



Access Sport: Building Stronger Communities

Final Report

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of a research project undertaken by the University of Bath, which was commissioned by Access Sport to specifically understand more about how community engagement and sense of belonging, created through sport and physical activity, contribute to building stronger communities. The research utilised a mixed methods approach, comprising of a focus group with staff at Access Sport (n=10); qualitative case study examinations of 12 clubs across Access Sport's primary locations (Bristol, London, Manchester) involving 90 interview respondents; and a quantitative online survey which was distributed across the Access Sport Inclusive Club Network, and was completed by 193 parents/guardians and 270 programme participants.

The key findings of the research highlight that:

1. Community sport challenges the traditional idea that communities are solely defined by place or locality.
2. Sense of belonging and community underpin the wider transformational benefits of sport.
3. Community clubs provide essential opportunities for young people to have positive and safe social interactions.
4. Community clubs have a positive impact on the parents and guardians of young participants as they enable them to socially interact with one other.
5. Sense of belonging extends beyond the boundaries of a community club.

The report identifies five key features that help to make community sports clubs more inclusive and build a stronger sense of belonging for participants:

1. **Know your participants** – investing time and effort to get to know and understand the needs, preferences, and challenges facing the participants at your club enables deeper social connections to be made.
2. **Be flexible and responsive when session planning** – sense of belonging is improved when participants are involved in the design of activities or are afforded opportunities to take ownership of how they engage (provided it is safe).
3. **Focus on individual, incremental improvement in participants** – inclusive sports clubs encourage opportunities for participants to develop and improve their sport skills at their own pace, helping them to persist with the achievement of goals, which prolongs engagement and helps to facilitate social belonging.
4. **Provide support for club volunteers** – making volunteers feel valued can be achieved with appropriate supervision from more senior club personnel and by providing opportunities to access training and qualifications that will help volunteer engagement.
5. **Fully integrate parents and guardians into the club** – parents and guardians are important gatekeepers to the on-going involvement of their children in sport and physical activity, and they often possess important technical and transferable skills which could be put to good use by the club.

Introduction

Access Sport's 2022 Growth Strategy identified four transformational benefits that individuals may experience from taking part in inclusive community sport:

- Physical and mental well-being
- Individual life skills and prospects
- Community engagement
- Sense of belonging

This report summarises the findings of a research project undertaken by the University of Bath, which was commissioned by Access Sport to specifically understand more about how community engagement and sense of belonging, created through sport and physical activity, contribute to building stronger communities. More specifically, the research sought to understand i) the impact of, and barriers to, building community engagement and a sense of belonging; ii) the processes or conditions which may enable increased community engagement and sense of belonging; and iii) how Access Sport can sustain these two outcomes in community sport settings so that participation in sport and physical activity may benefit future children and young people.

Defining community engagement and sense of belonging

Traditional views of community adopt a ‘locality-based’ definition, which presents them as a geographical area that acts as a space for friendship, neighbourliness, and place attachment^{1 2}. More recently, ‘place-based’ understandings of community have been widened to take account of changing lifestyle patterns and a more temporary connection with localities where people often no longer recognise the need to establish strong communal ties or rely on their physical neighbours for social contact or support¹. As such, community connection has become more fluid, and the definition of community has started to be thought of in terms of a ‘relationship’, where individuals are perhaps more likely to base their connection to a community around such factors as a collective of like-minded people or a protected characteristic². In turn, individuals may understand community connection around a shared sporting interest or experience.

Increasing an individual’s connection or engagement with their community is often achieved by encouraging citizens to become more actively involved in community activities³. This can simply involve joining a formal voluntary group, like a sports club, or can occur more deeply by supporting people within a defined community⁴. Joining a community group can often be hampered by barriers that impede participation⁵, such as access to facilities or transport, or a lack of opportunities for specific populations. Due to the barriers, community engagement can involve individuals becoming advocates for their community where they develop and implement solutions to community issues and challenges^{3 5}.

¹ Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. London: Verso.

² Rich, K. A., Spaaij, R. and Misener, L. (2021). Theorizing community for sport management research and practice. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, doi: 10.3389/fspor.2021.774366.

³ Zanbar, L. (2020). Sense of belonging and commitment as mediators of the effect of community features on active involvement in the community. *City and Community*, 19(3), 617-637.

⁴ Chaskin, R., Brown, P., Venkatesh, S. and Vidal, A. (2001). *Building community capacity*. New York, NY: Aldine De Gruyter.

⁵ Keyte, T., Philpott, C. and Sheppard, E. (2023). *London Together: what role can sport and physical activity play in driving social integration?* London: Mayor of London’s Office.

Developing community engagement also helps to generate a deeper sense of belonging to the community³, where individual's feel part of a collective that serves as a source of security and support. Sense of belonging can be increased by enhancing an individual's sense of emotional safety and feeling of acceptance by a community, which in turn, can build trust and a shared emotional connection to their community⁶. For professionals who lead community interventions, including ones that use sport and physical activity as an instrument for social inclusion, understanding the ways and extent to which participants belong to and engage with different forms of community can help them to further build a sense of belonging³.

⁶ McMillan, D.W. (1996). Sense of community. *Journal of Community Psychology* 24, 315–25.

Methodology

The research utilised a mixed methods approach, which involved three concurrent and overlapping phases:

- A focus group with staff at Access Sport (n=10) which was conducted to gain a more holistic view of their programmes and delivery model, and how their approach might contribute to community engagement and sense of belonging.
- Qualitative case study examinations (n=12) of specific projects sites and/or clubs across Access Sport's primary locations (Bristol, London, Manchester). Four project sites/clubs were selected in each location to glean a range of perspectives on how Access Sport programmes contribute to community engagement and a sense of belonging. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders at each site, including project staff, project volunteers, parents/guardians of programme participants, and (child) participants of Access Sport programmes. In total, 90 stakeholders were engaged through these interviews.
- A quantitative online survey which was distributed across the Access Sport Inclusive Club Network. The survey was targeted at parents/guardians of participants of access Sport programmes, and (child) participants of these programmes. The survey was constructed by adapting relevant elements of two validated questionnaires – the Sense of Community Index (version I and II) and the Sense of Belonging Scale. In total, the survey was completed by 193 parents/guardians and 270 programme participants. The geographical distribution of the survey responses is presented in Figure 1, with areas in red indicating the highest geographical density of responses.

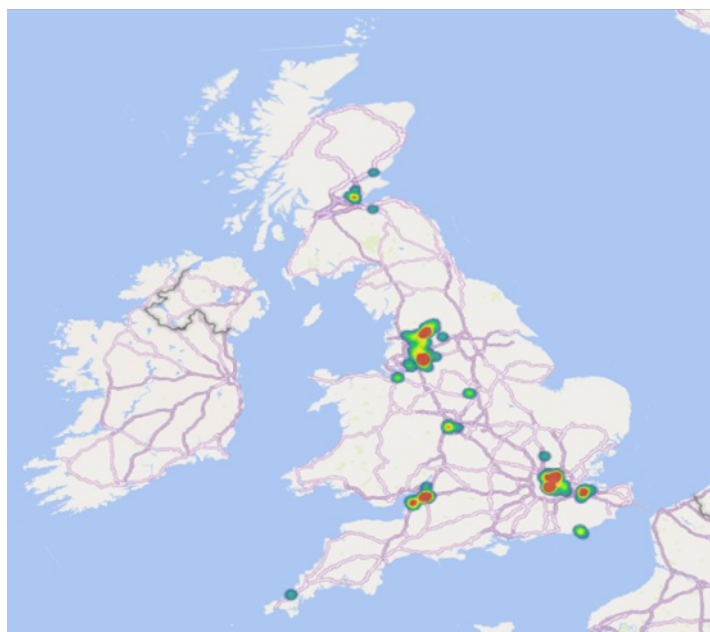


Figure 1: Heatmap of adult participant home postcodes.

Key Findings

1. Community sport challenges the traditional idea that communities are solely defined by place or locality.

Traditional views that define community as a place or locality assume that people prefer community sport to be available close to where they live. However, the findings indicate that the average distance travelled by survey respondents to their sports club is 4.38 miles⁷. That said, there was some variation in how far individual participants travelled to their sporting activities. Several participants attended a sports club in the same postcode to the one they lived in, while the furthest distance reported was 33.35 miles. For the five sports clubs with the largest number of survey responses, the average distance travelled by participants ranged from 0.73 miles to 12.28 miles. This emphasises that **for some sports clubs, the participants are drawn from the community where the club is physically located, and for other sports clubs, participants are willing and able to travel longer distances.**

⁷ All distances are in miles and ‘as the crow flies’.

The qualitative data provided detailed insight into the extent to which participants were willing to travel beyond their geographic community to access appropriate sport and physical activity opportunities and **connect with a community that was based around their sporting interests**. For example, one club explained how BMX participants were willing to travel from different parts of the country to use their pump track:

There's a mix, a definite mix, I've seen people from St George [Bristol], I've actually met someone who's come up from Cornwall to go to Glasgow; they wanted to tick this [pump track] off their list.

In some instances, participants were required to **travel significant distances to engage in sport because of a lack of specialist facilities** in their local area. This was particularly the case for disabled individuals:

Nothing is in the immediate community for us. Wiltshire FA have just started up a disability football team, which [our child] now goes to, but we've got four kids, and nobody knows about it.

I think cos' it's quite a long way, it's about a thirty-five, forty-minute drive for me, it's quite a long way for some people on a Saturday, especially if you work as well in the week...we don't live [close to the club]...

As the latter quote emphasises, while some parents/guardians were willing to travel to enable their children to access appropriate sporting opportunities, there was also a recognition that **being able to commit time and resources to travel is not always feasible**. This was reinforced by the survey data, which showed variation in the distance travelled to a sports club and the IMD decile of the participants⁸ (Figure 2). The lowest 5 IMD deciles, representing the most deprived areas, travelled on average 2.4 miles to their sport club, while those in the highest 5 IMD deciles (representing the least deprived areas) travelled further (on average 5.6 miles).

⁸ IMD is a combined measure of deprivation based on a total of 37 separate indicators that have been grouped into seven domains, each of which reflects a different aspect of deprivation experienced by individuals living in an area.

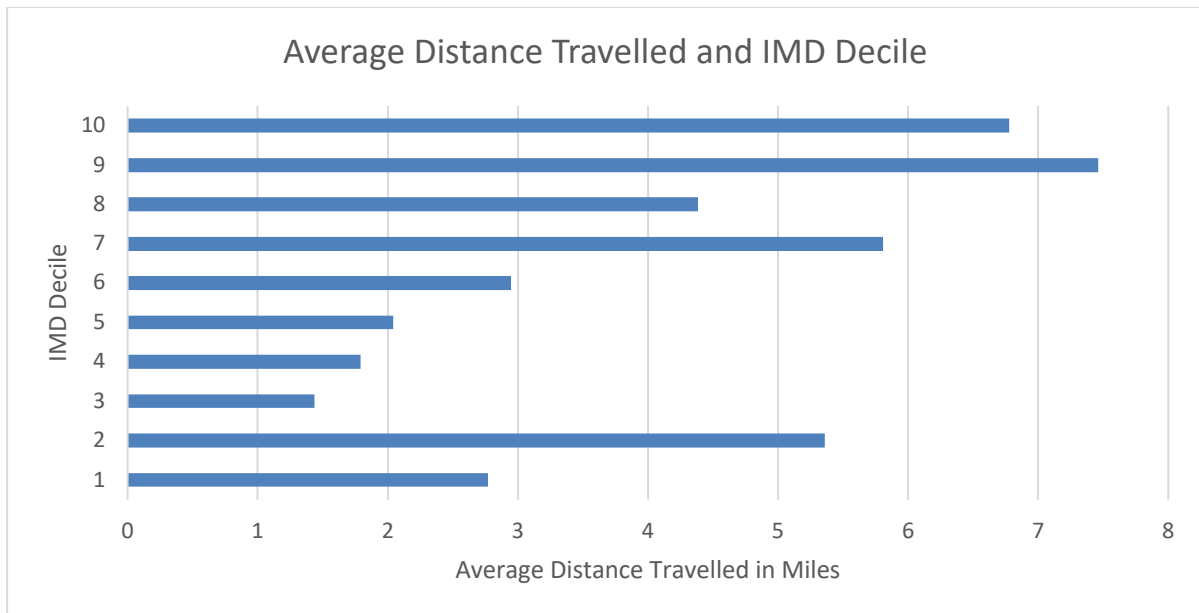


Figure 2: IMD decile and distance travelled to sports club (in miles).

2. Sense of belonging and community underpin the wider transformational benefits of sport.

The quantitative data emphasised how both children and parent/guardians rated their sense of belonging and connection to their sports clubs as the basis for acquiring the wider benefits of sport participation (see Figure 3). For questions relating to sense of belonging and emotional connection, parents/guardians responded overwhelmingly positively, reporting 91% agreement on sense of belonging and 88% agreement on emotional connection⁹. In addition, parents/guardians were asked three questions pertaining to their perception of how comfortable, supported and accepted their child was at the sports club. Again, this yielded positive responses of 97%, 98% and 97% respectively.

⁹ A positive response is when a participant responded to the question with either Strongly Agree or Agree.

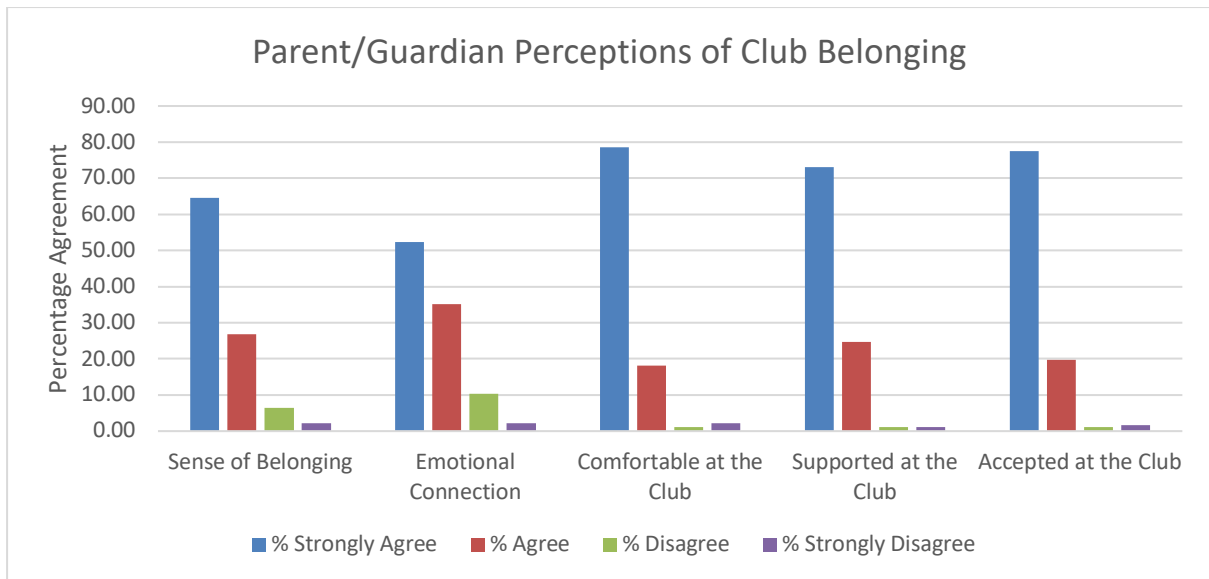


Figure 3: Percentage of adult responses to club belonging.

These findings were reinforced by the survey responses from children, who reported 97% agreement on sense of belonging and 95% agreement on emotional connection (see Figure 4).

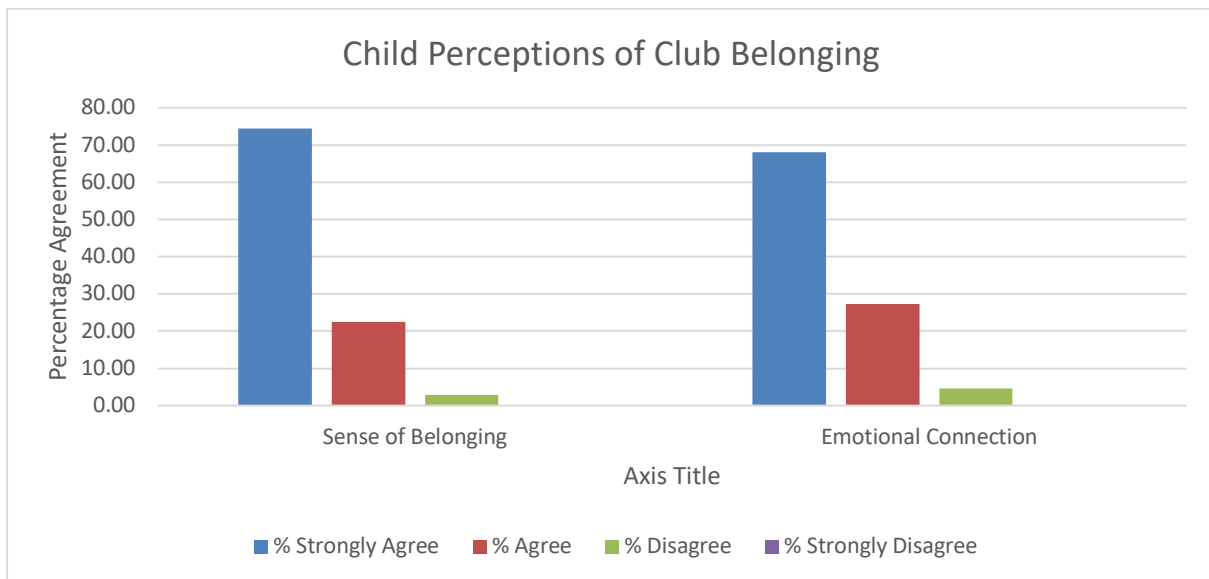


Figure 4: Percentage of child responses to club belonging.

The qualitative data provided further evidence to indicate that clubs act as an effective site to increase aspects of community engagement and wellbeing, leading to increases in social relations, both of which form key components of building stronger communities. Project staff and parents/guardians highlighted this impact at the individual level, demonstrating how **opportunities for socialisation** through the clubs **improved individual wellbeing and**

educational attainment, addressed feelings of social isolation, and/or acted as a vehicle to divert attention away from antisocial behaviour:

Freddie ... there's people like him who are drug dealing and all sorts at an early age and ... I still keep in touch with them, in fact I've got them playing for my football teams, they don't touch drugs at all, they don't deal drugs, they're at college getting on with their lives now. (Project Staff, Manchester)

I mean I'd go as far as saying, like, it's potentially saved their lives ... a couple of these girls, their mental health was so poor because they'd acquired their disability at sort of teenage age and were very isolated. (Project Staff, Bristol)

I found that actually he's doing better than what anyone ever expected because he's got that confidence, and that confidence now has gone onto school ... and that's a year and a half, you know, he's in the Paralympic training team. (Parent, London)

Another important factor to note is the length of time that respondents had attended their sports club, and how this supported sense of belonging and community engagement. Of the 193 parents/guardians who responded to the question about how long their child(ren) had been attending the sports club, 55% indicated that they had been attending for more than a year, with only 7% joining the sports club in the last year. It is possible to infer that the strong sense of belonging and connection to the sports club that respondents reported is attributable to a longer association and membership of a sports club.

3. Clubs provide essential opportunities for young people to have positive and safe social interactions

The importance of cultivating positive experiences for young people to establish a sense of community - particularly through engagement with physical activity - was inherently tied to the place and space where their sport activity happened. The clubs were perceived as **providing an inclusive space within which positive and meaningful social interaction could occur**. For example, 95% of children indicated that they had developed a strong relationship with other people at the sports club. This was strongly reinforced by responses gathered from the project staff and the parents/guardians situated across all locations:

I'd like to think we create environments that are friendly, are welcoming, are safe as in a safe space has been used a lot. That's really, really important, and so maybe just naturally by us in creating that environment they've then taken it one step further themselves, and if we didn't create the right environment we wouldn't get to that next stage (Project Staff, Bristol).

... strangers become like, you know, a family to you...like, you're catching up with your family...to see the kids being able to, kids that were unable to even look at you...to hold a conversation to tell you how was their day, or tell you, 'hey I didn't like that' and so on, to see them going through that change, through the way you deal with them...is mind blowing (Project Staff, Manchester).

They've [volunteers] got a wonderful attitude, I mean when she arrived and they didn't know her, they were so welcoming. And Sarah looks at body language an awful lot, more than words and she felt, 'yeah, this is ok', I'm accepted here this isn't someone saying, "oh, so we've got one of *them*", you know, which sometimes the words say inclusion but the body language says I'm a bit scared of this, but they're excellent. (Parent, Bristol).

These qualitative insights were reinforced by the survey data which indicated that 96% of parents/guardians and 98% of children reported that the person facilitating the sporting activity at the club made them feel wanted and accepted. Respondents also highlighted how **more traditional institutions (e.g., schools) were often unable to replicate this particular environment**. Importantly, without Access Sport helping to establish community clubs, parents/guardians indicated that the opportunity for social interaction, and its benefits, rarely existed elsewhere. In this instance, the clubs were perceived as unique in that they were able to encourage authentic social interactions, leading to the development of shared emotional connections and a strong sense of community belonging:

Definitely last year it reached crisis point...basically he [the child] would go up to kids and try and talk to them and they just wouldn't wait for him to finish his sentences...he definitely understood that, and he felt it, and he knew he didn't have any friends and he was sitting alone all playtime ... to help him with that we are looking for positive experienced clubs so he can feel good about himself but also practice that social interaction in a safe space. (Parent, London)

A lot of these children, they didn't know each other before and you can see slightly as the time goes by that they're actually building friendships, which is one of the most difficult things for children with special needs, especially with autism and stuff like that ... and they see each other in the streets, so if they're walking they'll go, oh you're going down there [to Ballers Academy], and it's that nice little community ... it's that, providing that thing for the children that gets missed whether at school, where they don't get the chance when they are outside the school to build them friendships, and they're actually getting them now. (Volunteer, London)

Caitlin really struggles with feeling like she's good enough, or like, seen as loved or valued by anybody ... it'll take her a long time at school to get used to another adult, whereas here she can have a different adult every week, but because of how warm and open to them being them they are, she could tell quite quickly that she doesn't have to have her mask, she can just be who she is. (Parent, Bristol)

Additionally, respondents indicated that the clubs provide safe locations for young people to engage in physical activity and interact with one another and the volunteers. Importantly, **parents/guardians invested trust in the activities** that were undertaken at the clubs, acknowledging that they offered a **safe space for positive interaction and pro-social behaviour** to occur:

It's the only thing these kids have to look forward to ... 100% it's a safe space for these kids to go ... where parents trust what goes on. If it wasn't there, there would be two locations where I could guarantee these kids would be, and they wouldn't be up to any good ... doing a bit of chaos for a laugh. (Project Staff, Manchester)

It's gotta be a safe and secure environment for when people come down here they don't feel threatened, they don't feel that there's any form of friction or risk of tension...and a lot of that'll come down to, I suppose, the ambience that the track creates, so the people who are down here...and they will police it themselves to a degree. If the older people have seen younger people misbehaving, they will tell them. (Project Staff, Bristol)

Re-emphasising how the children perceived the safe and secure environment created by the sports club as central to supporting their sense of belonging, 99% indicated that they felt comfortable at the sports club and 97% considered that they felt supported at the venue. What these findings reveal is that the clubs were inherently perceived as positive spaces that could allow for social interaction to occur in a safe environment. This was predominantly facilitated through the **creation of an inclusive culture** that had been encouraged by the project staff and volunteers at the clubs. The emphasis on **enabling genuine and authentic interactions** to occur within the clubs **fostered a sense of emotional safety and acceptance** for the participants, providing the foundations for a strong sense of community belonging to evolve over time. Specifically, in relation to feeling accepted, 97% of children responded positively to this aspect of their experience at the sports club. Importantly, this particular cultural environment was perceived as unique to the clubs - specifically among the parents/guardians and volunteers interviewed - and was unable to be replicated in more traditional settings where young people often come together to interact with one another.

4. Clubs have a positive impact on parents/guardians as they enable them to socially interact with one another

The positive impact of the clubs on building a **sense of belonging and encouraging community engagement also extended to the parents/guardians of the participants**. The survey data indicated that 84% of adults responded positively when asked if they had a strong relationship with others at the sports club. Volunteers and project staff highlighted how the clubs were able to provide an **avenue for informal interaction to take place**, allowing parents/guardians to socialise, share their commonalities, and establish friendships:

Our multisport club is at a youth centre, there's a sports hall and there's a social area. All the kids go in the sports hall with us and the parents sit in the social area ... the parents consistently rant with each other about the system that they're in, about access to supporting their needs at school, about doctors, all different things. A lot of the conversations are about that, which just massively helps them ... they get to have a shared commonality of I'm not the only one in this boat, bouncing ideas of each other etcetera. (Project Staff, Bristol)

Parents are on the side-lines they're chatting, you find a commonality, your child is racing, your child's training ... essentially, normal people will get together and they will chat and they will make friends ... I know even parents that I've met previously whose children no longer ride, and my child doesn't ride, we are still friends. (Volunteer, London)

Some of the parents that even come out, you know, they don't get out half of the time. It's good for them to mix, I always go along and 'ave a bit of a laugh with 'em. (Project Staff, Manchester)

For the vast majority of parents/guardians, the clubs **afforded a welcome break from the stresses and anxieties encountered in their everyday lives**. For example, 91% of adults indicated that they felt supported at the sports club. This specific environment offered a productive outlet within which parents/guardians could interact with one another and converse freely, particularly for the parents/guardians of children with a disability:

We have a lot of parents who will sit and have a conversation ... and it's almost that sort of ... I guess a kind of respite really, like, they've got this sort of chaotic life with a kid with disabilities or multiple kids with disabilities and actually, you get a chance to come away either have a chance to sort of sit and relax, have a chance to watch your child do some sort of different exercise, or you can get involved and chat to people ... it's quite like open, we're not forcing anything. (Project Staff, Bristol)

Additionally, through socialising at the clubs, the **parents/guardians were able to build a network to share information and resources**, predominantly surrounding issues related to accessing inclusive activities for their children. In many instances, this was facilitated through social media platforms. Despite this, the **‘in person’ network provided additional emotional support for many of the parents/guardians**, helping them to overcome feelings of inadequacy or social isolation:

When I came for the first time everyone was super welcoming, they were like, let me put you on the WhatsApp group...And having access to other people who have similar problems is just so helpful. A lot of the time you feel like you're on your own, a lot of the time you feel like you are doing everything wrong...so it's really nice to be in other communities of people. (Parent, London)

Even though I live in a different borough, it's like one of the mums I told her about the cycling thing in Eltham, but it's the fact that she's done it and she was in tears because her kid actually finally managed to ride her bike. (Parent, London)

[During] COVID basically everything was social media, so interaction with the parents was mainly social media and the resource base has really opened a door for me, but then also to come here and begin to meet other parents ... I sat down with another mum last week we had a cup of coffee, and she was telling me about her sons and their experiences and I kind've shared our journey and our experiences, and it was just really nice because it was just like giving you this growing feeling that you're not on your own and other people have the same struggles as you. (Parent, Bristol)

The capacity to bring together parents/guardians from differing backgrounds was also hugely beneficial to the clubs themselves. **Most parents/guardians were heavily invested in the sports club**, with the survey data indicated that they were committed (87%) and felt connected (91%) to the sports club. In addition, the qualitative data outlined how many parents/guardians **adopted formal roles to support the development of the clubs** and ensure that they could become sustainable entities:

The group of trustees that I have is the parents from the club. So we have, you know, the finance people, marketing people, we have the legal people, we have ... journalists, we have like the project management and so. So we have all the special people that we need to actually run like a business, and they do it, they do it on a voluntary basis and whenever I was, like, approaching people saying, 'hey this is what I want but I need you to do this' ... we have like twelve of them who say, 'hey, I can do this and that'. (Project Staff, Manchester)

Ultimately, the clubs were effective in engendering a sense of community among the parents/guardians. This was established by clubs enabling connections to grow through increased instances of socialisation and sustained via the creation of online networks and in-person emotional support. Importantly, the clubs acted as a community hub for parents/guardians - offering a site to acquire information and resources - and bring together individuals from disparate locations that were not necessarily situated within the clubs' neighbouring communities. In turn, this created a culture of reciprocity where parents/guardians invested their own time into supporting the development of the clubs through adopting formal roles on a voluntary basis.

5. Sense of belonging extends beyond the boundaries of a community club

Community engagement as an outcome also extended towards integrating participants into wider society. In many instances, clubs acted as a **conduit for social integration** to help assimilate participants into the local community:

One of our coaches Anastasia, she's Ukrainian ... like, running away from the war over there ... So we've been approached by one of the churches saying, 'hey, we work with like a Ukrainian family and she plays handball so can you provide her with opportunities to play?' And it's been, what, a year and a half ago since she joined us and now she's a fulltime coach, she plays on the under nineteens girls team, she plays in the Premier League ... obviously as you can imagine her English wasn't perfect when she came in, and now through, you know, her being exposed to the new environment, new culture, and everything. To see her share the passion and share her experience with others by showing them how to improve themselves as a human being, I mean, like...speechless. (Project Staff, Manchester)

Equally, community engagement often spread beyond the clubs themselves and sometimes acted as a means to develop a **sense of engagement which extended outside the boundaries of the clubs**, allowing club members to organically build connections and improve social relations within local communities:

I walk the dog down here most days and it can be quite daunting when you come across groups of say adolescents, even older people, that you're not necessarily gonna interact with or talk to ... with everyone here [at the pump track] like this, sat around in a group all friendly, some of them [participants] bring them in as well. That's what I was saying about engaging with the local anti-socialites I would say ... I'm trying to be nice about it, but that's you know the honest opinion. (Volunteer, Bristol)

Respondents further highlighted the role of clubs in fostering community engagement through increased communication and interaction, bringing together young people who were perhaps unfamiliar with one another and **enabling social bonds to be established**. Through this process, the programme participants formed communities that **engaged socially outside the confines of the clubs**, an unintended outcome that was perceived as hugely beneficial:

The world's electrical ... everything's Nintendo Switch and iPhones and things like that ... so they come out, and they see somebody they've never seen before, and they talk to each other there's communication there, whereas they don't get that if they're at home. You get them coming up to my little boy and say, 'how old are you', 'what's your name', 'how long have you been riding before', 'is that your bike', and it gets them talking. (Parent, Bristol)

The females at our wheelchair basketball team have really, have shown the strongest community engagement outside of our space. They consistently meet up in their community to go to the cinema, to bake a cake, to go to the pub, whatever they wanna do. That has been one of the best, best outcomes of that club. (Project Staff, Bristol)

By **bringing together individuals through shared experiences**, the clubs were perceived as **enabling the growth of social relations and the formation of reciprocal connections between participants**. As such, this impacted positively upon developing a sense of belonging and encouraged increased community engagement both within and outside the immediate location of the clubs.

Finally, data indicated how community connections were a strong enabler of participation in sport. Within the survey, parents/guardians were asked to comment on how their child had been initially recruited to their sports club with the most popular recruitment strategies being 'hearing about it from a friend' (38%), social media (16%), and a communication from their child's school (13%). This demonstrates the critical role that community connection plays in enabling access to sport and physical activity opportunities. Less identified recruitment strategies were seeing a poster (5%), communication from Access Sport (4%), and attending an Access Sport Multi-Sport Festival (3%). 21% of respondents selected 'other' and their specified modes of hearing about the sports club again underlined how community connection supported access to sport. Initial recruitment was influenced by: living locally to the sports club and observing a session taking place, web searches, direct contact from the club, familial

connections, other parents with an impaired child, connections sports club staff (e.g., the coaches), and support services and staff (e.g., Mencap, SENCO).

Features of an inclusive community sports club

The report highlights how sports clubs are communities in and of themselves and are an essential source of community for participants, volunteers, and parents/guardians. This emphasises the central importance of building a sense of belonging within community sports clubs to act as a foundation to unlock a range of additional social, physical, mental, and emotional benefits for their members. These benefits relate to a wider array of social outcomes, including supporting individuals with their mental and physical wellbeing, developing life skills and future prospects, and increasing community engagement. However, building a sense of belonging is a significantly overlooked aspect of sport and community intervention work. Consequently, enabling a sense of belonging needs to be a central pillar of club development to enable social outcomes to be achieved through sport and physical activity.

Therefore, in conclusion, the report highlights five key features that help to make community sports clubs more inclusive and build a stronger sense of belonging and community

- 1. Know your participants** – investing time and effort to get to know and understand the needs, preferences, and challenges facing the participants at your club enables deeper social connections to be made. Providing explicit opportunities within sessions to build authentic relationships is essential and combining these with more informal opportunities for quality interactions can create an environment to build social bonds and support belonging.
- 2. Be flexible and responsive when session planning** – sense of belonging is improved when participants are involved in the design of activities or are afforded opportunities to take ownership of how they engage (provided it is safe). Focussing on opportunities for play (rather than competition) is important, as is offering space for participants to be expressive and/or creative within physical activities.

3. **Focus on individual, incremental improvement in participants** – inclusive sports clubs encourage opportunities for participants to develop and improve their sport skills at their own pace. Integrating a learner-centred approach to sessions, where participants are instrumental in setting their own aims, encourages them to persist with the achievement of goals, supports personal best, and prolongs engagement, which, in turn, helps to facilitate social belonging.
4. **Provide support for club volunteers** – volunteers are the lifeblood of any community sport club and are often the key point of contact between participant and club. Making volunteers feel valued is essential and can be achieved with appropriate supervision from more senior club personnel. Regularly checking in on their mental and physical wellbeing, and, where possible, providing opportunities to access training and qualifications that support their developmental needs, will help volunteer engagement.
5. **Fully integrate parents/guardians into the club** – making parents and guardians feel welcome in your community sports clubs is equally as important as making young participants feel accepted, supported, and connected. Sports clubs act as ‘community hubs’ and provide families with valuable opportunities to build friendships, share information, and connect with their community. In addition, parents and guardians are important gatekeepers to the on-going involvement of their children in sport and physical activity, and they often possess important technical and transferable skills which could be put to good use by the club.