 - "We will use our funding streams to foster social participation in sport by encouraging the development of strong community-based sports organisations (e.g. Community Sports Hubs)..."<sup>4</sup>.

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the first 9 CSHs initially funded in 2015. The Hubs are located in - Clare, Donegal, Limerick, Mayo, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, West Cork and Wexford and were selected through a competitive bid process in 2015. The total amount of funding invested in the 9 Hubs between 2015 and 2017 is €1,292,392. 6 new Hubs were funded in 2016 (phase 2) and 13 new Hubs in 2017 (phase 3). The scope of this evaluation does not include Hubs established in phases 2 and 3 of the programme.

Section 2 of this report will provide an introduction to the concept of a Community Sports and Physical Activity Hub and its aims and objectives. Section 3 provides an overview of a mid-term review of the Hubs that was undertaken in 2016 and discusses other literature in this area. Section 4 outlines the evaluation design and discusses the methodology, evaluation framework, data collection tools, data analysis, scope and limitations of this evaluation. Section 5 provides an overview of the 9 community sports hubs. Section 6 of this report presents the overall findings of the evaluation under the broad headings of the framework. Section 7 identifies the critical factors for success that were found to be common across all Hubs. Section 8 provides a conclusion and a comment on potential future investment in the project.

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<sup>1</sup> Dormant Accounts Funds, Available at <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/dormant-accounts-fund-daf/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> National Sports Policy, Pg 37, Available at <http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/sport/english/national-sports-policy-2018-2027/national-sports-policy-2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 38



# 2

## Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs (CSHs)

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As stated in the guidelines for this project, a Community Sports and Physical Activity Hub is a collection of progressive sports clubs and other local organisations that want to work together to improve sport offered in their local community. The Hubs provide information, support and advice on a wide range of sports and physical activities to make it easier for people in disadvantaged areas to engage in a more active lifestyle. A CSH can combine a number of facilities, or it may simply centre on a single venue hosting many clubs. Irrespective of its approach, each Hub focuses on one of three themes-

a) Community Sports Hub

This is a Hub where the community is at the heart and is centred around community participation. This includes developing and strengthening linkages between the community, sports clubs and other physical activity groups.

b) School Community Sports Hub

This is a Hub that maximises sports facility usage through linkages with the local schools, community, sports clubs and other physical activity groups.

c) Outdoor Community Sports Hub

This Hub will focus on the development of the outdoor space as a Hub, increasing the linkages between the community, sports clubs and other physical activity groups.

All the Hubs operate within the existing structure of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) which operate under the remit of Sport Ireland. Although unique in their approach owing to adapting practices based on local community needs, all 9 Hubs work to achieving the same aims -

- Provision of a pathway for Sport and Physical Activity
- Well-trained people to develop the capacity of local sport
- Creation of strong organisations
- Provision of quality facilities.

As such, the intended impact of a CSH is to increase the number of people of all ages participating in sport and physical activity in their communities, with a specific focus on adolescents/young people.

The intended goals of this project, as per the original guidelines, are summarised in the table below.

Aim	Specific Goals	Activities specifically supported under this Initiative
Providing the pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity</li> <li>• A home where a range of local sports clubs can work together</li> <li>• A welcome and safe place to take part in sport and physical activity.</li> </ul>	<p>Research into community profiles and needs assessment</p> <p>Marketing and promotion activities, including outreach by sports clubs</p>
Well-trained people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and development of the people that make sport happen.</li> </ul>	<p>Purchase of small scale capital equipment</p>
Strong organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-sustaining sports clubs/ organisations</li> <li>• An integrated approach from local partners</li> <li>• A social environment that engages members of the community</li> <li>• Better organised and connected local clubs</li> <li>• Genuine community engagement and leadership.</li> </ul>	<p>Development of joint initiatives between sports clubs and recreational physical activity groups</p> <p>Delivery of training and development courses for sports volunteers</p> <p>Rollout of joint club 'come and try'/ taster sessions to increase membership</p>
Quality facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved access for local people and sports clubs at affordable prices</li> <li>• Integration with local facility planning and programming.</li> </ul>	<p>Develop and pilot a range of inter-linked sporting opportunities</p>

As the CSH project is funded by DAF, the Hubs specifically target disadvantaged groups. Disadvantaged groups under DAF are defined as -

- People who are economically or socially disadvantaged
- People who are educationally disadvantaged
- Persons with a disability (within the meaning of the Equal Status Act 2000).

# 3

## Previous Evaluations

### 3.1 Mid-Term Review of the Community Sports Hubs

A mid-term review of the Community Sports Hub project was conducted in 2016 by Sport Ireland's Evaluation officer. The mid-term review found that *"the programme continues to be relevant and effective for LSPs and beneficiaries they seek to target"*.<sup>5</sup> Further, the review stated that *"while implementation is at an early stage, the information and data suggest that the intervention is relevant, effective, and an efficient contributor to building and enhancing sport and physical activities among disadvantaged communities"*.<sup>6</sup> The review recommended there be a continued focus and scaling up of the programme in the future. The mid-term review used the OECD evaluation criteria<sup>7</sup> to grade the CSH programme on relevance and effectiveness and the Hub scored 4 for relevance to the LSP, 2 for relevance to participants and 2.5 to effectiveness.

### 3.1 Mid-Term Review of the Community Sports Hubs

An evaluation of the Scottish Community Sports Hubs, on whose model the Irish Community Sports Hubs are based, measured the extent to which the principles of the CSH were realised. The evaluation found that the role of the Hub Officer was critical to the success of the programme. It also found that the nature and level of activity undertaken to understand the needs of the community varied between Hubs. The report states that *there was very little evidence of work to specifically target those considered "hard to reach"*.<sup>8</sup> It found that local people took up a range of leadership and volunteering opportunities and had picked up new skills and knowledge. It concluded that in general, CSHs were seen as a positive addition to communities.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3 Other Literature on Evaluation in Sport

Choosing indicators for measurement of success of community sports projects, especially in disadvantaged communities, is a fairly underdeveloped area of Sports Research. Beneforti and Cunningham (2000) state that *"it is evident from the literature review that indicator development on outcomes from sport and recreation programmes (for the general population and even more so for indigenous populations) is in its infancy"*.<sup>10</sup> To date, most research has focussed on exploring the links between physical activity and various health outcomes as opposed to understanding what makes people active. However, this work has essentially been confined to the realm of targeted research and has not extended to routine monitoring and evaluation of service delivery.<sup>11</sup> A recurrent theme in the literature on programme evaluation was the importance of recording meaningful information on why or why not programmes achieve certain results.<sup>12</sup> This suggests it would be useful, as a precursor to or concurrent with the measurement of outcomes, to monitor the processes that underpin sport and recreation programmes in indigenous communities.<sup>13</sup> While Beneforti and Cunningham make this case for indigenous communities, it can largely be argued for the general population too.

<sup>5</sup> Mid-Term Review of Community Coaching Programme and Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs, 9/11/2016

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> According to the OECD criteria, a score of 2 means that "The evaluation found the programme to be generally acceptable but with some major reservations" and a score of 4 is "The evaluation found the programme to be highly satisfactory".

<sup>8</sup> CSH Evaluation - ODS Consulting

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 38

<sup>10</sup> Beneforti, M. and Cunningham, J., 2002, Investigating indicators for measuring the health and social impact of sport and recreation programmes in Indigenous communities, Australian Sports Commission and Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health, Darwin.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

# 4

## Evaluation Design

### 4.1 Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation was to understand whether Hubs have achieved their intended outputs, outcomes and impacts and if so, what contributed to their success. It became clear when designing this evaluation that the original CSH applications form and guidelines would be the central document that we would evaluate the Hubs against. As a result of this, two phases of the evaluation developed. First, an evaluation framework was created using the central document and second, data collection tools were created using this evaluation framework. The findings from this evaluation are also reported under the broad evaluation framework headings.

#### 4.1.1 Evaluation Framework

The framework was developed based on the aims and objectives of the programme as outlined in the original project guidelines. (See Appendix for full version of the framework.) Success of a Hub is measured by the extent to which the outputs and outcomes, as captured in this framework, have been achieved. Key Performance indicators for every output and outcome were developed based on a literature review. A consultation was held with all LSP and Hub coordinators where the evaluation framework was shared for feedback which was incorporated into the framework as much as possible. While the framework in itself was created post the design and implementation of the CSH projects, anyone involved with the Hubs prior to the framework would have been familiar with its content.

#### 4.1.2 Data Collection

Once the framework was agreed on, it was used to create tools for the evaluation. The tools were drafted, edited and finalised with input from Sport Ireland's Research team. Data was collected from three stakeholders of CSH projects:

- Hub/LSP Coordinators
- Key Informants from partner organisations of the Hub (clubs, schools, community groups, etc) and
- Members of the community for whom the Hub was established.

Hub/LSP coordinators and partner organisations were engaged through an online survey using Survey Monkey. Site visits took place to all 9 Hubs to engage with community members through focus group discussions (FGDs). Two focus groups were held in each Hub - one with frequent users of the Hub and the second with infrequent users. Frequent users were defined as those that have been involved with the Hub and its activities since its inception and infrequent users as those that had engaged with the Hub previously but discontinued.

Apart from the data gathered through the online surveys and FGDs, the site visits have resulted in observations about the Hubs that have proved to be useful in completing this evaluation report. Ad-hoc, face-to-face interviews also took place with the Hub coordinators and other Hub staff such as tutors and coaches during the site visits.

All 9 Hub/LSP Coordinator surveys were completed, 38 key informant surveys were completed and 94 community members were engaged through focus groups.

#### 4.1.3 Data analysis

All data was analysed using Nvivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software. Data from Focus groups was coded on Nvivo and themes identified, using the evaluation framework as a key reference point. These themes will be discussed later in the report. The Coordinator survey and Key Informant surveys were also imported onto Nvivo for analysis. Survey Monkey and Microsoft Excel were used for generating graphs and other figures that appear in this report.

## 4.2 Scope

The scope of this evaluation is limited to -

- Determining the extent to which the Hubs have achieved their objectives. This is done through an examination of the outputs and outcomes that have been delivered on by each Hub
- Review of the model of delivery of the Hubs and identification of factors that are critical for success of a Hub
- Review of the success of the Hub as a viable and useful model, warranting further investment and roll out.

## 4.3 Assumptions

In order to ensure a robust and structured evaluation, such that, when replicated, will produce exact or similar results, the following assumptions have been made about definitions of key variables.

### 4.3.1 Community

The word 'community' is a broad term used to define groups of people, whether they are stakeholders, interest groups or citizen groups. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interests (community of practice), or a community of affiliation or identity such as industry or sporting club.<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this evaluation, community is the geographic location i.e. community of place.

### 4.3.2 Data analysis

The National Sports Policy 2018-2027 states that participation in sport takes many forms. "Individuals can take part informally or formally, in competition or recreationally, on their own or as a part of a group or team, as a beginner or at a top level. Socially they can volunteer for many different roles, be a member of one or more sports clubs, or attend sporting events as a spectator". The evaluation uses this definition. The frequency of participation is discussed in the next section.

### 4.3.3 Recreational Sport

As stated in the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, "Recreational Sport means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or regular participation, aim at - a) expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing and b) forming social relationships." The evaluation uses this definition.

### 4.3.4 Community Leader

For the purpose of this evaluation, a community leader is one who possesses confidence, as a result of experience and expertise, to lead members of the community in the area of Sport and Physical Activity. A community leader doesn't necessarily have to be trained with formal qualifications but nonetheless possesses the skills and knowledge that influences their capability as a leader.

### 4.3.5 Volunteers

The term 'volunteering' refers to "*helping others... and receiving either no remuneration or only expenses*" (Taylor et al., 2003: 6). Adopting Taylor et al's (2003: 6) definition, volunteering includes both formal and informal volunteering given that people may give their time both within a club setting or help others in sport outside a club environment.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> PennState Centre for Economic and Community Development. Available at <http://aeese.psu.edu/research/centers/cecd/engagement-toolbox/engagement/what-is-community-engagement>

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, P., Nichols, G., Holmes, K., James, M., Gratton, C., Garrett, R., Kokolakis, T., Mulder, C. and King, L. (2003). Sports Volunteering in England, 2002, summary report. Sport England.



#### **4.3.6 Involvement**

Sport involvement is conceptualised as a multifaceted construct representing the degree to which participation in a sport activity becomes a central component of a person's life and provides both hedonic and symbolic value.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4.3.7 Safe Space**

Safe space refers to a way of acknowledging and relating to others. Safe spaces are levellers, inclusive spaces that facilitate meaningful interaction through shared respect and shared meaning.

### **4.4 Limitations**

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#### **4.4.1 The lack of baseline data**

The lack of baseline data has meant that we cannot know in absolute quantitative terms whether or not sports Hubs have led to an increase in rates of participation in sport and physical activity in communities. While this has meant that a comprehensive impact level evaluation could not be carried out, we can still determine levels of engagement at the Hub and estimate potential impacts at community level.

#### **4.4.2 Cost of Impact Measurement**

The cost of measuring the impact of a project with the scale of investment as a community sports Hub can often times be a lot more than the quantifiable value of the impact of the project itself. This is because the level of funding that each Hub has received is minor when compared to the significance of its intended impact. It would cost more to evaluate the impact of such a project in isolation, than it would to measure the impact of a number of projects implemented, in relatively large communities. The impact of small investments in large communities is costly to measure, due to the accuracy and tolerance of measurement required.

#### **4.4.3 Frequency of Participation**

The intended impact of the CSH project doesn't define frequency of participation. In other words, no minimums have been set for the number of times one must engage in a sport or physical activity for it to qualify as participation. It could range from engaging in a sport once a month to doing so three times a week. It is therefore a challenge to discuss if a Hub has been successful in increasing levels of participation when there isn't clarity on what this means in terms of frequency.

#### **4.4.4 FGD Member Selection**

Participants of FGDs were chosen at the discretion of Hub coordinators which has created a certain level of bias in the data. A completely randomised selection process of participants for each focus group would have been ideal but difficult and impractical to implement.

#### **4.4.5 Inconsistency of Responses**

The design didn't take into account the inconsistencies in how many key informant surveys would be returned for each Hub. This has meant that the responses have ranged from 2 for a Hub to 8 for another Hub which creates bias in the overall data trends.

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<sup>16</sup> Sport involvement: A conceptual and empirical analysis. Anthony A. Beatona Daniel C. Funka Lynn Ridinger b Jeremy Jordanc

# 5

## The Community Sports Hubs

### 5.1 Maghery Coastal Adventures - Donegal

Maghery Coastal Adventures, Donegal's Sports Hub, is based out of Maghery's community centre - Maghery la cheile. The objective of the Hub, is to increase participation in adventure sports among all age groups in the area along with training local people to become instructors to ensure sustainability in the future. The sports offered by the Hub are - kayaking, stand up paddling, hill walking, surfing, snorkelling and cycling.

Maghery Coastal Adventures is run as a community enterprise. All income generated from provision of activities is used to pay the instructors and is invested back into the enterprise. The Hub is run by a steering committee which reports to the Maghery community group. The big difference between a commercial entity and a community enterprise in outdoor sport is that the former may not provide opportunities for progression but the latter definitely does and Maghery Coastal Adventures is an example of such a Hub.

The Hub has been able to reach its target population with users coming from Maghery, the general Rosses area of west Donegal as well as other parts of the country. A comprehensive needs analysis was undertaken in the form of a survey sent out to the community, 2 focus groups with young people and one-to-one interviews.

### 5.2 Sligo East City Community Sports Hub

As defined in their original application, the "East City Community Sports Hub represents a collective of progressive community organisations, sports clubs and agencies working together to develop a model of delivery which leads to increased participation in sport and recreation in the disadvantaged area of the Sligo East Ward with support from SSRP." (Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership)

As such, the Hub coordinator stated the objective of this Hub as being the maintenance and further development of opportunities for participation in regular physical activity for all members of the community. It is clear from this evaluation that the role of the Sligo Sports and Recreational Partnership in the East City Community Sports Hub is one of strategic guidance and support rather than one of direct delivery - an approach that works well.

The East City Community Sports Hub built on the already existing SSRP Cranmore Regeneration through Sport Initiative. The Hub widened the reach of the initiative from just Cranmore to the wider East City region. This has happened as per the larger Sligo County Council/Cranmore Regeneration Master plan. What makes this Sports Hub unique in its approach is the clarity on the part of the LSP and Hub coordinator that between programme delivery and programme coordination the work of the SSRP sits in the latter. The SSRP work with the Cranmore Regeneration Office and the Community Development Forum to enter into partnerships with other community organisations and sports clubs to increase rates of participation in the area.

A formal needs analysis was undertaken as a part of the Cranmore Regeneration Master plan with community organisations and residents. Further, the Cranmore Development Forum, sports clubs in Cranmore and in the wider East City area were also consulted.



## 5.3 Carrickphierish, Waterford

The sports Hub in Carrickphierish, Waterford is a multipurpose sports hall that is used by 2 schools during the day and is rented by the LSP from the council every evening and on the weekends. The Hub is adjoined to a state of the art library that is available for use by the school and local communities. The Hub is surrounded by two large local authority housing estates and one local authority housing complex. As stated by the Hub coordinator, the objective of this Hub is “to work together, to develop the Carrickphierish Community Campus as a welcoming and inclusive place that supports the engagement and holistic development of the community maximising the benefits for everyone.”

Through the Hub, the WSP has funded and delivered a wide variety of programmes from the campus such as basketball, GAA training, breakfast clubs, dance and fitness classes and indoor soccer. The target groups for these activities have been varied. The Hub is also home to a disability club called Deise Dragons. The Hub Coordinator leads on the Carrickphierish community campus steering group, which provides strategic guidance to the activities of the Sports Hub and Library.

There was no needs analysis undertaken before the establishment of the Hub. While there are consultations that take place with relevant partners and agencies for the development and programming needs of target groups, these target groups have not been engaged with directly. It was found through the focus groups that the Carrickphierish area already struggles with not having a sense of community, there is no shop, café, restaurant, pub or church in the local area.

## 5.4 River Suir Community Sports Hub, South Tipperary

This is a water based sports Hub providing opportunities to the community to kayak and canoe on River Suir, from Cahir to Carrick-on-Suir with a special focus on Clonmel. As stated by the LSP coordinator, the objective of this Hub is to “link with the community to provide opportunities for participants to experience and engage in water sports and become proficient in water skills, along with reconnecting the community with the River Suir.”

It was found that while there was no lack of opportunities for sport and physical activity in Clonmel, there certainly wasn't a culture of people on the water. River Suir has been associated with anti-social behaviour and cases of suicides in the past and therefore wasn't perceived as a resource that could add value to the town.

The sports Hub functions through a 3 way partnership between Tipperary County Council, Tipperary Sports Partnership and Canoeing Ireland. The Hub works with 2 local clubs - Clonmel Canoe Club and Ardfinnan Canoe Club to provide opportunities for participation in the sport as well as for training and development. The Hub has worked with schools, the National Learning Network and youth organisations to deliver kayaking and canoeing opportunities. The Slalom course was designed in partnership with Canoeing Ireland and also sees engagement from the National Slalom team for training.





## 5.5 West Cork Islands

The West Cork Islands sports Hub is established across a collective of 6 islands - Sherkin, Cape Clear, Bere, Long, Whiddy and Heir. As stated by the Coordinator, the objective of this Hub is to create a culture of sport, exercise and physical activity for members of the community.

The West Cork Islands are a part of an inter-agency working group, who have their own strategy, aims and objectives. The Hub coordinator works with 3 organisations that are representatives of the islands on this working group to deliver activities that are closely linked with this strategy. It is the inactive, sedentary adults and young people living on the Islands of West Cork that are the target group for the Hub. Activities delivered by the Hub include kayaking, inter-island soccer, taekwondo, sailing initiatives and general physical activity/gym based programmes.

The only needs analysis performed was an ad-hoc, informal analysis on one of the islands. It is the role of the 3 representatives of the islands to link in with the Hub coordinator on the needs of the communities in order to enable the Hub to cater for the different needs of the islanders.

## 5.6 Ballyhaunis, Mayo

The sports Hub in Mayo is based in Ballyhaunis, a town with 40 different nationalities. The Hub is a cricket practice area built as a result of local leaders approaching the Sports Partnership, in keeping with the needs of the International community. As stated by the Hub coordinator, the objective of the Hub is to “provide inclusive participation opportunities for all in a multicultural community”. The cricket practice run area was built inside a housing estate, the Maples, alongside a multi-use games area and a playground.

The cricket practice area has been built next to a multi-use games area, which is constructed and run by Mayo County Council. The practice area is managed by the Local Authority. The target group for this Hub is the local community of Ballyhaunis, with a special focus on integrating the Muslim population into the community through sport. A Ballyhaunis Sports Network, led by the Ballyhaunis Chamber of Commerce that used to exist has now fizzled away. It was the remit of the Ballyhaunis Sports Network to get all nationalities to take part in sport and physical activity.

A needs analysis was undertaken through the Ballyhaunis Sports Network. This group identified needs of the community on the basis of which the application was made. There was a need for a cricket practice area as practice was happening on an ad-hoc basis in unsafe areas. Thus, the Hub was able to provide structure and organisation to the sport.



## 5.7 Riverchapel, Wexford

The sports Hub in Wexford is the Riverchapel Community Complex, which encompasses a BMX track, 2 pitches for Soccer and GAA and a walking track. The objective of the Hub is to provide facilities for the community to play sports. The Riverchapel Community Complex Limited is run by a voluntary management group. The group consists of representatives from Courtown HIBS FC, Ballygarrett GAA Club, Courtown Community Council, Wexford County Council, Riverchapel National School and a representative of the BMX Group. Each club pays a licence membership fee to the complex. The Wexford Sports Partnership supported the complex in its first 2 years of establishment, funding ceased in 2017.

No needs analysis was undertaken with the community before the complex was built. However, it was clear from the focus groups that the Hub has been able to centralise opportunities for people to access sport and physical activity in the area.



## 5.8 Croom, Limerick

The sports Hub is the Croom Community Centre. Limerick Sports Partnership in conjunction with the Croom Community Development Association (CCDA) applied for funding to develop the community centre as a Hub. The community centre is surrounded by 10 neighbouring housing estates, who are the target group for the Hub's activities. The Hub has since grown to encompass a park with an outdoor gym and the Croom Civic Centre.

As stated in their application, the LSP and the CCDA are working together to deliver an active and sustainable sports Hub within the community of Croom. Both organisations work alongside each other to deliver activities for the community.

It is clear from the FGDs that opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity were minimal in Croom before the establishment of the sports Hub. Activities used to be limited to walking but the Hub has opened up a range of opportunities including Yoga and Pilates, climbing wall and gym based fitness classes.



## 5.9 Clarisford Park, Clare

Clarisford Park is as an all-inclusive community sports facility set in 10ha of open grassland and mature woodland on the banks of the River Shannon in Killaloe, Co. Clare. The sports Hub in Clare is more a stream of funding than a particular facility. The funding provided through the Hub for Clarisford Park is to target non-participation and drop-off rates in sport and physical activity in order to facilitate an intergenerational sports facility.

The Hub coordinator works with clubs and organisations in the area to deliver a range of programmes and activities to the community. Funding from the Hub is also used to subsidise classes in order to make them more affordable to the community. The park is home to a Soccer Club, Rugby Club, GAA, Athletics Club and a Scouts Group.

A fully-fledged needs analysis was carried out prior to the establishment of the Hub. This was done in the form of an asset mapping exercise to see what opportunities existed for sport and physical activity and what was being used.





# 6

## Results & Discussions

### 6.1 Community Sports Hubs on the ground

It is evident from this evaluation that while it is easy to theorise what a sports Hub is, in reality, every sports Hub is unique. No two Hubs are the same with respect to their model of delivery, their target groups, activities they coordinate or even their funding models. Indeed, an ostensible challenge of writing such a report would be drawing similarities between Hubs that function very differently. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that despite the varying nature of the Hubs, they are all meant to act towards effecting the same impact - i.e. increasing rates of participation in sport and physical activity in their community.

Positively, 7 out of 9 Hub coordinators stated in the survey that their objective was to increase rates of participation in Sport and Physical Activity in their community, albeit through different ways - from water & adventure sports to fitness classes. This flexible and non-prescriptive nature of the Community Sports Hub funding has been well received and has allowed for a larger focus on community needs. The other 2 Hubs mentioned generating club buy-in and holistic development of communities but didn't explicitly mention an increase in Sport and Physical activity.

When reading the results of this evaluation, it will be useful to remain cognisant of the fact that every sports Hub looks different on the ground. While this report will not prescribe a 'one size fits all' approach, it will attempt to draw conclusions on what approach has had more impact and identify areas that have potential for cross learning.

### 6.2 Pathways for participation

#### Pathway into Sport

It was evident from the focus groups with community members that opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity were limited in their communities before the Hubs. Data from the Hub coordinator surveys confirms this. On what opportunities existed before the Hub -

*"Before this facility our only exercise was walking."*

- FGD Participant, Croom

*"With the exception of a few Clubs/Initiatives (Bere Island GAA, Heir Island Sailing School, Inter Islands GAA Tournament) there was minimal opportunities for people to participate in a club structure or even structured sport. Ad hoc activities were organised throughout the year, but nothing on a level that the Hub has tried to address."*

- Hub coordinator, West Cork Islands

When asked about current opportunities to participate in Sport and Physical Activity, both within and outside the structures of the Hub, the response from participants was fairly positive. Specifically, there was positive feedback on a range of opportunities available to the community, across the Hubs.

*"There's a good range of opportunities - young and old, across a range of abilities - fast and slow"*

- FGD Participant, Maghery

*"The number of opportunities this community has been given is incredible."*

- FGD Participant, Sligo

However, it was evident that the presence of opportunities does not guarantee participation. This is especially the case when your target groups are disadvantaged communities. For example, the Carrickphierish sports Hub is a multipurpose hall - a facility that is shared by 2 schools. The Hub has been successful in filling the hours of the hall. They're filled up by sports clubs and fitness instructors but the Hub is struggling with participation from community members in the surrounding estates. The participants that come in do so from areas outside of Carrickphierish.

## Pathway through Sport

Opportunities or the lack thereof, often go hand in hand with the provision of a pathway.<sup>17</sup> It was found that those sports Hubs that offer niche sports have been able to successfully create a pathway for progression.

*"Yes, there is more opportunities through school programmes, summer camps and intro days. There is also an opportunity for interested participants to gain training & education and pathways are in place for participants on the coaching ladder."*

- LSP Coordinator, Tipperary

Some sports Hubs have not only offered opportunities for participation but have assisted with training for progression and setting up clubs. For example, community members that would have never tried sports like paddle boarding and hill walking prior to the establishment of the Hub, have gone on to become instructors at Maghera Coastal Adventures. The Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership (SSRP) set up a come and try taster day for Lawn Bowls that eventually saw interested members of the community come together to establish the Sligo Lawn Bowls Club with the assistance of the Hub coordinator.

It is clear that while sports Hubs have displaced some existing activity into the realm of a sports Hub, they have also created significant opportunities for communities that would not have had them before.

## 6.3 Awareness

Lack of awareness has come up consistently in all focus groups as being a barrier to participation. Rather than a lack of opportunities, the problem in communities seems to be the lack of awareness of these opportunities. However, it must be noted that the lack of awareness isn't a simple issue. From the focus groups it was noted that there are 3 types of awareness challenges facing the Hubs -

### 6.3.1 Lack of awareness of all opportunities

The first type of challenge with awareness is missing awareness of all opportunities that exist in the community related to sport and physical activity.

*"Advertising and promotion could be a lot more. A Facebook page meant only for Physical Activity would be useful."*

- Focus Group Discussion Participant, Croom

*"I've never seen on advertisement for it."*

- Focus Group Discussion Participant, Carrickphierish

*"The big thing is educating the community on what they have - community complex, GAA, Soccer..."*

- Focus Group Discussion Participant, Riverchapel

In these cases, despite the advertising and marketing tools employed by the sports Hub, they did not reach the intended audience and as a result, community members did not know what opportunities exist in their community.

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<sup>17</sup> For the purpose of this evaluation, pathway has been defined as structures that allow individuals to move progressively in sport, from one level of involvement to another.

### 6.3.2 There is awareness of opportunities but not of their accessibility

The second type of awareness challenge is cases in which community members know that opportunities exist but do not perceive them to be accessible.

*"People think this is meant for the school. It is a bit better now that the sports Hub sign has gone up."*

- Focus Group Discussion Participant, Carrickphierish

*"There's a sense that Clarisford isn't for me, that it is very sporty."*

- Focus Group Discussion Participant, Clare

*"There's an awareness challenge. There's enough people to do everything but there's a whole group that haven't started."*

- LSP Coordinator, Waterford

This manifests in two ways - physical accessibility or mental accessibility. Physical accessibility is straightforward, in that it relates to a physical structure or facility while mental accessibility deals with levels of confidence. In the latter, people feel as if they cannot make use of opportunities because of their perceived levels of fitness or because they feel that the initiatives are not intended for them even before finding out for certain.

### 6.3.3 Awareness of opportunity but not the 'sports Hub'

The third type of awareness challenge is cases in which people know there exist activities for them to participate in, but do not necessarily know the 'sports Hub'. This type of lack of awareness isn't a barrier to participation as people will still take up the activity. However, it may be important in the context of building a Sport Ireland Community Sports and Physical Hub brand in the future.

*"People know the Slalom course but not the 'Community Sports Hub'."*

LSP Coordinator, Tipperary

*"Awareness is high. They know the activities happen but will not know the term 'Hub'."*

- Hub coordinator, West Cork Islands

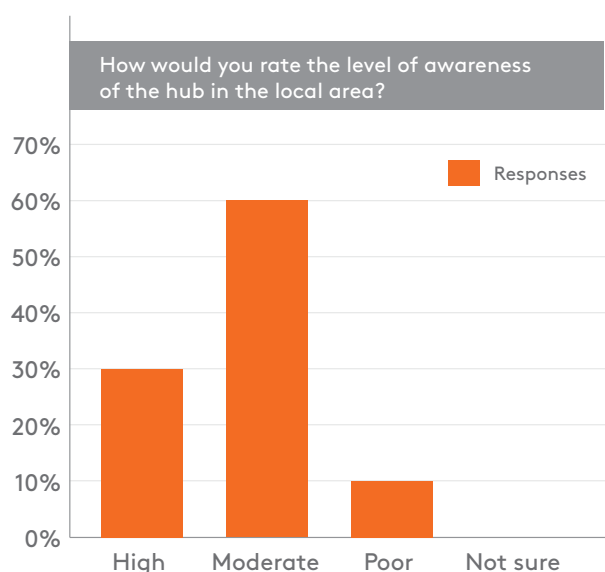


Figure 1: Hub coordinators on Level of awareness of the Hub in the community

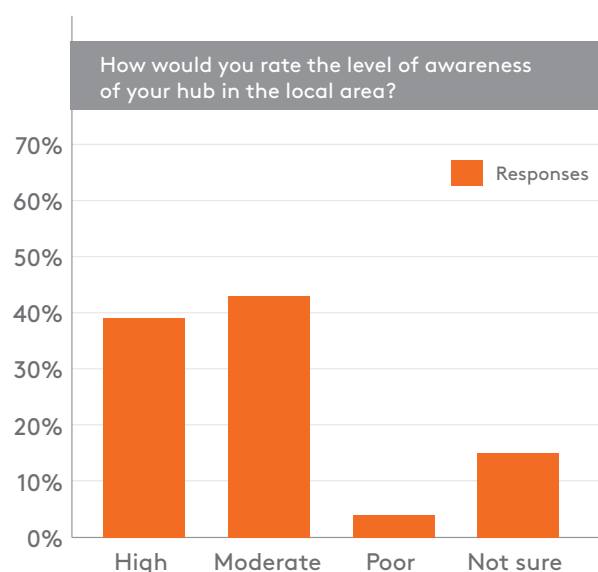


Figure 2: Key informants on level of awareness of the Hub in the community

Lack of awareness is a challenge that all sports Hubs are facing, albeit to a different degree. It is clear that a focus is needed to tailor advertisement and marketing to local communities. For example, newsletters and leaflets may not be the most appropriate tactic to engage with a community that has less than average levels of literacy. Further, the power of face-to-face engagement cannot be ignored, whether in the form of taster days or having chats with the community in the local grocery store, as suggested by a focus group participant in Carrickphierish. Face-to-face interaction builds trust, an element that is key for community engagement.

## 6.4 Levels of Engagement

Community engagement is defined as how much a target community engages with the sports Hub in the form of participating in its activities or volunteering for its activities and associated sports clubs. It is clear that there is potential for an increase in levels of community engagement across all Hubs and the lack of awareness, as discussed above, is a big determinant of the current rates of engagement.

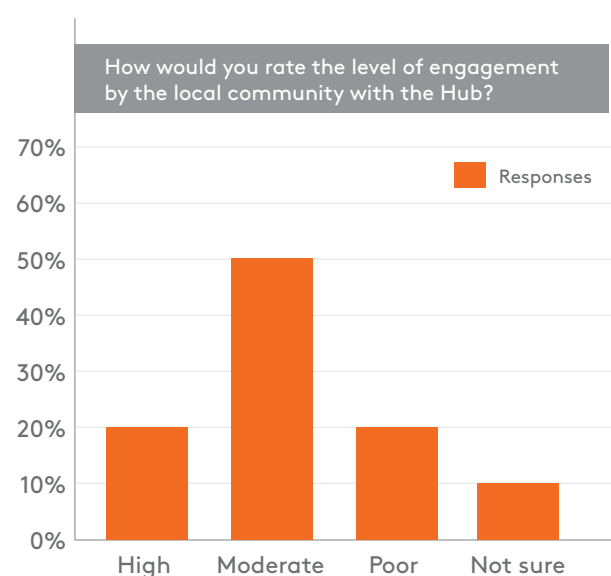


Figure 3: Hub coordinators on level of engagement by the community

All those Hubs that are surrounded by estates characterised by high levels of disadvantage struggle with participation rates from those areas. Some of these Hubs are still used by people coming in from outer, more prosperous areas, but participation isn't as high in the Local Authority estates. Sligo East City Hub is an exception to this. The Hub coordinator from SSRP has worked with Cranmore Estate from 2006 and has built a relationship with the community based on mutual trust and respect. The Hub coordinator is the face of the Hub and works strategically with community groups based in Cranmore and outside to deliver activities to the community. This estate has also seen consistent investment from various other sources and it would seem that all these factors have led to there being a certain level of readiness within the community to participate in sport and physical activity. It is this readiness that is missing in many disadvantaged areas which may manifest in low levels of community engagement.

*"The Hub is 2 years in existence and a number of successful programmes are maintaining good participation numbers. We would like more participation from Local Authority Housing estates."*

- Hub coordinator, Croom

*"I still feel the engagement is poor overall. There are many people aware of the Hub but I still feel that we need to connect with the people in the surrounding neighbourhoods and find a way to bring in the local residents."*

- Hub coordinator, Carrickpheirish

*"Some initiatives are effective i.e. Men on the Move, Couch to 5K, new table tennis club, cricket coaching, etc. but there is still a division in the community living in the area".*

- Hub coordinator, Ballyhaunis

## 6.5 Welcome & Safe

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It is clear from the evaluation that a number of Hubs have succeeded in creating a safe and welcome environment. The words 'welcome' and 'safe' came up unprompted in a majority of focus groups when participants were asked what brought people back to the Hub.

*"Going down to the pier would have been a lonely spot. Now, instructors make it so safe. Security is offered to the parents."*

- FGD Participant, Donegal

*"I feel safe in the park."*

- FGD Participant, Croom

*"The walking path is lit and safe, it is well-maintained and handy."*

- FGD Participant, Riverchapel

*"Once we're consistent with it, they know it is a safe space to come in"*

- FGD Participant, Carrickphierish

Safety is linked to how accessible a facility is and this seemed to be an area of challenge for some Hubs. 7 out of 9 Hub coordinators responded positively when surveyed on if they had taken any special actions to make the Hubs welcome and safe. The actions outlined in the survey have to do with completing courses like Safeguarding, following best practice policies depending on what sport is on offer and ensuring that there are qualified and experienced coaches delivering activities. While these are certainly important, this evaluation has brought to light that the concept of 'safety' transcends certificates and qualifications for participants.

## 6.6 Well-Trained people

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Well-trained people refers to the training and development of local people in order to build capacity and ensure sustainability of sport in the community. Every Hub in its application had identified a list of training modules that would be provided in order to develop local capacity.

From the Hub coordinator survey it was evident that that the number of people trained over the last year is diverse, ranging from 13 to 580. While a number in itself isn't representative of quality of training or what pathways exist for a trained community member, it is evident that not all sports Hubs have been able to deliver all of the training identified originally. The wide range of numbers reported indicates the need for further clarity on the role of sports Hubs in training and leadership development.



Hubs that provide participation opportunities in fairly specialised activities - Tipperary, Donegal have hosted a lot more training because training in these Hubs is linked to a progression pathway that could potentially lead to certification. In all other cases, most training has happened in the space of child safeguarding and first aid, which is the remit of an LSP and not a community sports Hub.

There is a need to have a vision for what training provided by the sports Hub must look like. As per the original guidelines, training and development courses were to be delivered by the Hub for club development and development of volunteers. The guidelines suggested -

### **Suggested supports**

- Establish Forums
- Club Mark
- Code of Ethics/Children's Officer training
- Coaching opportunities
- Disability Awareness Training/Disability Inclusion Training
- Job seekers programme
- Community Leadership programmes
- Active Leadership
- Youth Leadership training
- Coaching Children
- GIW Walking Training
- Street Games
- Mental Health Training
- Other (describe)

However, with data from this evaluation bringing up the need for 'softer' skills, such as the ability to make a group of participants feel welcome and safe, perhaps the focus of training and development for local people needs to be refined. All the training provided by the Hubs so far has been in the space of-

- Climbing Wall Certifications
- TRX Certifications
- Mountain Leader Training and Assessment
- Committee Mentor Training
- Canoeing Ireland - Level 1, 2 and 3 Skills Training
- River Rescue
- Youth Sport Leader
- Disability Awareness

Most training has not happened in the space of volunteers and club development as originally intended. It was noted that FGD participants in 2 out of 9 Hubs pointed out that there weren't enough coaches and volunteers around in their community.

It is assumed that the intended outcome of all training and development is to be able to develop local leadership in the community and the survey has pointed out that this happened to varying degrees in the Hubs.

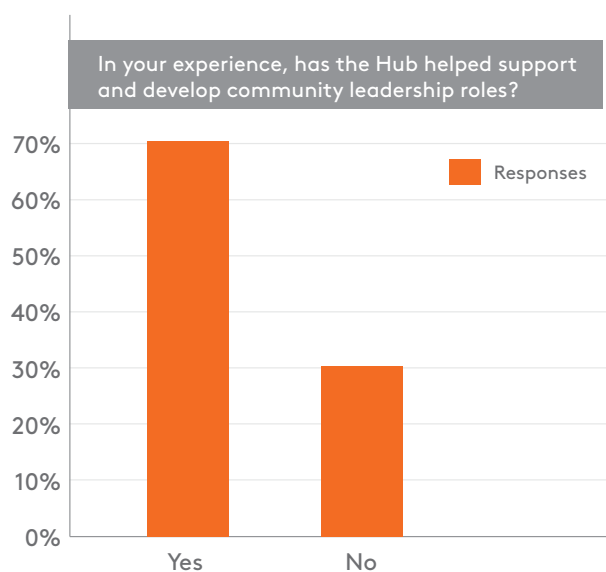


Figure 4: Hub coordinators - role of the Hub in developing community leadership roles

The data points to two types of approaches taken by Hubs for leadership development in the community -

#### 6.6.1 Organic Development of Leadership

Some Hubs haven't taken any specific actions to support and develop community leadership roles. Instead, they see it as an organic process facilitated by the Hub.

*"The community champions happened very organically. These are people who just wanted good for their community. You cannot teach people that. It's identifying those skills and building them".*

- Hub coordinator, Clarisford Park

*"The Hub through its activities and initiatives has organically created a number of leaders locally. Local community leaders took on roles when organising activities and events."*

- Hub coordinator, West Cork Islands

#### 6.6.2 Building Leadership through Community Coaching

Ballyhaunis and Croom Hubs have specifically used the Community Coaching programme to develop leadership in the community. Further, both the Croom and Ballyhaunis Hubs have identified participants from the programme that have gone on to become involved with the Hub in the capacity of coaches. The Riverchapel community complex is starting off in their community coaching programme with a vision to feed some participants into the sports Hub.

*"2 members of the international community completed the community coaching programme and implemented a school based cricket coaching programme which has proved to be very successful. We also had an eastern European coach on the programme who has been instrumental in the establishment of a youth wing on the newly formed Mayo Volleyball club."*

- Hub coordinator, Ballyhaunis

#### 6.6.3 Embedding Leadership into Model of Delivery

The Sligo, Tipperary and Donegal Hubs have embedded community leadership into the way they coordinate programmes on a day to day basis.

*"All programmes have a service agreement with a community host organisation which identifies clear roles and responsibilities. SSRP provides mentor support for community groups to lead and manage programmes. SSRP has also provided club development, committee training, governance support and capacity building with volunteers in new and existing sports clubs, as well as training for community leaders including active leadership and first aid".*

- Hub coordinator, Sligo

The Sligo Lawn Bowls club is a good example of this - a come and try day run by the SSRP led to 10 interested local people coming together to undertake the mentor programme. They then set up the Sligo Lawn Bowls club, which is managed and run on a voluntary basis.

*“They helped us develop a club constitution and all the paper work needed to develop a new club.”*

- Key Informant, Sligo Lawn Bowls Club, Sligo

The Hub in Tipperary is a good example of training and development creating a sustainable structure of delivery of sport.

*“Yes, leadership roles have improved in the community through training & education. There are now newly qualified instructors who are providing leadership through instruction in their clubs and on courses within the Hub setting. Also, some members are very involved in the development of activities & promoting of the Hub in the community.”*

- Hub coordinator, Tipperary

*“Earlier, when a leader was away (from the Canoe club), everything came to a standstill. Now they have people trained up to keep activities going. ”*

- LSP Coordinator, Tipperary

## 6.7 Strong Organisations

Community Sports Hubs are meant to create and facilitate strong organisations in the community that develop sport and physical activity. The strategic support and development provided by the Hubs are to lead to the creation of self-sustaining sports clubs/organisations in the community, create community engagement and leadership which would allow local clubs to be well organised and connected. These pillars of a strong organisation would embed support in the community for participation in sport and physical activity to thrive. Relationships with partner organisations like local clubs, schools and community groups are central to the process of embedding these pillars and ensuring strong support.

Just over 50% of the clubs/organisations surveyed had an already existing relationship with the relevant LSP before the sports Hub was established. Positively, a majority of the clubs and organisations surveyed stated that they could not have delivered their activities without the support provided by the Hub. These activities range from fitness classes, thump boxing, climbing wall, lawn bowling, walks, breakfast clubs and basketball. As such, when asked if the Hubs had benefitted their organisation in any way, all partners surveyed responded positively. Support provided by Hubs took different forms - strategic support, support with venues and costs, support in training and finding coaches and support in bringing in new membership.

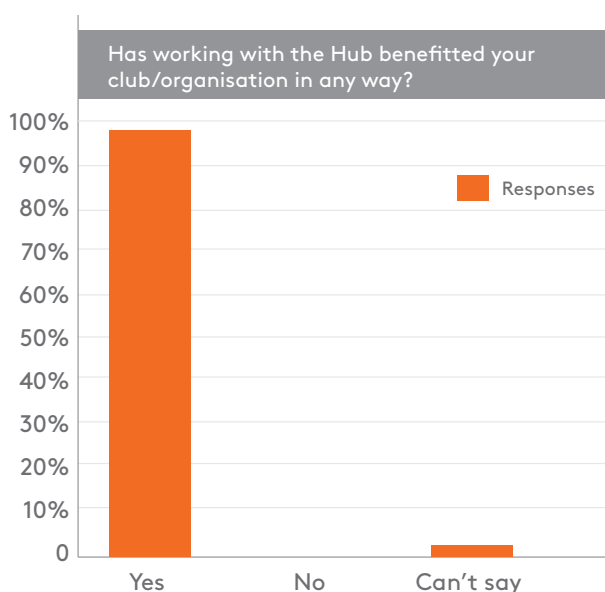


Figure 5: Key Informants on working with the Hubs

Hubs have benefitted clubs and community organisations, broadly, in the following ways -

### 6.7.1 Awareness

Hubs have allowed for sports clubs and private tutors/instructors to know of each other's services. Sports clubs and private instructors sharing a facility to engage with the same community seems to be commonplace.

*"Other clubs/organisations know who we are individually also. They are aware of our skills and strengths."*

- Key Informant, Clarisford Park

### 6.7.2 Increased access

Hubs have allowed clubs to engage with community groups that they might not have had access to before. In Tipperary, this has led to an increased uptake of Kayaking as a sport as well as increased club membership. On the flip side, Hubs have also facilitated access to facilities and venues at affordable prices for members of local clubs and community groups.

*"Increased participation and exposure to the sport of Kayaking."*

- Canoeing Ireland Representative, Tipperary

*"60 new members in the Rowing Club and 20 in the Boat Club".*

- FGD Participant, Tipperary

*"Access for young people to quality sports instruction and facilities"*

- Key Informant, Fororige, Croom

*"It has provided opportunities for young people that they otherwise may not have access to. It has provided us with bigger space for activities at an affordable cost for young people."*

- Informant, North Suburbs Community Youth Project, Carrickpheirish

Hub coordinators and key informants were surveyed on the support Hubs provide to clubs and other organisations. From both surveys, it is evident that the weakest area in club support is creating a platform for networking to develop sport. The strongest area is the dedicated support and funding support that local clubs receive from the Hubs and this is reflected in both surveys.

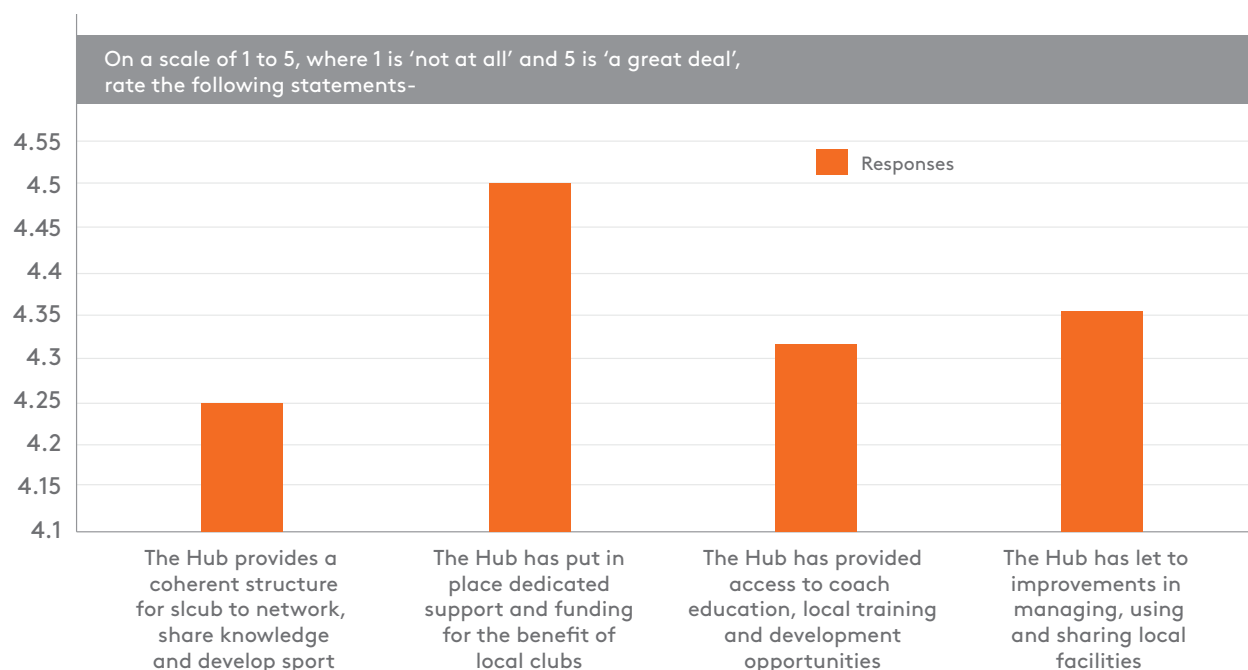


Figure 6: Key Informants on the role of Hub Support

Apart from benefitting the club/organisations, Hubs have also positively facilitated relationships between clubs in the community.

*"We have developed relationships with groups and clubs using the Hub and it has provided us with a different facility to use."*

- Key Informant, Waterford GAA, Carrickphierish

*"It has given Canoeing Ireland a place of residency among the community and local clubs"*

- Key informant, Canoeing Ireland, Tipperary

*"We met with the bowling group and Men's Shed and saw the great work they do"*

- Key Informant, Walking Group, Sligo East City

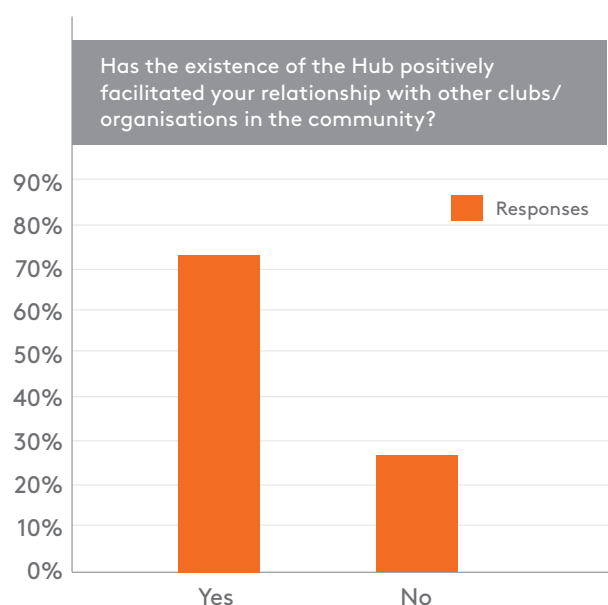


Figure 7: Key Informants on the relationship with Hubs

Structures that allow for self-governance and local ownership of projects are also of paramount importance when creating strong organisations. The Riverchapel Community Complex is an example of a Hub that continues to thrive despite a loss of funding in the 2nd year. The Hub didn't come to a standstill because it already had management structures in place that allowed for self-governance. Further, the Hub also had support from the community in the form of local people that took it upon themselves to keep the BMX club running. There is no doubt that if these people left tomorrow the club would struggle but one cannot deny that there are solid organisational foundations which will let other members of the community take on roles of leadership.

*"The management committee helped in social capacity building. Without the management committee, we would have lost direction."*

- FGD Participant, Wexford



## 6.8 Quality Facilities

It is evident that communities are able to access quality facilities at more affordable prices over the lifetime of a Hub. When asked what it is about their Sports Hub they would like to change, no FGD participant mentioned reduced cost. A pay as you go system for usage has allowed for flexibility that has been welcomed.

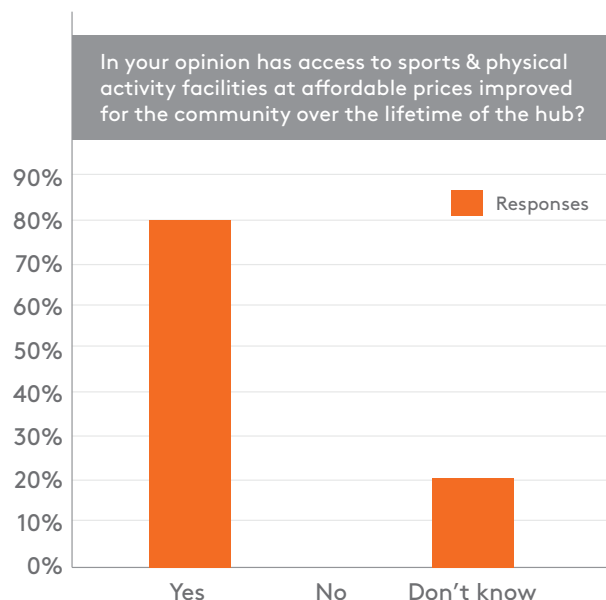


Figure 8: Hub coordinators on access to and affordability of Sport and Physical Activity

Many Hubs have used their funding to subsidise programme rates in order to enable those who might not have had a chance before to participate in sport. For example, included in the Sligo East City Area is Globe House, an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. The SSRP, through the sports Hub, provides funding to Resource House to subsidise a 6-week summer camp in the local council pool for children from the direct provision centre and the estate. If the Hub funding didn't subsidise the camp, the children wouldn't have accessed the camp owing to the distance (Resource House provides a bus to transport the children) and cost. On the opportunities provided by the Hub a member of Resource House in Cranmore, who works with children from Globe House, says-

*"It has opened up opportunities for children that otherwise wouldn't happen."*

However, the kids' interaction with the swimming pool ends at the end of the 6 weeks. Should some wish to continue engaging in the sport they would have to find ways of managing both the cost and transport. While not just unique to the East City Hub, this is an example of the presence of opportunities and quality facilities but not necessarily a long-term pathway and it may be worthwhile to consider the role of a sports Hub or even the larger sports partnership in addressing this transition gap.

Quality facilities made available to the community in absence of a community needs consultation or more broadly, a community, isn't sufficient to ensure engagement and participation. For example, the sports Hub in Carrickpheirish, Waterford is a multipurpose sports hall that is used by 2 schools during the day and is rented by the LSP from the council every evening and on the weekends. The Hub is adjoined with a state-of-the art library that is meant for use by the school and local communities. The Hub is surrounded by two large local authority housing estates and one local authority housing complex. Surprisingly, there is no café, restaurant, pub, shop or church in this community. Despite the quality of the facility available, the Hub has struggled to engage with local community groups. In other words, quality facilities will struggle to succeed in isolation of broader coordinated community development or regeneration projects.

# 7

## Critical Success Factors

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It is highly encouraging to see that in spite of the differences in the way the Hubs operate, the key factors that determine their success are consistent. There are a few 'key ingredients' that people are looking for, either consciously or sub-consciously, when deciding whether to participate/continue to participate in sport. The list below has been put together from data collected through the focus groups and interviews with Hub and LSP Coordinators.

### 7.1.1 Face of the Hub

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In the first ever focus group conducted, the group was asked for three things we would certainly need if we were to create a Hub with 100% community engagement. Without hesitation, the group unanimously said that they would need Luke, the Hub coordinator. When drilled into further, it was found that the Hub coordinator really was the face of the Hub. He was what people associated the Hub with. The same was found with the Hub coordinator in Sligo. Community members associated Diane, the Hub coordinator, with sport and expertise and knew she was the one to go to for questions related to sport in the community. At the same time, they were aware of the fact that she wasn't the direct deliverer of activities. The same is true for the Hub coordinator in Donegal. Hubs that didn't have such a 'face', struggle to bring in participants from the communities. Once again, this directly links in with the element of trust.

Acknowledging the realities of staff turnover highlights the need to empower and support the development of a number of community leaders. In the same vein, a coach too has huge power in getting people to walk through a door to play a sport or take part in physical activity. A coach that challenges her/his participants the right amount with a balance of enthusiasm and fun, is hugely popular. An ideal coach is one who is genuine, committed and truly cares about the well-being of the participant outside the sphere of sport or fitness. This coach can create a safe environment for participants, can cater to a range of abilities and builds a relationship that allows for social engagement. Coaches that have come from the local community are looked upon as leaders, especially among children.

### 7.1.2 Community Leadership and Ownership

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Community buy-in leads to creation of strong community groups, leadership and eventually, ownership, allowing for sustainability. Sports Hubs that do not have structures in place for community feedback and direction will not benefit from an organic development of leadership. For example, the sports Hub in Wexford was able to function and eventually grow despite a loss of funding. This is because of the governance structures that had been set up, which supported the subsequent leadership that developed within the community.

### 7.1.3 Lack of Confidence and Vulnerability

The focus groups revealed that many of the times, non-participation in sport is underpinned by a sense of vulnerability and low confidence. For example, people may not go into a gym for fear of not knowing how to operate the machines and the fear of being judged. The gym in the Croom Sports Hub is a good example of one that has created a safe space for community members by virtue of their relationship with the coach. However, they didn't feel confident enough to use a gym outside of Croom. Similarly, SSRP is now trying to work with the community to increase rates of participation in activities outside the Cranmore estate. The popularity of alternative sports like canoeing and kayaking in Clonmel is representative of the fact that children that feel a lack of confidence in traditional field sports have an opportunity to try an alternative sport that may suit them better.

## 7.1.4 Professional Expertise

Those Hubs that have been able to combine local community knowledge with professional expertise have seen a level of community buy-in and thereby higher levels of engagement. Professional expertise could be the management of a facility, such as the cricket pitch in Ballyhaunis, or professional expertise in a sport such as a Canoeing Ireland representative working with the River Suir Hub. Local knowledge is the understanding of the local community context that is often a result of working deliberately with a community to establish links. For example, it was found that community members were less likely to engage with the cricket practice area in Ballyhaunis if they didn't know who the facility belonged to, which was a barrier to building community trust and engagement. A similar challenge is being experienced by the Hub coordinator of the Carrickpheirish Hub. The right combination of local knowledge and professional expertise can help build in the minds of the community that the sports Hub is the place to go to be active.

Moreover, this has highlighted that in order to build community knowledge and relationships as a priority, one of the most important steps for a Hub coordinator is to identify and map the key community development organisations and existing/potential community leaders. Hub development officers must initially engage and meet with community leaders to listen to the needs and requests of the community.

## 7.1.5 Awareness

Word of mouth continues to remain a powerful tool to create awareness. The idea that advertisement can create awareness but not endorsement has come out very strongly. Having a friend vouch for a new fitness class or a new activity is a far more powerful tool for increased participation than online, print, radio or social media campaigns. This further ties in to the notion of trust. Another big factor for continued engagement is the dynamic between participants in a group. A lot of people will continue to engage in a sport because they feel like they will let the larger group down if they don't. This type of group accountability develops organically and should be actively enabled.

## 7.1.6 Consistency

Consistency is a determinant of the level of participation by an individual. Consistency affects participants in two ways - a) there is an enhanced sense of security and trust of those delivering the programme and b) it allows there to be a structure to one's day. Consistency means that there is a routine to one's day and people can plan around this routine. Consistency is undeniably linked to reliability and there are two forms of consistency that came up -

- Consistency of service: This is physical. For example, knowing that there is a class being held every week on the same day and at the same time gives participants the confidence to be able to engage even if they have dropped out for a few weeks.
- Consistency of person: This is psychological. For example, seeing the same face deliver a class allows a relationship to develop between the coach and the participant that is characterised by trust, security and mutual respect.

## 7.1.7 Welcome & Safe

The provision of a welcome and safe environment is of paramount importance for getting people to engage and participate. A safe space could mean either a physical space that is perceived to be safe or an emotionally safe space. The former has to do with location and accessibility of the facility whereas the latter is created by a coach/tutor who succeeds in making participants feel less vulnerable. The notion of a safe space for participation came up in every focus group when FGD members were asked what brought them back every day to take part in sport and physical activity.

# 8

## Conclusion

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### 8.1 The Success of CSHs as a Viable Model

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The data collected through this evaluation indicates that Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs are a viable and useful model to increase levels of participation in sport and physical activity in a community.

Overall, Hubs are perceived as being positive additions to communities. The unanimous agreement from partner organisations that working with the Hub has benefited them is testament to the fact that Hubs have been successful in creating value within communities. Data has shown that Hubs have positively facilitated relationships between clubs and other organisations and they have improved access to affordable sports and physical activity opportunities in communities.

Increased participation is best achieved when Hubs deliver on all 4 areas of the framework i.e. provision of a pathway, well-trained people, strong organisations and quality facilities. The evaluation has found that those Hubs that have achieved success in multiple areas have seen better community engagement and, as an extension of that, better participation levels in sport and physical activity. This conclusion is based on the qualitative data gathered in this evaluation. The Hubs are likely to be funded for the next 2 years after which funding will end. It is essential then that Hubs shift their focus onto the areas in which they have been underperforming in order to deliver on their impacts. This evaluation cannot comment on the efficiency and viability of the Community Sports Hub model in comparison to other models. Sports Hubs have not been evaluated against any other model and no quantitative data is currently available to show that an increase in participation levels caused by Hubs is more than an increase in participation levels caused by other projects. To this end, the collection of baseline data for future projects is recommended.

Aside from the 4 areas of the framework, this evaluation has found that there are some critical factors of success such as having a face of the Hub, creating community leadership and ownership, breaking down the barrier of lack of confidence and vulnerability, presence of professional expertise, pushing for awareness and endorsement, consistency and creation of welcome and safe spaces that positively influence levels of participation in sport and physical activity. There is potential for further study to take place to understand if these factors are exclusive to sports Hubs or if they are applicable to other areas of sports development.

# Appendix

**Intended Impact:** To increase the number of people of all ages participating in sport & physical activity.

**Objective:** Bring local people together and provide a home for local clubs and sports organizations.

AIM	OUTPUT	KPI	OUTCOME	KPI
1. Providing the pathway	<b>1.a.</b> Research into community profiles and needs assessment	<b>1.a.1</b> List of engagement activities undertaken by the hubs to better understand needs of the community. (Including needs of local community groups, clubs & schools) <b>1.a.2</b> Number of reports/papers produced as a result of needs assessment. <b>1.a.3</b> Extent of influence/ involvement of the community in hub development	<b>1.1</b> Opportunities to participate in sport & physical activity	<b>1.1.1</b> Number & type of local clubs, groups and classes that are associated with a hub. <b>1.1.2</b> Percentage of people that believe there exist opportunities for sport & physical activity participation in their local area. <b>1.1.3</b> Percentage of people accessing sporting facilities in the community at least once a week (disaggregated for gender, disability) <b>1.1.4</b> Level of awareness of the hub within the community <b>1.1.5</b> Strong club-school links
	<b>1.b</b> Marketing & promotion activities, including outreach by sports clubs	<b>1.b.1</b> Number & type of marketing/promotion activities undertaken by the hubs <b>1.b.2</b> Number of people and local organizations reached.	<b>1.2</b> A home where a range of local sports clubs can work together	<b>1.2.1</b> Number & types of sports clubs that have come together to deliver programs in the community. <b>1.2.2</b> The hub provides/creates a conducive environment for local clubs to work together.
	<b>1.c</b> Purchase of small-scale equipment	<b>1.c.1</b> Evidence small scale equipment purchased	<b>1.3</b> A welcome and safe place to take part in sport & physical activity	<b>1.3.1</b> Members of the community feel safe and welcome when using facilities of the sports hub/participating in programs delivered by clubs. <b>1.3.2</b> Sustained participation numbers reflected in renewed memberships. 1.3.3 Ethnic, social and cultural diversity of the community represented in participation data.
2. Well trained people	<b>2.a.</b> Development of joint initiatives between sports clubs and recreational physical activity groups	<b>2.a.1</b> Number of joint training initiatives developed and delivered in the community	<b>2.1</b> Training and development of the local people that make sport happen to build capacity and ensure sustainability	<b>2.1.1</b> Percentage of community members trained that feel equipped with the skills, knowledge and capacity to sustain and encourage local sports participation. <b>2.1.2</b> Percentage of local people trained believe they have gone on to become role models/mentors for community members. <b>2.1.3</b> Percentage of community members trained that feel confident to run their own programs <b>2.1.4</b> Percentage of community members trained that would feel comfortable in a position of leadership.
	<b>2.b</b> Training & development of local people	<b>2.b.1</b> Number & type of trainings held for the development of community members. <b>2.b.2</b> Number of community members signed up for each training <b>2.b.3</b> Number of community members that completed trainings		

AIM	OUTPUT	KPI	OUTCOME	KPI
3. Strong Organisations	3.a Strong pathways facilitated	3.a Strong club-school links exist.	3.1 Self-sustaining sports clubs/ organisations	3.1.1 Number of sports clubs/other organisations that feel equipped to continue to deliver quality services to the community.
			3.2 An integrated approach from local partners to develop leadership in the local community	3.2.1 Number & type of community stakeholders that come together to develop community leadership 3.2.2 High quality partnerships measured by feelings of trust, confidence and willingness to work with one another on a repeat basis. 3.2.3 Percentage of people that believe voluntary/leadership opportunities have been created by the hub. 3.2.4 Number of voluntary/ leadership opportunities created.
			3.3 Genuine community engagement & leadership	3.3.1 Community influence- Percentage of people that feel they can positively influence decisions made by the local hubs. 3.3.2 Percentage of people that feel the hub contributes to community cohesion. (People from different backgrounds get on well in a local area) 3.3.3 Percentage of community members that feel a sense of ownership towards the hub.
			3.4 Well organised and connected local clubs.	3.4.1 Clubs demonstrate a sustainable and robust organisational structure. 3.4.2 Clubs are guided by an overarching annual strategy. 3.4.3 Clubs demonstrate a strong sense of connectedness with each other in the community.
4. Quality facilities	4.a Resources are efficiently used to produce optimum & quality facilities.	4.a.1 Community members are satisfied with the quality of sporting facilities available to them.	4.1 Improved access for local people and sports clubs at affordable prices	4.1.1 Percentage of people that feel they can easily access sports clubs. 4.1.2 Percentage of people that feel they can easily afford sports clubs/ programs. 4.1.3 Number of sports clubs that demonstrate an increase in membership and participation due to better access.
			4.2 Integration with local facility planning & programming	4.2.1 Integrated planning is reflected in the strategic plans & documents of the hub as well as local partner organisations.









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