



ACTIVE PARTNERSHIP NETWORK

YOUNG PEOPLE FORWARD

FINAL REPORT 2021

Executive Summary

Young People Forward was funded by the London Marathon Charitable Trust with support from Virgin Money. It provided 6 Active Partnerships and Street Soccer Scotland with funding to work with young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The work focused on offering opportunities for young people to take part in sport and physical activity, with the broadest possible definition of this. It also provided progression activities for young people and funded equipment and training that could lead a lasting legacy in the delivery organisations.

Achievements

Over the delivery of Young People Forward has:

- ✿ Engaged 722 young people
- ✿ Created progression opportunities for 60% of the young people engaged
- ✿ Delivered 294 physical activity sessions
- ✿ Worked with 49 delivery organisations or partners involved in working with homeless young people or young people at risk of homelessness

Impact

Young People Forward has created opportunities for young people to take part in sport and physical activity. For the young people who took part in Young People Forward:

- ✿ 51% showed an increase in personal wellbeing indicators around happiness
- ✿ 58% showed an improvement in their levels of anxiety
- ✿ 39% showed an increase in the number of days when they completed more than 30 minutes of physical activity

“It takes my mind off all the stuff I am dealing with it helps me feel something instead of feeling numb’ Young Person

“Benefits of keeping active are endless I can find myself, my mental health is not great, if I sit about the house and let myself dwell into that not really doing anything instead of coming out and being active I find my confidence and my positivity and my general

levels of depression are much worse. If I come along to a session and feel good, get sweaty it makes you feel good for the rest of the day’ Young Person

“It definitely improves my mental health for sure, when I go home I feel positive about my day, I feel better for coming out in general you don’t feel so grim, so it it’s something that I need for my mental health you know’ Young Person

Key Learning

Our key learning from Young People Forward is:

- ✿ The insight gained from the evaluation adds to the evidence base that sport and physical activity can be a hugely valuable tool to engage young people who are at risk or who are experiencing homelessness
- ✿ Alongside the mental and physical benefits to a young person of being active, taking part in activities together can help build a different relationship between the young person and their support worker
- ✿ More opportunities should be created to raise awareness of the value of sport and physical activity among partner organisations and to equip them with the skills they need to embed it in their delivery
- ✿ Active Partnerships are a good conduit to local organisations supporting young people but these partnerships take time to build

To find out more about the Young People Forward evaluation contact Amy Shephard at amy@shephardandmoyes.co.uk

Introduction

Shephard & Moyes Ltd were commissioned in March 2021 to evaluate the Young People Forward project. Young People Forward works through Active Partnerships and Street Soccer Scotland to support young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Funding for the work was provided by the London Marathon Charitable Trust with funds from Virgin Money.

The project has the following objectives:

- ✿ Provide young people with opportunities to be active in a safe and supportive environment
- ✿ Support local community organisations working with the target group to embed sport and physical activity into their programmes
- ✿ Improve health, wellbeing and resilience of the young people

- ✿ Provide bespoke support to help the young people address the challenges they face
- ✿ Help young people reduce their risk of homelessness and embark on a journey out of homelessness

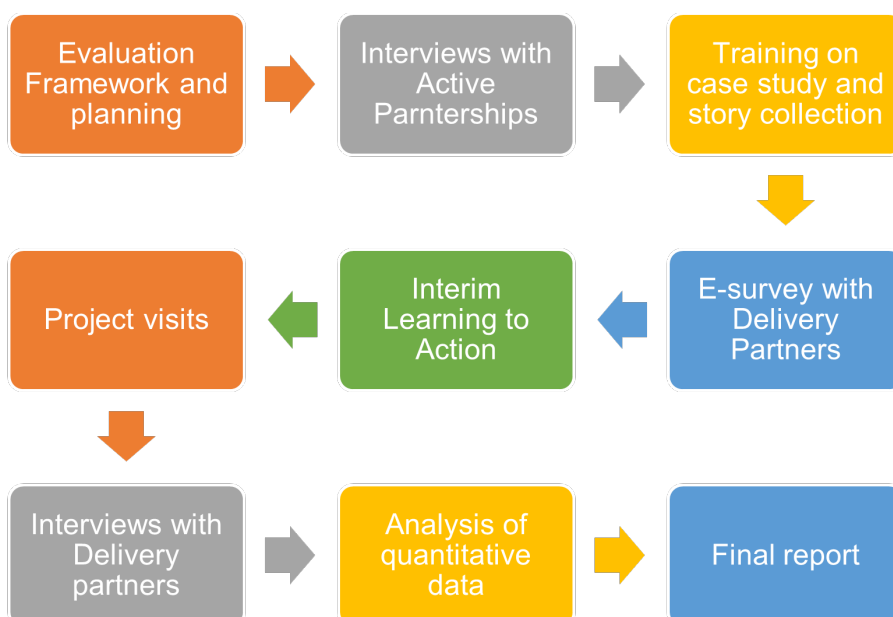
Young People Forward is delivered by the following Active Partnerships and partners:

- ✿ GreaterSport (Manchester)
- ✿ MSP (Merseyside)
- ✿ Yorkshire Sport Foundation (South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire)
- ✿ Active Humber (Humber)
- ✿ Rise (Tyne and Wear and Northumberland)
- ✿ Active Lancashire (Lancashire)
- ✿ Street Soccer Scotland (Scotland)

This report contains the findings of the evaluation of Young People Forward.

Evaluation Approach

Our approach to the evaluation is shown below. We worked alongside the Project Management group for Young People Forward who were responsible for the quantitative data collection via the delivery partner organisations. We include the data that was collected in this report.



Background and Context

The Active Partnership Network brings together the 43 Active Partnerships that operate across England. For Young People Forward they also partnered with Street Soccer Scotland to provide a reach for the project into Scotland.

Active Partnerships are locally based organisations that have developed and evolved to meet the specific needs of their local community. Active Partnerships have the same goal of 'creating the conditions for an active nation' and making being active a social norm.

The 43 Active Partnerships are all different. They are different sizes and have a different scope and focus. Some Active Partnerships have a substantial amount of direct delivery. For example, Active Lancashire has been delivering the Challenge Through Sport Initiative for 7 years. This provides people who are in recovery or have a wider range of vulnerabilities with access to sport and physical activity but also a wider range of wrap around support. Other Active Partnerships have a strong focus on partnership building and organisational support. For example, Greater Sport employ an Equality Lead for Young People as part of a push to engage more non-sporty young people in sport, providing a range of support to organisations to help make that happen.

Although for some of the Active Partnerships working with this particular target group was new to them, several of the Active Partnerships involved in Young People Forward have been working to reach the most inactive. This inevitably means they have been working in communities that experience a similar range of barriers and complexities to those targeted by Young People Forward.

The resource available through Young People Forward allowed those Active Partnerships (and Street Soccer Scotland) that already had direct delivery to continue or expand this work. It allowed Active Partnerships with existing relationships in the homelessness sector to strengthen these links and allowed the remaining Active Partnerships to use the funding to pump prime new activity and new partnerships.

Homeless Sector

Young People Forward focused on those young people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. This meant a wide range of potential delivery partners could be involved. The broad types of organisations that had the potential for involvement in Young People Forward included:

- ✿ Educational settings – targeting young people, particularly in Pupil Referral Units who had instability in their home lives
- ✿ Youth Groups – targeting young people with a range of vulnerabilities and complexities who are being engaged in positive activities
- ✿ Supported accommodation – targeting young people living in supported accommodation and receiving housing support
- ✿ Homelessness charities – organisations specifically working with young people who are homeless, this includes those that are street homeless as well as those sofa surfing
- ✿ Refugee and asylum seeker charities – organisations working with young people who are in accommodation while waiting for home office approval or those in receipt of approval but in need of additional support

The young people who are engaged through these organisations will have variety of challenges and be at different stages and so what often characterises the work in this sector is the person centred and caring approach taken by workers.

“ All of the young people that come to us are here for very different reasons’ Stakeholder

“ We meet young people where they are now, they could be in crisis or they could know what is happening next’ Stakeholder

Sport and Physical activity sector

The many and varied benefits of sport and physical activity are being increasingly well documented. Sport England has collated much of this evidence into an easy to use and

research directory . The academic literature on the specific role that sport and physical activity can play in people with more complex needs is more limited. What is often unclear when understanding this research is how much is down to the sport and physical activity and how much is down to the mentoring and wrap around support that can take place while sport or physical activity is taking place.

100% of the delivery partners involved in our evaluation already had a strong recognition of the value of sport and physical activity. They identified that sport was a tool they could use that allowed a range of conversations to then take place around it.

“ I see sport as being a universal multi-faceted tool they can engage with regardless of what they are facing’ Stakeholder

“ With sport it is all the conversations that go on around it’ Stakeholder



About the delivery

As we set out in the previous section the seven partners involved in Young People Forward all had different levels of experience and expertise working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The approach taken by each of the partners is illustrated below.



In total, 49 different delivery partners worked on Young People Forward alongside the seven lead organisations. This included:

- ✿ National organisations with local delivery (e.g. Crisis, Refugee Council, Centrepoint, Albert Kennedy Trust)
- ✿ Local organisations with a national affiliation (e.g. Emmaus, YMCA)
- ✿ Local charities supporting homeless young people (e.g. Liverpool Homelss FC, Nightsafe, We are with You)
- ✿ Supported accommodation providers (e.g. Stepping Stone, South Tyneside Churches Key Project)
- ✿ Local authorities supporting Looked After Children (e.g. Wigan Social Care, Gateshead Council, Sefton Council)

They types of projects that received funding included.

- ✿ Crisis used the funding to support an existing sport and physical activity officer provided with a resource to specifically focus on young people. They consulted the young people about what they would like to do and were able to offer group adventure activities alongside 1:1 sessions with an opportunity to be active
- ✿ Sheffield Wednesday Community Programme worked with the Refugee Council to provide resistance bands and other sports equipment. They provided small group sessions in the car park when restrictions allowed before progressing to a regular football session
- ✿ Askins Lodge received funding to improve their outdoor space and to purchase gym equipment for the supported accomodation. They also received funding so they could train their Progression Coaches as Personal Trainers
- ✿ Wigan Athletic Community Trust worked with Looked After Children to offer a summer programme of activities and opportunities to be active including Go

Karting and Laser Quest. They also worked to get young people taking part in the wider range of activities offered by the Trust

- ✿ Women's Force Vision received funding to continue a successful football project offering regular opportunities to be active and a women's project providing opportunities for gardening and growing. The project also provided kit and equipment to allow the football to take place
- ✿ The Running Charity was able to use funding from Young People Forward to support a full time post for a year to establish the work in Leeds. They use running to work with young people experiencing homelessness or with complex needs and offer one to one and group opportunities to be active

All the people involved in the delivery of Young People Forward regularly spoke to young people about what they would like to get involved in around sports and physical activity.

In total 294 physical activity sessions were delivered.

The types of sport and physical activity that have been made available through Young People Forward include:

- ✿ Personal training and circuits based work
- ✿ Adventure type activities including woodland trips and Go Karting
- ✿ Functional activities including walking to the shops
- ✿ Walking including longer walks in more mountainous terrain
- ✿ Gardening and nature based opportunities
- ✿ Football
- ✿ Horse Riding
- ✿ Tennis

In addition, some delivery organisations used the funding for pieces of equipment that could be kept in their supported accommodation

after the delivery period of Young People Forward came to an end.

There were some interesting insights provided by delivery partners about helping young people identify what sport or physical activity opportunity they wanted to be involved in. In some cases too much choice was as difficult as too little. Helping young people identify what they would like to get involved with often involved a conversation with their key worker to help them think it through.

“ It’s difficult to ask for what you have never had’ Young Person

“ One of the biggest challenges was getting young people to want to do something’ Stakeholder

Delivery Focused Insights

Working with Young People

The young people involved in Young People Forward are in a difficult period of their lives. They are either currently experiencing homelessness or are going through a period of their lives that makes that a possibility. It is not unexpected that young people engaged in the project are often chaotic.

What this translates to for many of the projects delivered under Young People Forward was being understanding about this. Young people would often cancel at the last minute, fail to attend or forget they had agreed to attend. Delivery partners told us about the importance of not taking this personally and recognising this simply reflected where the young people are.

It is also important to recognise young people will often be coming to the session because it gives them an escape. It is the opportunity to do sport or physical activity that is drawing

them in. This means although conversations about wider issues will often take place, these happen at the pace of the young person and when they want to share. We found it was important for deliverers to be sensitive to this.

“ What goes on in my head never leaves’ Young Person

“ It’s really relaxed it is not poking at the emotional’ Stakeholder

A hugely striking feature of the group sessions we attended through Young People Forward was how inclusive they were. They included people of different abilities but it was striking how diverse the group often was and how welcomed everybody was at these sessions.

“ Yeah there are some people who are not so good, some people that are too good and then there’s people like me that just shouldn’t be here because we’re too bad’ Young Person

All the people we spoke to in the evaluation about this inclusive environment identified how everyone who was at the session was there to play and take part, but they all knew there was a story and a reason for them being there. This made the sessions welcoming and powerfully inclusive.

Type of delivery

One of the interesting features of some of the delivery around Young People Forward is around the group work that takes place. Where group activity is happening successfully this tends to be because of a limited number of reasons:

- ✿ The organisation and session is well established and referral partners are continuously and actively promoting the opportunities to a wide range of people
- ✿ The sessions are inclusive to ages and abilities. This helps create a critical mass of

people at the sessions so there are always enough people for a 'good game' and encourages people to come along

- ✿ The group is taking place with a closed group of people. For example young people who are resident at a particular accommodation or asylum seekers from the same accommodation

Across Young People Forward organisations, including hugely well established organisations, struggled to form new groups. This was in part due to the type of work young people had but was also because of anxieties about being part of a group the young people had.

“ It was more difficult than imagined to get people to come along to a group session. Young Peoples schedules aren't very fixed. They are often in work but it can be zero hour contracts or flexible work so in reality ended up being one to one' Stakeholder

Approach to funding

One of the key strengths of Young People Forward was its flexibility. The funding wasn't prescriptive so it could do a wide range of different things depending on what the organisation wanted to focus and it could be tailored to young peoples needs.

This flexible funding allowed equipment to be provided alongside activities. As we discuss later, the provision of training and equipment ensured some of the resource will have a long lasting legacy.

As we have already referenced for some of the partners involved in Young People Forward, working with this particular group of young people was new. This, in many ways, is a huge positive. The work allowed Active Partnerships to reach out to a new network of potential partners. Young People Forward provided people with a relatively small project they could work together on.

All the Active Partnerships who were new to this type of delivery were able to fund a combination of different partnerships. Some were new to sport and physical activity and others were well established and could use the funding to do more. This was a pragmatic and sensible approach to ensuring the funding was allocated and the resource was used wisely.

The biggest challenge for Young People Forward was the time scale for its delivery. Although this was well managed by the Active Partnerships it was clear from speaking to a wide range of partners the same money available over a longer time frame would have been more beneficial. This problem was exacerbated by the Covid-19 lockdown at the end of 2020 and the start of 2021.

Staff skills

There is huge variety in the Young People Forward projects but in broad terms there were staff and workers involved who:

- ✿ Combined the skills with delivering sport and physical activity with the mentoring and wrap around support. This was at Street Soccer Scotland and Active Lancashire and in some of the projects including Askins Lodge and The Running Charity
- ✿ Focused on the physical activity provision and worked with wider partners to provide the wrap around support to young people
- ✿ Focused on the wrap around support for young and worked with a specialist physical activity provider (e.g. Horse Riding Instructor) to provide the physical activity or sporting opportunity

The relationship between the worker and the young people in any of these three different settings is critical. The staff we met were hugely empathetic and patient. Some organisations including Active Lancashire and Street Soccer Scotland employ people with lived experience. But workers from across the different organisations were well respected by

the young people.

Workers identified the need to have patience and understanding. They also needed a good understanding of barriers, mental health issues. Crucially they also identified the importance of having good risk assessments, particularly for any group settings.

Speaking to the young people and observing the sessions highlighted the key skill staff had during the sport and physical activity sessions. This was the ability to find the balance between being interested in someone but also knowing when to leave someone to it and to just let them play or get their frustrations out.

“ They realise if you were having a bad day or someone else was having a bad day, its that kind of vibe that surrounds you, they will give you the opportunity to talk but also keep your head down, supportive but not intrusive’ Young Person

Impact of Covid-19

At the time of the final phase of the Young People Forward evaluation the final Covid-19 restrictions in England and Scotland had been eased. But for much of the time of the Young People Forward delivery restrictions were in place.

Delivering any kind of project during Covid-19 has been a challenge and this was also the case for Young People Forward. All organisations that offered support to homeless young people managed the restrictions differently and placed different requirements on them. For some this meant treating any supported accommodation as one household. For asylum seekers each room was counted as a household meaning they were unable to spend any time indoors with anyone.

For the Active Partnerships building new relationships with new partners this introduced a whole set of new challenges. This included the fact some organisations were placed on furlough, meaning it was difficult to find people to have the initial conversation with. It also included the challenge of different Covid-19 requirements for different organisations.



Reach and Impact

Overall 722 young people were involved in a Young People Forward project:

- ✿ 57% of participants were 19 and under
- ✿ 68% of participants were male
- ✿ 85% of participants were white

Levels of personal wellbeing at baseline showed:

- ✿ 57% had medium or low levels of life satisfaction
- ✿ 52% had medium or low levels of feeling life was worthwhile
- ✿ 52% had medium or low levels of happiness
- ✿ 43% had high levels of anxiety

We also found that young people involved in Young People Forward had reasonably high levels of resilience at baseline. This is perhaps unsurprising as they have often had to go through a significant amount of hardship and periods where they have had to look after themselves. 75% feel able to solve their own problems and 81% recognise they have a number of good qualities. It is also worth reflecting that the time frame of Young People Forward means it has primarily reached those young people who are already engaged with support services. These relatively high levels of resilience may reflect some of the work that has already taken place to support them in their lives.

We also found at baseline that attitudes towards sport and physical activity were good. Two thirds exercise for 30 minutes a day on 3 or more days and just 19% are only active for 1 day or less. This suggests that young people are reasonably physically active when they join the project and are active on days away from just when they are active at the project. Attitudes towards physical activity are also strong at the baseline starting position with 80% feeling they have the opportunity to be active, 84% feeling they have the ability to be active and 75% finding sport enjoyable or satisfying.

The follow up data we collected showed:

- ✿ 48% had an improvement in their life satisfaction indicator
- ✿ 29% had an improvement in feelings that life was worthwhile
- ✿ 51% had an improvement in happiness
- ✿ 58% had an improvement in levels of anxiety

Although it is important to recognise how Young People Forward was part of a much wider programme of support, through our evaluation we explored with the young people the specific role that being active was playing in helping their overall wellbeing.

They highlighted how the opportunity to be active was hugely important to their mental health as it provided a distraction from their thoughts and a way to destress.

“When I’m having a bad day it really helps..I was saying this to you last week, I think I was feeling really sad..it was really nice to go out and not feel rubbish’ Young Person

“It definitely improves my mental health for sure, when I go home I feel positive about my day, I feel better for coming out in general you don’t feel so grim, so it it’s something that I need for my mental health you know’ Young Person

As we set out at baseline the young people already had relatively high levels across the indicators of resilience. But close to 30% of people increased their perceptions of being able to do things as well as other people and nearly a quarter showed an improvement in thinking they had a number of good qualities.

Young people also identified how the opportunity to socialise and to attend a session provided them a focus and purpose to their day. It got them out of their house and meant they had something to commit to and a schedule to keep. The opportunity to do something they otherwise would not be able to

do was the draw. This helped them connect to different people.

“ It is just something to do I was always in the house doing nothing playing on the computer so I thought I would get out and actually do something’ Young Person

“ I now have a busy schedule because I do football’ Young Person

39% of young people have increased the number of days they do sport and physical activity.

“ I’ve always played football, so for me just jumping around and getting myself out there, having a bit of fun, practicing and doing this every week I will get a little bit better’ Young Person

“ It’s really good to come along and have a blast’ Young Person

Sport as a tool

The feedback from young people and delivery partners also identified how valuable sport and physical activity was as a tool. This included using the opportunity to be active as a tool to engage them.

“ Using sport as one of the many tools to engage them in the first place’ Stakeholder

They also identified how being active together helped develop their relationship. It then helped them find their own self-care and self-management tools.

“ You are just a person [when playing sport], you can build a much better relationship with them’ Stakeholder

“ It’s about finding the importance in it, for instance, like boxing, it’s a massive like release for them. And then I’m hoping they they’ll find what they really like doing and would like to have a go on’ Stakeholder

Young people also told us how this environment helped them open up and face their own challenges.

“ The trust and help they give you I was struggling when I came down here at first and now I am like different I can talk to folk a lot now so it is a big change for me’ Young Person

Progressions

442 young people progressed onto a further opportunity, close to 60% of participants. All of the young people we consulted through this evaluation had regular discussions with people about what they wanted to do next. Some of these discussions were informal, some were more formal.

“ I think it was the third or fourth time I was here and I was talking about getting a job and they helped me with getting a job and they said I know someone and I’ll see if I can get you a job at this warehouse and since then I have been working there’ Young Person

As we have set out the workers involved in this work are skilled and know how to have conversations with young people that help them open up. They are able to harness the passion and enthusiasm young people have and help them work towards the goals they have.

With support with his training plan Badr, an Active Lancashire participant also successfully completed the London Marathon.



Key Learning and Looking Forward

Young People Forward has been a successful project. It has reached a large number of young people and offered them opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity.

Learning for Delivery Organisations

Some of the debate that centres around the role of sport and physical activity in providing positive benefits lies in the role of the sport itself or the mentoring and support that is provided by a good coach or member of staff. Young People Forward is adding to the evidence base that suggests it can be both. It can provide people with a mental break, a positive means of escape and a positive activity. But it can also be used as a tool to open up conversations.

We recognise that for many organisations working with homeless young people, or those at risk of homelessness, resources can be incredibly tight and focused on progression outcomes. However, there is considerable potential for sport and physical activity to be used as a tool by organisations and considerable potential for people in front line facing roles to receive training so they feel confident integrating sport and physical activity into their delivery.

One of the key roles that sport and physical activity plays is providing fun and escapism. The opportunity to let off steam to concentrate on something other than what is going on in their head and to feel something should not be underestimated. This includes fun and adventure activities that gently push people outside their comfort zone.

Our learning from Young People Forward is that group work is often challenging. Young People can lack confidence to join groups and their lives can make it difficult to pin down a particular time that works for them. Where

groups work well they are inclusive and open to anyone. The focus is on the activity not the type of person who can attend. This allows groups to gain a critical mass that means people are then more likely to come. Organisations should find what works for them but to also recognise engaging one or two young people at a time is more normal than engaging large groups.

We would encourage organisations to:

- ✿ Recognise the value of sport and physical activity and provide training to staff so they can incorporate the work into their role and use sport and physical activity as a tool
- ✿ Source funding opportunities to offer fun activity days as well as sport and physical activity that provide young people with the opportunity to try new things and have new experiences
- ✿ Be realistic when expecting young people to join groups and recognise new groups will likely attract very small numbers

Learning for Active Partnerships

Each Active Partnership involved in Young People Forward took a different approach to reaching homeless young people or those at risk. This means each organisation will take something different from their experience of Young People Forward.

Active Partnerships are the experts in sport and physical activity. We would encourage all Active Partnerships to work proactively to identify ways they can help organisations develop their skills around sport and physical activity and also how this can support organisations in their wider roles.

In 5 of the 7 areas involved in Young People Forward the Active Partnerships distributed funding to a wider network of organisations. We would encourage Active Partnerships to continually review and challenge where their

funding is being distributed to. This is to ensure the added value of the Active Partnerships, their local connections, is fully utilised.

Active Partnerships have the potential to raise awareness of the potential for sport and physical activity. This is particularly important to do in those organisations that have yet to see the value. The timing of Young People Forward meant that most of the resource was directed at organisations who already recognised the value of sport and physical activity. There were some notable exceptions but we would encourage Active Partnerships to challenge themselves and to reach new and different partners who have yet to see the value of sport and physical activity.

We would encourage Active Partnerships to:

- ✿ Be clear on capacity when engaging with projects like Young People Forward
- ✿ Develop more opportunities to transfer sport and physical activity skills to homeless organisations and support them to understand the different ways sport and physical activity can support their wider strategic objectives
- ✿ Review and challenge to make sure the local value that Active Partnerships bring is utilised
- ✿ Broaden the reach of projects to include those organisations who have yet to see the value of sport and physical activity

Learning for funders

Young People Forward has been successful and it has achieved what it set out to do. But the length of the funding opportunity was too short. This combined with Covid-19 limited what the Active Partnerships could do and who they could work with.

For some Active Partnerships this was a new area of work and it takes time to build new partnerships. This was made particularly difficult because Covid-19 meant some organisations had staff on furlough or were focused on managing the Covid-19 situation they were facing.

Working with young people who have complexity and with organisations who work with them, all takes time, consistency and longevity. The funding from Young People Forward needed longer or more flexibility to allow those new to this area of work longer to form the initial partnerships.

Long term funding to organisations and organisations with longevity like Street Soccer Scotland provide young people with a base they can return to. This can be hugely valuable to those young people who have a limited direct family network.

The work at Askins Lodge shows the potential of this type of work. In this setting the funding provided equipment and training for staff so they can work with young people long term. But there is work to do across the sector getting more organisations to recognise the value of sport and physical activity. Because of the time scales the Active Partnerships were limited to those organisations who had an active interest. More time would have meant more opportunity to raise awareness of the opportunities sport and physical activity presents when working with complex young people.

We would encourage funders to:

- ✿ Support projects that raise awareness about the role of sport and physical activity among more complex young people
- ✿ Provide long term funding so more long term projects can be established that in turn provide a long term base for young people
- ✿ Recognise existing housing contracts are focused and tight and opportunities for positive activities are limited so provide additional funding to allow these positive activities to happen with a particular focus on opportunities to be active
- ✿ Support opportunities for young people to have fun. These opportunities also help young people move out of their comfort zone and help them develop. These soft outcomes can be more hugely valuable alongside traditional progression focused outcomes.