

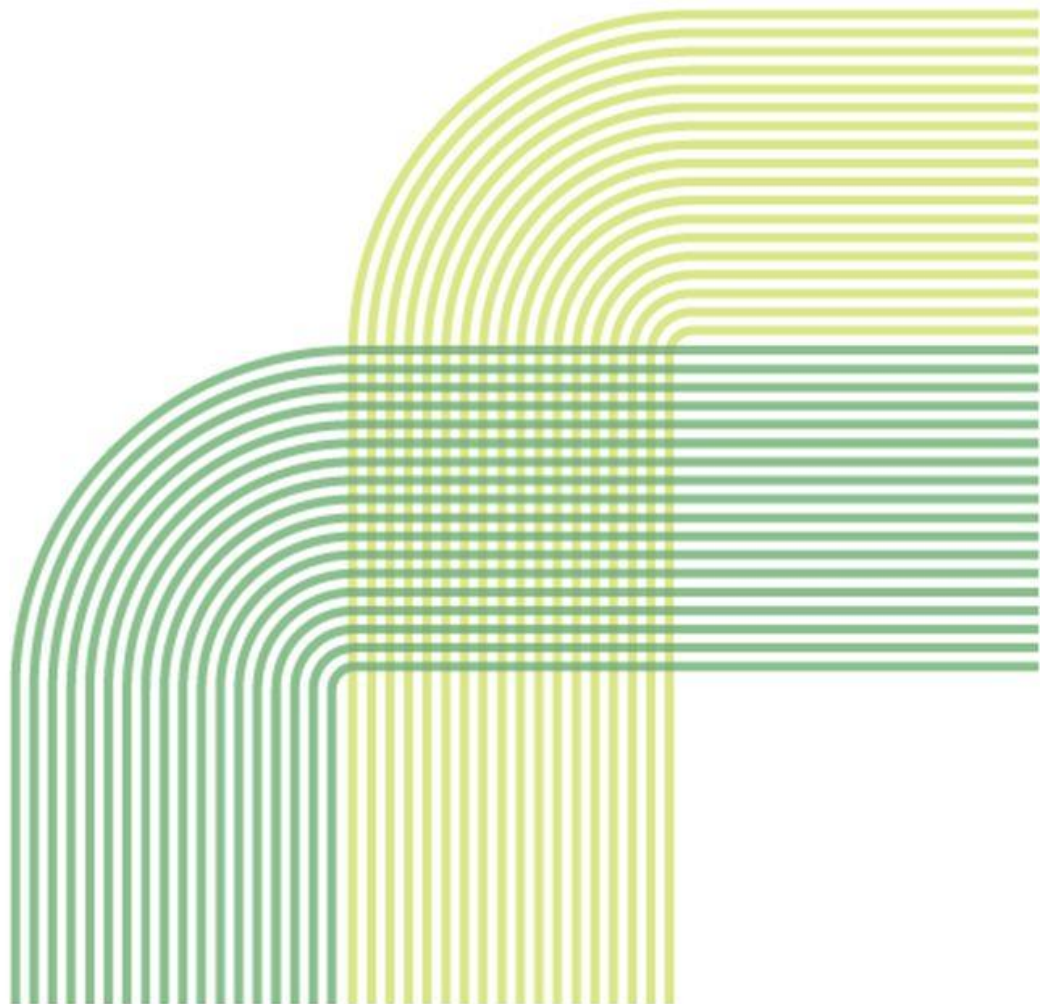


**IFF Research**

# Evaluation of the Active Women Programme - Year Two

Prepared for Sport England  
By IFF Research

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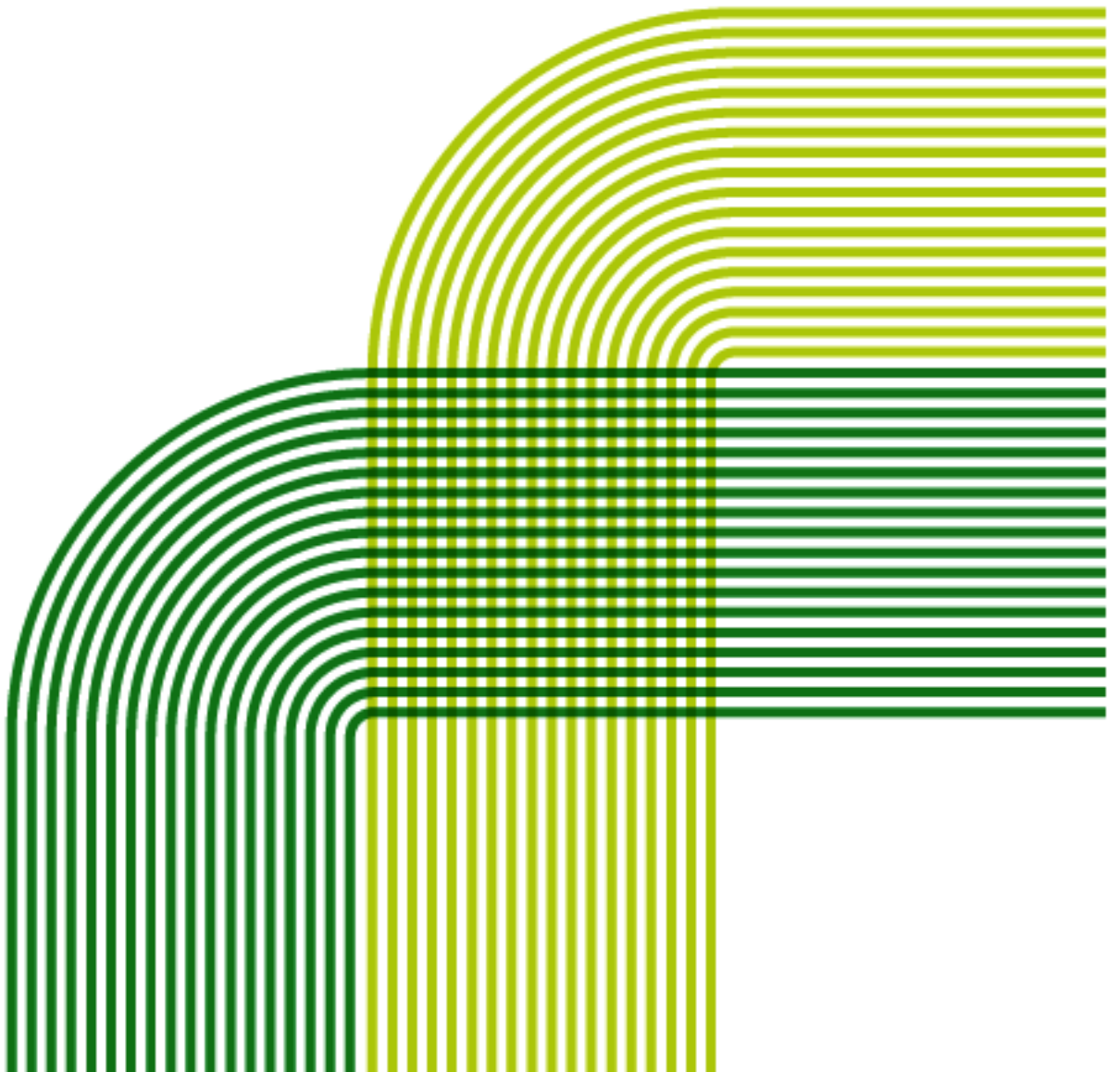




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# 1 Executive Summary

## Introduction

- 1.1 Women currently take part in less sport than men and despite intensive efforts to address this, participation levels among women remain stubbornly flat.
- 1.2 Sport England's Active Women Programme seeks to overcome this by contributing £10m of National Lottery Funding to support projects as they grow and sustain female participation in grassroots sport. Active Women projects are intended to increase the number of women playing sport and to encourage women who already play some sport to take part more often.
- 1.3 To be eligible for Active Women funding, applicants had to demonstrate that projects would address the specific barriers to participation in sport faced by either:
  - Women in disadvantaged communities (the 20% most deprived lower super output areas in the country); or
  - Women caring for children under the age of 16.
- 1.4 In January 2011, the 20 projects awarded Active Women funding were announced, with the intention that the projects would run for up to 3 years.
- 1.5 Sport England commissioned IFF Research to conduct an evaluation of the Active Women Programme, with the overarching objective of gaining an understanding of the efficacy and value of the programme in terms of encouraging participation in sport among women.
- 1.6 This document reports on Year Two of the Active Women Evaluation.

## Analysis of Management Information

- 1.7 The Active Women projects report against a set of standard indicators developed by Sport England. These reported figures show the extent to which projects are meeting targets and so provide information on where projects may be facing challenges, or seeing particular successes, at least in terms of the numbers of women involved.
- 1.8 The core output measures are 'participants' (the total number of women who take part in sport at a project at least once) and 'throughput' (the count of the total number of 'attendances').
- 1.9 Targets for these measures were included in the initial funding bids submitted by Active Women projects and subsequently agreed between each Active Women project and Sport England by the outset of the Programme.
- 1.10 Of the 20 Active Women projects, the overall projected Year Two target was 93,521 while the actual total achieved was 93,855, just over 100% of the target (in Year One the equivalent figure was 99%). At an individual project level, 12 of these 20 projects had reached their participant target.

1.11 However, projects are still struggling to achieve their throughput targets (as in Year One) although there has been an improvement in the second year of delivery. Twelve projects reported their Year Two throughput figures and while the total target for these 12 projects was 317,809, the number achieved was 160,981, 51% of the target (the Year One equivalent was 43%).

1.12 A key aim of the Active Women projects is to address specific barriers to participation in sport faced by women in deprived areas and women caring for children under the age of 16. Evidence from the management information would suggest that projects have been struggling on both these fronts:

- The overall target across the 18 projects reporting figures on women living in deprived areas was 37,244. The achieved figure was 16,582, 45% of the target.
- Of the 14 projects reporting on women caring for children under 16, the overall target was 40,361. The achieved figure was 18,536, 46% of the target.

### Recruitment and marketing on the Active Women Projects

1.13 The majority of projects met their participant target numbers for Year Two, demonstrating that they continue to successfully recruit women to activity sessions. However, there is a good deal of variation between projects with some far surpassing their targets while others (albeit fewer) do not reach them.

1.14 The successful recruitment approaches utilised in Year One are still being used by projects and are still effective. This chapter focuses on the main changes made to projects' recruitment efforts since Year One, and the challenges that remain.

1.15 The key changes and shifts mentioned by projects in terms of recruitment include:

- Increased partnership working
- Increased marketing and publicity
- Further emphasising the social nature of activity sessions and spreading the 'bring a friend' message

1.16 While these appear to be working well, some significant recruitment challenges remain across all projects:

1.17 The challenge of recruiting from the target group of women who care for children and (particularly) those from deprived areas (several projects acknowledge they are no longer concentrating on these women specifically and are simply trying to attract all the women they can).

1.18 Linked to this, and while marketing and publicity has improved, women consistently comment that they have seen little or no publicity and for example had only heard about the sessions through a friend.

1.19 Women very much value face-to-face (or at least telephone) contact from project staff or volunteers prior to attending a session for the first time, but this appears to be happening less in Year Two.



### Activities on the Active Women Projects

- 1.20 Following guidance from Sport England in Year One that projects could be flexible with the activities they provide, projects have very much taken a needs-led approach in Year Two, tailoring the activities they offer and the set-up and nature of each session to women's requirements and interests.
- 1.21 Experience of delivering sessions throughout Year One has enabled some projects to develop a set of 'core' or 'hub' sessions, which they have offered alongside new activities and taster sessions.
- 1.22 Projects have continued to offer a variety of sports and activities in Year Two, both individual and team-based, to cater to a range of needs. Badminton, running and swimming have all been particularly successful.
- 1.23 Partnership working has facilitated the range of activities projects have been able to offer.
- 1.24 The types of sessions have also been varied. Mother and children sessions have become more widespread in Year Two, as have competitions and sessions that offer women more of a challenge to cater for those who have progressed beyond entry level.

### Staffing on the Active Women Projects

- 1.25 Projects have had a great deal of success in engaging (and retaining) staff and volunteers in Year Two, enabling the delivery of more sessions for participants, a greater diversity of activities and more support for individuals.
- 1.26 However, encouraging an increased level of volunteering among women from deprived areas would be a worthy area of focus in Year Three.
- 1.27 The training offered to staff and volunteers has increased in terms of its quantity, its range (focussing on both activity-specific and 'softer' skills) and its level (with a greater number of staff aiming for or achieving level 2 qualifications).
- 1.28 Although some projects have started to provide more advanced sessions alongside their beginners offering, there is some unfulfilled appetite for receiving more traditional 'coaching' as a majority of participants would like coaches to provide them with more tips to help them improve their technique.
- 1.29 Mentoring and buddy schemes are providing on-going support for volunteers and new coaches, but staff could benefit from more regular team meetings (which will need to be organised well in advance).



## Partnership working on the Active Women Projects

1.30 As in Year One, partnerships have:

- helped with promotion and recruitment, allowing projects to reach a larger and more diverse selection of participants,
- provided funding, staff, equipment or facilities enabling more sessions (and more types of activities) to be offered

1.31 Partnerships will also be crucial to ensure the sustainability of projects.

1.32 If projects that have formed successful partnerships with commercial organisations could provide tips on how best to do this, and if this could be shared more widely, it could be very valuable.

## Retention of women on the Active Women Programme

1.33 There are indications that projects have struggled to retain participants in Year Two. Most projects have not met their throughput targets. Additionally, the proportion of women surveyed that considered themselves to still be attending has significantly decreased (61% Year One, versus 35% Year Two).

1.34 However, one of the key roles of Active Women is to provide exit routes for participants into other sport and activity sessions and qualitative interviews with project staff and participants suggest that this has been on the increase in Year Two; a potential side effect of this is reduced retention on Active Women projects. It is important to take this into account when looking at the throughput figures and drop-out rates.

1.35 There is also evidence that projects have been taking positive steps to boost retention in Year Two:

- Reviewing the timing of sessions on a frequent basis, to account for changing personal circumstances;
- Ensuring classes are low cost and affordable;
- Increasing communications from project staff;
- Tailoring sessions by looking at the needs and profile of participants, to ensure that women feel comfortable and at ease;
- Increasing 'soft' skills training for coaches;
- Improving the staff-to-participant ratio, by increasing the number of volunteers and so enhancing the class experience;
- Offering more incentives, such as loyalty cards;
- Giving participants the chance to progress, through more challenging classes and competitions as well as volunteer and training opportunities;
- Offering more classes and a greater variety of activities on an on-going / permanent basis.

1.36 But there are a couple of key areas for improvement:

- Childcare facilities are still only offered by a minority of projects, largely due to limited funding. Many projects identified this as one of the biggest barriers to on-going participation. Projects have explored



ways around this through partnership working and running classes involving children, which have been moderately successful but there is an appetite for more so such avenues should continue to be explored in Year Three.

- Communications from project staff could be more consistent. Although most projects were reasonably good at contact before women attend a session, they were less good at providing on-going and follow-up contact (although as discussed in Chapter 4, perhaps less so than in Year One).

### Impact of the Active Women Programme

1.37 The amount of sporting activity engaged in by participants has dropped since Year One, however participants are still doing more activity at Year Two than in the month before they got involved in Active Women. Prior to joining their Active Women project, women were doing an average of 7.0 sporting sessions per month. This rose to 10.6 at the time of the Year One survey before falling to 8.7 at Year Two.

1.38 Just under a half (46%) of participants had done more sport in the previous month than they had done before their involvement with an Active Women project. This compares to 61% from Year One (gross impact). Of this 46%:

- 22% were not doing any sport before Active Women but had done so in the month prior to their Year Two interview.
- 24% had done sport before Active Women and increased the frequency of activity since.

1.39 Nearly one in three (28%) women felt that they would not have done any sport without Active Women, while a further half (49%) would have done less sport, indicating that the majority of women feel that the introduction of the Active Woman Programme has impacted on their activity levels. Only one fifth of women (21%) stated that they would have done “at least as much sport or activity anyway” (deadweight)

1.40 Nearly two-fifths (38%) of all participants reported that both their activity levels rose and, crucially, that without Active Women they would have done less, or no sport (net impact).

1.41 Women from the target groups (deprived and / or with childcare responsibilities) were more likely to have seen the amount of sporting activity decline from Year One compared to women not in the target groups, indicating the importance of maintaining engagement with the target groups once they have started on the Active Women Programme. Indeed, these women were significantly closer to their levels of activity before starting Active Women sessions.

1.42 Over four in five women (85%) had recommended their project or spoken about enjoying the sessions to someone else while three in five (61%) had brought a friend or family member along to a session (multiplier effects).

1.43 Participants were slightly less positive about the softer impacts (such as having fun or feeling better about themselves) of their Active Women sessions compared to Year One, although this can be explained by the higher proportion that were no longer participating in Active Women sessions at Year Two.

### Sustainability of the Active Women Projects

1.44 In Year Two projects have been taking an increased number of measures to improve the sustainability of their project.





- 1.45 Projects have been particularly successful at improving and increasing the training opportunities available to participants, providing women with some of the skills they need to run sessions themselves.
- 1.46 Community-based partnership working has also progressed in Year Two, as projects have developed and/or strengthened links with community groups and local councils.
- 1.47 Collecting feedback is a chance to involve women in future decisions affecting their project and give them an interest in its sustainability. While all projects have provided women with informal feedback opportunities, the opportunity to use more formal feedback channels should be considered in Year Three.
- 1.48 Securing alternative funding continues to be a challenge for all projects and any best practice which can be shared in terms of securing commercial partners would be highly beneficial. Many projects have introduced or increased charges to participants during Year Two in order to facilitate sustainability but they are mindful that this can only go so far, as cost is a key barrier to exercise among the Active Women target groups.
- 1.49 Some projects have been offering more challenging sessions in Year Two to make the transition to clubs and groups outside the Active Women project less daunting for participants.



## 2 Introduction

### About the Active Women Programme

2.5 Women currently take part in less sport than men and despite intensive efforts to address this, participation levels among women remain stubbornly flat.

2.6 Sport England's Active Women Programme seeks to overcome this by contributing £10m of National Lottery Funding to support projects as they grow and sustain female participation in grassroots sport. Active Women projects are intended to increase the number of women playing sport and to encourage women who already play some sport to take part more often. To sustain behaviour change, it will also be important for projects to offer appropriate exit routes for participants so that they can continue to play sport even after the activity supported by Active Women funding has ended.

2.7 To be eligible for Active Women funding, applicants had to demonstrate that projects would address the specific barriers to participation in sport faced by either:

- Women in disadvantaged communities (the 20% most deprived lower super output areas in the country); or
- Women caring for children under the age of 16.

2.8 This involves stimulating local demand for sport and providing an appropriate and accessible supply of sporting opportunities to meet demand.

2.9 In January 2011, the 20 projects awarded Active Women funding were announced. These projects vary by:

- Geographical coverage (three national and 17 local, spread by region)
- Sports offered (All are multi-sport projects, except two of the national projects: England Netball and British Cycling)
- Type of delivery organisation (including councils, NGBs and charities)
- Starting date (projects began delivery between autumn 2010 and spring 2011)
- Scope (as detailed in Chapter 3, the projects vary considerably in terms of target numbers of participants)

2.10 The projects were scheduled to run for three years, with the exception of StreetGames which had a two year delivery period. It is also worth noting that StreetGames is structured somewhat differently from the other projects. Whilst 19 projects receive their funding directly from Sport England, StreetGames distributes its Active Women funding to its own network of over 50 local projects.

### Active Women Evaluation

2.11 Sport England commissioned IFF Research to conduct an evaluation of the Active Women Programme, with the overarching objective of:

- Gaining an understanding of the efficacy and value of the programme in terms of encouraging participation in sport among women.

2.12 And more specifically within this:



- To examine what works, for whom, and in what context.
- To explore the barriers to participation and to assess the role of the Active Women projects in overcoming these barriers;
- To track participants' experiences, satisfaction and behaviour;
- To isolate the specific influence of the Active Women project on participants' experiences and behaviour, in order to estimate the net impact of the programme.

2.13 The understanding gained from the research will be used to enhance the development and delivery of projects within the programme as findings are shared with Sport England and with Active Women projects throughout the programme's life. The research will also inform decisions on Sport England's investment in similar projects and programmes in the future.

2.14 This document reports on Year Two of the Active Women Evaluation.

## Methodology – Year Two

2.15 The evaluation design ensured both breadth and depth, collecting some information on all 20 projects (the 'basic evaluation') and exploring issues with a selection of six projects in much greater detail (the 'focussed evaluation').

2.16 The 'basic evaluation' in Year Two consisted of:

- A face-to-face depth interview with the lead(s) at each of the 20 projects (in November / December 2012)
- On-going collection of six-monthly reports from each project, detailing participant numbers achieved and a variety of other measures (detailed in Chapter 3)

2.17 Consistent with Year One, the six projects selected to cover in greater detail in Year Two were:

- Back to Netball, England Netball
- Breeze, British Cycling
- Sport4Women, London Borough of Tower Hamlets
- East Durham Belles, Wingate & Station Town Family Centre
- B-inspired, Braunstone Foundation Charity
- Think Fit, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation

2.18 The 'focussed evaluation' in Year Two consisted of:

- Site visits to each of the projects, consisting of three to six in-depth interviews with those in development and delivery roles, including project leads, coaches and volunteers (in November / December 2012)
- In-depth interviews with 20 new participants, three or four from each project (in December 2012 and January / February 2013)
- In-depth interviews with 11 enquirers (in January, February and March 2013).
- In-depth interviews with 22 longitudinal participants across projects (in February, March and April 2013)



- 528 shorter quantitative interviews with longitudinal participants (in April 2013)

#### Site visits

- 2.19 The site visits generally consisted of a series of face-to-face interviews at one of the project's delivery locations in the course of one day, with some follow-up interviews conducted over the phone where a key person was not available on the day in question. As in Year One, Back to Netball interviews were split over two locations, reflecting the national nature and delivery structure of the project.
- 2.20 These site visits were geared to understanding how projects have been developing in Year Two and the impact of any changes to delivery made following the first wave of research.

#### In-depth interviews with new participants

- 2.21 The new participant interviews were conducted face-to-face and the women were able to choose a location (e.g. their home, a local café or library) rather than having the interviews take place at the project sites themselves, in case this influenced their response.
- 2.22 A new participant was defined as any woman who had started attending one or more sessions of an Active Women project in Year Two, whether or not they were still participating at the time of the research.

#### In-depth interviews with enquirers

- 2.23 The 11 enquirer in-depth interviews were over the phone. In Year One 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with enquirers (in April / May 2012), bringing the total number of enquirer interviews to 25.
- 2.24 An enquirer is defined as any woman who has enquired about a project but did not then go on to participate.

#### In-depth interviews with longitudinal participants

- 2.25 In-depth interviews with longitudinal participants (i.e. follow-up interviews with Year One participants) took place over the telephone. Longitudinal participants fall into four types:
- Participating in Year One but not currently;
  - Participating in Year One and still participating;
  - Not participating in Year One and still not; and
  - Not participating in Year One but participating in Year Two.

- 2.26 The focus of these interviews was on developing an understanding of the barriers and enablers of participation over time.

#### Quantitative survey with longitudinal participants

- 2.27 As in Year One, the quantitative questionnaire was designed to take 10 – 15 minutes to complete and a prize draw of £50 of love2shop vouchers was offered as an incentive for women to take part in the survey.



2.28 Longitudinal participants (including some from StreetGames as well as the six projects from the ‘focussed evaluation’) were invited to take part in the survey in one of two ways:

- IFF Research sent out email invites, containing a link to the survey, directly to participants.
- Participants for whom telephone numbers but no email addresses were held were contacted by IFF’s telephone interviewing team and invited to complete the survey over the phone. Those with both telephone and email addresses who did not respond to the survey online (or whose email invites bounced back) were also invited to take part by telephone.

2.29 The Year Two questionnaire was designed to explore medium-term outcomes, sustainability and any wider impacts reported from participation.

2.30 The six projects were selected as part of the ‘focussed evaluation’ as they represented a good cross-section of different types of projects (by the factors described in paragraph 2.5). However, as in Year One, this is not to say that the participants of these six projects (plus StreetGames) mirror exactly the characteristics of the participants of all 20 Active Women projects. When interpreting overall quantitative findings, it should be borne in mind how the overall survey population breaks down by project.

**Table 2.1: Number of achieved interviews by Active Women project – Year Two**

Active Women project	Interviews achieved
B-inspired	149
Back to Netball	105
East Durham Belles	105
Breeze	61
Think Fit	57
Sport4Women	29
StreetGames	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>528</b>

### Evaluation schedule

2.31 The final wave of the Active Women Evaluation will comprise:

- Site visits with project leads in Year Three among the projects in the focussed evaluation;
- Following up participants who have taken part in the in-depth interviews to examine longer term impacts of the Active Women Programme;
- Telephone depth interviews with other providers of sporting opportunities to women, to see if the Active Women Programme has had an impact, positive or negative, on them.

2.32 Findings from Year Three of the research will be available in Summer 2013.



## 3 Analysis of management information

### Introduction and summary

- 3.1 All 20 Active Women projects report against a set of standard indicators that Sport England has developed to facilitate the comparison and aggregation of results across projects on the Active Women Programme and, indeed, all other projects that involve sports activity.
- 3.2 The core output measures are 'participants' (the total number of women who take part in sport at a project at least once) and 'throughput' (the volume of participation at a project i.e. the count of the total number of 'attendances').
- 3.3 Some projects also report on counts of 'volunteers' and 'coaches', as well as splitting their participant counts by age, ethnicity, disability, whether they live in deprived areas and whether they care for children under the age of 16.<sup>1</sup>
- 3.4 Targets for these measures were included in the initial funding bids submitted by Active Women projects and subsequently agreed between each Active Women project and Sport England at the outset of the Programme. A small number of projects made further modifications to their interim targets after recruitment had commenced as their original targets were felt to be slightly too ambitious to achieve within the timescale. However the overall, three year, targets for most projects stayed roughly the same regardless of these modifications.
- 3.5 The figures which show how much progress has been made towards targets are submitted by projects to IFF Research and Sport England every six months. All but three of the projects have now completed two years of delivery and have therefore compiled and provided their figures for 2012-2013. The remaining three projects have completed and provided figures for their first 18 months of delivery and, unless specifically stated, references to their targets will use the midpoint of their Year One target and Year Two target, to ensure comparability across all projects.
- 3.6 It should be noted that Year Two figures represented total numbers achieved since the start of delivery of the Active Women projects; they are cumulative, including Year One results too<sup>2</sup>. Table 3.1 illustrates the number of projects reporting on these various targets.

<sup>1</sup> Throughput figures are provided as totals with no demographic breakdown required.

<sup>2</sup> Comparisons are made throughout this chapter with Year One proportions. There is a slight discrepancy between the overall Year One figures reported here and those shown in the Year One report, due to not all figures being available at the time of the Year One report.



**Table 3.1: Number of projects with Active Women measure targets**

Active Women measure	Targets
Participants	20
<i>Deprived</i>	18
<i>Childcare</i>	14
<i>Age</i>	17
<i>Ethnicity</i>	10
<i>Disability</i>	8
Throughput	12
Coaches	13
Volunteers	11

- 3.7 The overall projected Year Two target across all 20 projects was 93,521 while the actual total achieved was 93,855, just over 100% of the target (in Year One the equivalent figure was 99%). This confirms that, projects were generally on track with their delivery, at least in terms of participation.
- 3.8 While projects were generally on track with their participant numbers, they were still struggling, like in Year One, to achieve their throughput targets, once again highlighting the issues projects have faced with retention. Twelve projects reported their Year Two throughput figures and while the total target for these twelve projects was 317,809, the number achieved was 160,981, 51% of the target (the Year One equivalent was 43%).
- 3.9 A key aim of the Active Women projects is to address specific barriers to participation in sport faced by women in deprived areas or women caring for children under the age of 16. Evidence from the management information would suggest that projects have been struggling on both these fronts, and have found it harder than in Year One:
- The overall target across the 18 projects reporting Year Two figures on women living in deprived areas was 37,244. The achieved figure was 16,582, 45% of the target. This represented a significant decrease from Year One, where 64% of the target for women living in deprived areas was achieved.
  - Of the 14 projects reporting on women caring for children under 16, the overall target was 40,361. The achieved figure was 18,536, 46% of the target which once more represented a decrease from the Year One figure of 71%.
- 3.10 Such decreases from Year One perhaps suggest that as projects attempt to increase their participant numbers beyond Year One, they sacrifice targets relating to other measures, such as engaging with women in the target groups, although as this Chapter will show later on, the overall figures are somewhat skewed by the larger projects.



3.11 Thirteen projects reported on the number of coaches they had had after two years. The overall target for these projects was 1,114 and they surpassed this, achieving 2,055 coaches in total, 184% of the target (Year One: 164%). The number of volunteers was reported on by 11 projects; with an overall target of 2,061, projects achieved 2,265 volunteers in total, 110% of the target (Year One: 98%).

3.12 Table 3.2 presents a summary of the figures achieved in Year Two looking across key Active Women measures while also comparing these to Year One proportions achieved.

**Table 3.2: Summary of key Active Women measures**

Active Women measure	Projects reporting	Year Two Target	Year Two Achieved	% Year Two Achieved	% Year One Achieved
Participants	20	93,521	93,855	100.4%	99%
<i>Deprived</i>	18	37,244	16,582	45%	64%
<i>Childcare</i>	14	40,361	18,536	46%	71%
Throughput	12	317,809	160,981	51%	43%
Coaches	13	1,114	2,055	184%	164%
Volunteers	11	2,061	2,265	110%	98%

### Achieved participant figures by project

3.13 As we have already seen, at an overall level, projects appeared to be on track with their delivery in terms of participation. This is all the more positive given that the targeted number of participants in the second year of delivery was generally higher than the number targeted in Year One. There was however some variation by project, with twelve of twenty reaching their targets and a handful of these twelve outstripping their targets considerably (reporting between 114% and 251% of their targets).

3.14 Those projects that did not hit their targets reported reaching between 55% and 94% of their participant targets.





- 3.15 It is also interesting to compare the number of participants achieved in Year One compared to Year Two to understand the extent to which projects, once they have spent time in Year One setting up projects, creating marketing tools and spreading awareness are able to capitalise on this development period and experience an exponential increase in the number of participants they achieve in Year Two.
- 3.16 At an overall level, across all 17 projects which had submitted their Year Two figures, 69% of all participants joined in the second year of delivery. This proportion was identical to the proportion as set out in the targets; i.e. on average projects anticipated that, of all the participants they had had by Year Two, 69% of them would start in the second year of delivery.

### Throughput achieved figures by project

- 3.17 While projects were slightly closer to reaching their throughput targets in Year Two (51%) than Year One (43%), most were still a long way off from achieving their target. Five projects reached their throughput targets, with the rest reporting between 33% and 64%. This suggests projects still have much work to do to increase retention rates. Chapter 8 (Retention of women on the Active Women Programme) assesses in more detail the issues that projects have experienced with retention.
- 3.18 As in Year One, projects with higher throughput targets tended to be further away from achieving them. As one would expect, throughput figures increased significantly from Year One to Year Two. At an overall level, throughput figures achieved in the second year of delivery accounted for 72% of all throughput figures achieved over the two year period.

### Participants by throughput

- 3.19 Although projects were on the whole on track with their participant numbers, most clearly found it difficult to achieve their throughput targets. It is important to examine the relationship between these two measures as this provides useful context for assessing issues relating to recruitment and retention. The success of Active Women projects cannot merely be judged by participant numbers: the aim should be to keep hold of participants once they have attended sessions and encourage them to keep returning to further sessions to facilitate a long term benefit for participants.
- 3.20 There was little difference at an overall level in terms of the number of attendances per participant between Year One and Year Two (3.9 vs. 3.8)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These figures were calculated by dividing the actual (as opposed to targeted) participant figure by the actual throughput figure.



## Participants by demographic

- 3.21 A key aim of the Active Women projects is to address specific barriers to participation in sport faced by women in deprived areas or women caring for children under the age of 16.
- 3.22 As has been shown already, projects struggled even more in Year Two than Year One to meet their targets for participants living in deprived areas (on average reaching 45% of the target). Five projects reached or exceeded their targets, with the remainder varying widely, reporting between 14% and 95% of their deprivation targets.
- 3.23 Projects also struggled with the other main target group, women caring for children under the age of 16. At an overall level, projects achieved 46% of the target. Here, six projects reached their targets, five of which outstripped them by a long way (reporting between 147% and 465%). Of those that did not meet their targets, projects again varied widely reporting between 28% and 95% of their childcare target.
- 3.24 Of the ten projects which had included information about the ethnicity of participants in their Year Two report, 7 had achieved more participants from a minority ethnic background than they had targeted (with the average being 180% achieved of the total target), which is an improvement on the already high Year One figure of 131% achieved of the total target.
- 3.25 Seven projects had included the disability status of their participants in their Year Two reports, with three of these meeting (and exceeding) their targets. At an overall level, projects are doing better at meeting their disability targets this year, reporting an average of 102% compared to 69% in Year One. That said there was huge variation among projects, ranging from 25% to 256% of the disability target met.
- 3.26 In terms of age, four projects had recorded information on participants under the age of 15. One project met and exceeded this target, while the other three did not (though all reached at least 50% of their target).
- 3.27 Sixteen projects had set targets and recorded information on participants aged 16-19. There was variation among projects, although most (12 out of 16) fell short of their target;
- 3.28 Projects were far more likely to engage with women aged 20 or over; most came close to, or exceeded, their target (15 out of 17 projects achieved at least 80% of target). Overall, 118% of the total target was achieved.

## Coaches and Volunteers

- 3.29 In line with the goal of Active Women to increase the frequency of sporting activity among women there is also a drive to increase the numbers of women who volunteer in, and coach, sport.
- 3.30 Thirteen projects included information on coaches in their Year Two progress reports, while 11 submitted information on volunteers. The figures were positive in that, overall, Active Women projects achieved 184% of their Year Two target for coaches (164% in Year One) and 110% of their Year Two target for volunteers (98% in Year One).



- 3.31 The high number of coaches is partly down to the proportion of male coaches, as was also the case in Year One. Male coaches represented just 3% of the overall targets (5% Year One), although they made up 18% of the overall total achieved (14% Year One).<sup>4</sup>
- 3.32 Coaches were also split by their level of qualification: ‘NGB qualified’, ‘General qualification’ and ‘Unqualified’. ‘NGB qualified’ refers to all coaches, instructors or leaders with an NGB qualification at Level 1 or equivalent and above. ‘General qualified’ refers to anyone with a non-sport specific formal qualification that equips them to lead or coach some sports activities, such as certain NVQs and teaching qualifications.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.33 At an overall level, of those projects which submitted their Year Two progress reports containing breakdowns of the types of qualifications their coaches had achieved, projects had surpassed their targets for coaches of all categories, as was the case in Year One, but particularly emphatically with reference to NGB qualified coaches and unqualified coaches, as Table 3.3 shows.

**Table 3.3: Coach numbers by qualification**

Active Women measure	Targets	Actuals	Actual as % of target
Of 13 projects which had targets for coaches			
NGB qualified	192	623	324%
General qualification	204	387	190%
Unqualified	18	170	944%
Street Games (Undefined)	700	875	125%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,114</b>	<b>2,055</b>	<b>184%</b>

<sup>4</sup> These figures disregard StreetGames results as they did not report coach numbers by gender.

<sup>5</sup> StreetGames did not discern between level of qualification among coaches.



## 4 Recruitment and marketing on the Active Women Projects

### Summary

The majority of projects met their participant target numbers for Year Two, demonstrating that they continue to successfully recruit women to activity sessions. However, there is a good deal of variation between projects with some far surpassing their targets while others (albeit fewer) do not reach them.

The successful recruitment approaches utilised in Year One are still being used by projects and are still effective. This chapter focuses on the main changes made to projects' recruitment efforts since Year One, and the challenges that remain.

The key changes and shifts mentioned by projects in terms of recruitment include:

- Increased partnership working
- Increased marketing and publicity
- Further emphasising the social nature of activity sessions and spreading the 'bring a friend' message

While these appear to be working well, some significant recruitment challenges remain across all projects:

- The challenge of recruiting from the target group of women who care for children and (particularly) those from deprived areas (several projects acknowledge they are no longer concentrating on these women specifically and are simply trying to attract all the women they can).
- Linked to this, and while marketing and publicity has improved, women consistently comment that they have seen little or no publicity and for example had only heard about the sessions through a friend.
- Women very much value face-to-face (or at least telephone) contact from project staff or volunteers prior to attending a session for the first time, but this appears to be happening less in Year Two.

### Introduction

- 4.1 The recruitment chapter in the Year One report explored the ways in which women had been recruited to the project throughout the first year, including what information about the projects was available to women and in what format, and what had motivated women to attend a session for the first time. The Year One research also looked at the kinds of barriers that seemed to be preventing women taking that initial first step and going to a session for the first time. The Year One research identified a number of recruitment methods that appeared to be particularly effective: face-to-face recruitment, personal contact from coaches, encouraging women to bring a friend to sessions, promotion in non-sporting areas within the community, linking with partnership organisations to increase awareness and referrals, providing easy to access practical information about sessions, and mythbusting where necessary, for example trying to make it clear that women do not need to have a high level of fitness to enjoy the



activities on offer. However it was also highlighted that recruiting women within the target groups was proving particularly challenging.

- 4.2 This chapter explores how projects are continuing to recruit new participants in Year Two, by looking at how women are now becoming aware of the projects in Year Two, how projects have changed or adjusted their recruitment approach, and challenges that remain. As the focus of this chapter is recruitment of new participants, it draws from the in-depth interviews with new participants, enquirers and project staff and volunteers, and not data from the quantitative side of the Year Two research, as these respondents were all recruited in Year One and are therefore out of scope.

### Participant figures

- 4.3 As in Year One, projects generally met their participant targets in Year Two (i.e. the number of individuals attending sessions), however there was considerable variation between projects. As highlighted in Chapter 3 (Analysis of Management Information), some projects have considerably exceeded their targets while others did not meet them. It should be kept in mind however that these targets are not the only measure of a project's 'success' and it may be that some targets were perhaps over-ambitious.

### How women became aware of the project

- 4.4 When women who had started attending during Year Two were asked how they had heard about the Active Women project, a broad range of locations and formats were mentioned. Many women mentioned word of mouth as in Year One, but they also mentioned ads in free newspapers, posters at their children's school or information at their local leisure centres (the website, posters or leaflets). Smaller numbers were referred by other organisations such as Weight Watchers or a different sporting club in the community.
- 4.5 That said, as will be detailed later, some women also mentioned that it was not always easy to find information, and that more contact from the project prior to attending the session would have been helpful and reassuring. In fact, interviews with "enquirers" – women who contacted an Active Women project but then never attended a session – demonstrate that in some cases, a lack of contact from projects was the key reason for not going to a session for the first time.

### Motivators and barriers

#### Motivators

- 4.6 The social nature of the sessions was a huge motivator for women to attend the Active Women classes; when asked why they decided to go to an Active Women session rather than a different kind of activity, many women said they primarily wanted to meet new people, make friends and have fun whilst being active. In addition, some felt motivated to go because it seemed clear from the advertising that it would be a laid back (low-commitment) session that catered for all (and particularly low) abilities and fitness levels. Several others liked that the sessions were women-only, and inexpensive. As will be discussed, many of these aspects are highlighted in projects' marketing of the sessions.

#### Barriers

- 4.7 Some women reported they had no particular reservations before attending a session, though these women tended to be more familiar with sport and sporting venues. Others mentioned



that as they had gone with a friend, they were less nervous than they would have been had they attended alone. Many others reported concerns about their weight, fitness level, and the fact that they simply had not taken part in exercise (particular team games) for many years.

## Effective recruitment in Year Two

### Increased Partnership working

- 4.8 Many projects mention that their recruitment in Year Two has been boosted by an increased level of partnership working since Year One (the extent and type of which is discussed in detail in Chapter 7) within the local community. Partnership working was also highlighted in Year One as something that helped recruitment, but it seems to be mentioned by staff to a greater extent in Year Two as a great way of recruiting in areas previous closed off. This means that Year Two has seen women being recruited from many different areas of the community, demonstrated by the range of ways women said they had become aware of the project.
- 4.9 For example, staff at B-inspired found that recruitment via mosques and community centres had been effective in targeting the hard-to-reach women living in more deprived areas who did not do regular exercise. As in Year One, the project also found that their partnerships with Sure Start (children's) centres made it much easier to make contact with women who care for children of pre-school age.
- 4.10 Several projects highlighted increased contact with local schools in Year Two, and indeed several women mentioned they had seen publicity for the sessions in the school environment. Other project staff mentioned specifically that their recruitment levels had also been boosted by links with local GP surgeries, mental health organisations and Weight Watchers.

### Increased Marketing, PR and increased online presence

- 4.11 As projects' 'grass roots' aspects have become more established in Year Two (venues, coaches, partners, finance), many have now increased their focus on marketing and PR in order to boost recruitment.
- 4.12 Some projects have been able to take on staff to specifically fulfil this role, for example Breeze introduced a Marketing and Communications Executive at the end of Year One, and as a result the project enjoyed 280 pieces of coverage in the press and on the radio. Staff at the project maintain that PR is essential for raising awareness, citing that the same 'volume' of advertising would be far too expensive.
- 4.13 Many projects have worked to increase their online presence in Year Two, particularly in terms of social media such as Facebook and Twitter. While some acknowledge that becoming too dependent on these tools could mean certain sections of the community (older women and those living in particularly deprived areas) are 'left behind' in terms of awareness in the future (Breeze particularly highlighted this potential issue), most projects cite that the use of these has boosted their recruitment and reached women that they would not have otherwise. East Durham Belles gave the example that several women attended an event who had not registered with them specifically, but who had become aware of it via Facebook.

*'I think [Facebook] has had quite a lot [of impact] because we get so many queries through it. I don't know where they found us from but they seem to like our page...I think it is because people use Facebook a lot in general.'*

**(Engagement and Development Officer – East Durham Belles)**



- 4.14 New participants of East Durham Belles and Back2Netball both stated that they were able to get all the necessary information they needed to attend either through the projects' Facebook page or dedicated website. This demonstrates the importance of not only employing these measures, but also actively managing such means to ensure information is regularly updated.

*'I liked their Facebook page; so I regularly knew what was happening.'*

**(New Participant, 25 – 34 – East Durham Belles)**

*'I looked at the page on Facebook. The co-ordinator keeps the page up to date on Facebook which is handy.'*

**(New Participant, 25 – 34 – Back2Netball)**

- 4.15 Other projects have adapted their paper marketing to be more accessible for potential new recruits. For example, Sport4women have adjusted their posters and leaflets to make them more accessible to women in the target group, particularly those in deprived areas. The leaflets are now available in several languages spoken commonly in the Borough, and the posters have been altered so that abbreviations have been removed that were proving confusing for non-English speakers. These changes were seen by the project as particularly key for recruiting non-English speaking women from deprived areas.
- 4.16 Volunteers at Breeze praised a new online toolkit that enables them to easily edit and print Breeze posters for display. This means that up to date information can be added or changed at short notice by volunteers, meaning that potential new recruits seeing posters will always have access to the most up to date information without the need to go online and find it.

#### Social nature of recruitment further emphasised

- 4.17 The social nature of the Active Women sessions has remained a strong motivating factor for women to get involved throughout Year One and Year Two, and this is something that projects have continued to utilise in order to maximise their recruitment efforts.
- 4.18 Many new participants felt the Active Women offering was different from other sporting sessions specifically because of the emphasis on having fun with new friends rather than taking part in serious sport.

*'Lots of the other women at school also said they were interested so I saw it instantly as a social thing rather than a get fit thing. All my mates were going and we could have a good laugh for an hour.'*

**(New participant, 25 – 34 – Back to Netball)**

- 4.19 All projects have responded to this and ensure that their publicity highlights this popular aspect. For example, Sport4women have consciously changed the focus of their marketing, because they felt the initial 'Sport' in the name could be putting women off. While the project name has not changed, the images and text used on the posters and leaflets were changed to emphasise the 'fun' aspect alongside the 'Sport' in the name.
- 4.20 Encouraging women to "bring a friend" has been a highly successful recruiting practice in Year Two, and in fact word of mouth among women in the community remains one of the most effective recruitment channels, particularly among the harder-to-reach target group of those living in deprived areas.





- 4.21 Back to Netball staff cited that encouraging women to bring friends has been particularly effective when combined with a competitive element, when the women were encouraged to form teams and leagues with other women they knew.
- 4.22 Back2Netball staff also mentioned that finding existing groups of women and recruiting them as a group meant the women were more likely not only to turn up to the first session, but also to keep going.
- 4.23 B-inspired, Breeze and Back to Netball have introduced “Mums and kids” sessions in Year Two, which were reported as being very popular – women enjoyed the opportunity to spend active leisure time with their children.

*‘It’s a great way to get mums along to these sessions. When I first ran these sessions I started off advertising these as ‘mum and daughter’ sessions and I lost a lot of mums if they had sons, hence ‘mum and children’. It was the mums that pointed it out to me.’*

**(NDCC – Back to Netball)**

Low commitment further emphasised

- 4.24 The groups of women being specifically targeted by the Active Women project (carers of children and women living in deprived areas) are typically not groups that have the ability or inclination to give a firm commitment to a regular time slot (though that said, some do), so the opportunity is generally welcomed to take part on a casual basis without losing money or missing parts of a specific training regime. This is not something specific to Year Two, but the projects becoming more established mean that more taster sessions are able to be provided, as well as more regular drop in sessions.
- 4.25 Indeed, new participants of B-inspired, East Durham Belles, Back2Netball, Think Fit and Sport4Women all stated that the ‘drop-in’ nature of sessions meant they felt more at ease and less daunted by the prospect of attending for the first time.

*‘There was no pressure. You turn up and you do as much as you want to do. There’s no drill sergeant telling you what to do, so it was quite easy and it was a nice environment.’*

**(New Participant, 45 – 54 – Think Fit)**

- 4.26 Projects appear to have grasped this crucial aspect of offering flexibility by incorporating drop in sessions as a key part of their recruitment drives:
- East Durham Belles are enticing women to participate who are returning to exercise after a longer period by offering short courses such as Bollywood Dancing, and then using these to signpost participants to the regular activities on offer. However there is an admission that this comes at a considerable cost due to the sessions being largely unplanned within the scope of the project budget.
  - Think Fit are using taster sessions as a means of encouraging word of mouth recruitment by involving local community groups. This is part of a wider initiative to seek simpler recruitment avenues within the project.
  - B-inspired have set up permanent drop in centres with group taster sessions to attract new participants into their existing sessions. These taster sessions include “New Beginnings” workshops which aim to foster self confidence in women.





- Sport4Women are using sports days and ladies days to encourage initial participation, and also offering taster health walks in partnership with Walking for Health.

*'Sometimes women won't come into the leisure centres. They think 'I'm too old, I can't do this now' and they haven't tried it for a long time, but when they have a little taster they realise 'oh I can still do this!'*

**(Tennis Coach – Sport4Women)**

- 4.27 Also, as the projects have become more established in terms of venues, coaches and finance, some projects now have the ability to provide 'permanent' drop in centres (East Durham Belles). This means these can be publicised and make it easier for women to attend for the first time, rather than feeling they will be joining a class in the middle of a 'run'. In Year One some projects found it more difficult to guarantee when drop in sessions would be running, making it more difficult to advertise the venues and times for new recruits with confidence.

#### Olympics utilised

- 4.28 A particularly high profile event in Year Two of the Active Women Programme was of course the London 2012 Olympics. While the build-up to the Olympics in Year One did not appear to enthuse the participants interviewed a year ago in terms of getting involved in sport, the arrival of the Olympics did seem to increase interest in getting active.
- 4.29 Many projects took the opportunity of using the buzz around the Games to help engage women including attendance at local Torch Relay and other Community Games events (for example Back2Netball delivered taster sessions at the London Live Hyde Park and Victoria Park events). East Durham Belles organised the Belle-lympics - an Olympics-themed family sports day focusing on 'silly' and fun sports activities, which was very well attended and is discussed further in Chapter 8 (Retention), and Breeze had Laura Trott as an ambassador for one of their larger bike rides.
- 4.30 Although the Olympics was something of a one-off in its ability to catch the imagination, some projects have also been basing recruitment drives around other events / times of the year, for example Back2Netball publicity has referenced New Year's Resolutions and Valentine's Day.

## Recruitment challenges in Year Two

#### Recruiting women from target groups remains challenging

- 4.31 While projects have in the main continued to recruit to their targets in Year Two, staff have nevertheless consistently reported that marketing to (and therefore recruiting) women from deprived areas is a challenge, despite the increased partnership working with community organisations in deprived areas.
- 4.32 Some projects acknowledged that they had reduced attempts to recruit women solely from the 'target' population (i.e. women caring for children and women living in deprived areas), and were instead using a more 'blanket' approach to attract any women they could in order to 'play it safe' in terms of hitting targets. Arguably it may have been better for projects to be less concerned with hitting targets and focusing more on attracting the 'right' women who would benefit more from the sessions.



- 4.33 Recruitment through leisure centres was found to be largely ineffective for those women within the target group (living in a deprived area and doing little exercise), which is why projects have looked to improve their presence in the wider community.

Breadth of marketing to be improved

- 4.34 While projects have shown an increased focus on publicity of Active Women sessions in Year two, most of the new Year Two recruits interviewed felt that better advertising would be one of their main suggestions for improvement. Some suggestions included supermarket noticeboards and visual advertising in shopping centres and GP surgeries.

Contact with participants prior to first session

- 4.35 Projects have become larger and more established in Year Two. This means more sessions can be provided and more women can take part, however it also means that it is arguably more difficult for staff or volunteers to make contact with women on an individual basis, for example to confirm their upcoming attendance or respond to any queries.
- 4.36 Several new participants for Year Two felt more contact from projects before they went to their first session would have been reassuring, for example a confirmation email, phone call or text message. Those that did have personal contact before their first session were reassured by it.

*'It was also useful just to chat to the co-ordinator. I said I was a bit nervous about going because I hadn't been for ages, so it was useful to have that personal contact as well.'*

**(New participant, 25 – 34 – Back to Netball)**

- 4.37 Some women also commented that it would have been really good if they could have been sent a timetable or a description of the activity that they were soon to take part in for the first time.
- 4.38 Further to this, interviews with enquirers (women who had enquired about taking part in Active Women sessions but never attended) showed that for some women, more contact from the project would have encouraged them to attend.
- 4.39 For some this was simply a timing issue – they had emailed the project for information but by the time the project had responded several weeks later, the woman had already begun taking part in a different sporting activity. Arguably, these women were not in 'need' of the Active Women project as much as others who did not have the confidence or the inclination to find an alternative, but swifter responses from projects can only be a good thing.
- 4.40 Other women who never took steps to attend a session (and by the time of our interview had found no sporting alternative) did acknowledge that more personal and reassuring contact from projects could well have been the encouragement they needed to overcome their fears of attending an unfamiliar session for the first time. Some women described how they had got in touch with a project to ask about classes, and had received (generally after a delay of a few weeks) some information about venues and session times. While this is what these women asked for, they reported feeling daunted by the prospect of a first session and that the information they had received (perceived as a little 'sparse') did not encourage them to attend.



4.41 .Suggestions for more personal communication include:

- A 'meet and greet' email with photos email with some photos of the coach and some of the participants
- A personal-sounding email really encouraging women to take part and enthusing about the sessions
- A little more information about the level of fitness of the rest of the group and reassurance that lots of current participants felt nervous before they went along, perhaps with some quotes saying as much
- A follow up call from a coach or a volunteer to make personal contact before attending

4.42 Similarly, it was mentioned that contact from a project after an initial 'no-show' (if a session had been booked but then not attended) would help to ensure another booking would be made, and this time honoured. One enquirer did not attend the Breeze ride she had registered for, and the lack of follow-up contact appeared to increase the initial reservations she had about joining a group she did not know:

4.43 It should be noted that several of the new recruits and enquirers interviewed said they had had all the information they needed about the project before attending, and (for the enquirers) that a lack of attendance subsequently was due to personal reasons or timing issues, about which the project could have done little. However, many of these women were familiar with leisure centres and sporting activity to at least some extent; it is women who have not taken part in sport recently (i.e. the target group) who may well benefit from (or in fact need) the kinds of contact mentioned above.

4.44 None of the new participants interviewed in Year Two were recruited by a face-to-face publicity event so none had had the opportunity to meet the coach or volunteers before going along to a session for the first time (unless they had specifically gone into the leisure centre to enquire). While a sample of 20 new recruits cannot be conclusive it may be that, as projects grow, the same level of labour intensive face-to-face outreach work in the local community that can be so effective when recruiting will no longer be possible. Indeed, projects did not report doing a lot of this type of face-to-face recruitment in Year Two.



### Individual stories highlighting recruitment issues:

- 4.45 The following portraits tell the story of some women's experiences of the Active Women project, illustrating issues relating to recruitment. Similar portraits are included at the end of the chapters on retention and impact highlighting relevant issues.

#### **PARTICIPANT STORY: "DINA"**

Dina, aged 16-24, started attending B-inspired sessions in October 2012.

She felt she had been inactive for 10 years and wanted to get fitter so she could keep up with her young nephews.

She approached her local leisure centre but felt the badminton sessions there would be too advanced, and was given a leaflet for B-inspired. She used the leaflet to make contact with the project by email and phone, and to look at their website, however she found the information on the website not up to date and felt the sessions should be better advertised.

Dina decided to go to the session because it was low cost and women only (she wears a headscarf), and the drop-in element also particularly suited her well.

*It is amazing that it is free and there are a really good range of classes and times. I liked the fact you could leave and join at any point - you weren't committed.*

Dina felt a little out of place at her first session as she was the only new starter, but said the coach was very welcoming which put her at her ease and she has continued attending two sessions a week since then.

She feels that if she had not contacted B-inspired then she would have continued to be very inactive aside from occasionally playing the Wii at home.



### ENQUIRER STORY: "FINULA"

Finula, aged 35-44, enquired with East Durham Belles but never attended a session.

Finula is relatively inactive but was taking part in a swimathon with her husband at her local leisure centre and heard about East Durham Belles in an announcement from the centre manager.

She feels that she would really like to be more active and do something other than swimming and 'walking round the block during her lunch hour'.

She emailed the project and asked for some information and was sent a timetable. While at the time she did not feel this was inadequate, she never made any further contact with the project. She feels now she would have really liked some more encouraging personal contact to make the sessions sound friendly.

*I have not been in touch recently and they have not sent me any updated timetables or anything and it would be nice to have a little reminder – we are here, but then again I am quite lazy about it obviously*

Finula would love to take part in some netball sessions but has concerns both about the sporting and the social aspect of attending for the first time:

*I would definitely like to have a go at netball but what scares me about going to that is it sounds like they have little teams set up and I can't even remember the rules for netball so I would need to be reassured that it really doesn't matter and anyone can join in. I have no idea [of the rules] and they would really have to teach me like I was learning for the first time ...*

*I have had a look at the East Durham Belles Facebook page and you can see them leaving messages for each other and that is really nice because it sounds really friendly but because you are not part of that it is like stepping into someone else's group of friends*

It would not take a great deal to allay these fears, and in fact if the project were to make proactive and friendly contact she would be keen to go along and try a session, despite the 8 mile car journey to the centre in Peterlee not being ideal.

She is not currently doing any more exercise and has not been swimming in the last month.



## 5 Activities on the Active Women Projects

### Summary

Following guidance from Sport England in Year One that projects could be flexible with the activities they provide, projects have very much taken a needs-led approach in Year Two, tailoring the activities they offer and the set-up and nature of each session to women's requirements and interests.

Experience of delivering sessions throughout Year One has enabled some projects to develop a set of 'core' or 'hub' sessions, which they have offered alongside new activities and taster sessions.

Projects have continued to offer a variety of sports and activities in Year Two, both individual and team-based, to cater to a range of needs. Badminton, running and swimming have all been particularly successful.

Partnership working has facilitated the range of activities projects have been able to offer.

The types of sessions have also been varied. Mother and children sessions have become more widespread in Year Two, as have competitions and sessions that offer women more of a challenge to cater for those who have progressed beyond entry level.

### Introduction

- 5.1 A source of confusion for some projects in Year One was the extent to which they could change the activities they offered in response to changing demand, but Sport England confirmed at the end of Year One that projects were not confined to offering the activities stated in their original bids. Projects were also made aware that women taking part in these new or altered activities would count towards their targets. Projects used this freedom to increase the breadth of their activities, and to introduce more taster sessions for example Bollywood dancing or Dance-a-line (Dance/Trampoline) in order to attract initial interest from the community that could then be channelled towards more mainstream activities. Experimenting in this way over the course of Year Two means that projects now appear well aware of what activities work for what kinds of women within their community.

*'Back when we first started delivery we didn't really know the women's needs and expectations. But as we've gotten to know them we've tailored how we do things... We're interacting with different types of women on each of the sites. We haven't got a one size fits all model or programme. Our expertise is the knowhow about how to tailor our classes. It's more a needs-led approach, putting something on after having spoken to the women.'*

**(Project Lead – Think Fit)**

- 5.2 It is in this context that the following topics will be explored:

- The development of 'core' sessions alongside new / taster sessions;
- Type of sports / activities offered;
- Type of session within each sport / activity.



### The development of 'core' sessions alongside new / taster sessions

- 5.3 Projects have continued to offer a wide variety of activities in Year Two, largely consisting of 'core' or 'hub' sessions, alongside some new activities and taster sessions.
- 5.4 'Core' or 'hub' sessions are activities that have been trialled, proven to be popular and so been established on a more or less permanent basis (although there may still be gaps between blocks of sessions). It is this type of session that projects hope will become sustainable beyond the life of the Active Women Programme. Project staff felt they had identified the activities that were working well on their project in Year One and have focused their energies on developing these flagship sessions in Year Two, while less successful activities have not been continued.

*'In Year One we were pushing 6 week taster courses in different venues across the city. From those taster sessions we now have long-term drop-in centres across the city that women can go to week in, week out. We have now identified where there is a need.'*

**(Inspiring Sport Officer – B-inspired)**

- 5.5 Think Fit is a good example of a project that has developed a set of 'hub' sessions, as set out in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Summary of 'hub' sessions on Think Fit in Year Two**

Activity	Working well with
Jogging	Asian women in Leyton Mixed ability Mix of ages (aged 16 to 79)
Multi sports	Ethnically mixed, but a large proportion of Asian women Mix of ages 16 – 65
Badminton	Retired / not working Women with grown children Mostly aged 40+ Ethnically mixed
Exercise / fitness class	Mums with new-borns Mid-20s to mid-40s

- 5.6 It is evident that the Think Fit 'hub' sessions are quite varied, not just in terms of the activities on offer, but in terms of the range of women engaging with the sessions. Multi sports sessions, for example, have appealed to women of a range of ages, particularly Asian women. These sessions were felt to be working well because they are varied with a different activity each week, which keeps interest up and suits a range of abilities. In addition, the sessions take place in an enclosed venue, so women trust the venue and see it as a safe space, something that has been especially important to attracting Muslim women.
- 5.7 East Durham Belles is another good example of a project that has provided a varied set of 'hub' sessions in Year Two and in doing so has met the needs of a range of women.



**Table 5.2: Summary of ‘hub’ sessions on East Durham Belles in Year Two**

Activity	Working well with
Running	Women in their 30s and 40s
Cycling	Mix of ages Mix of abilities
Rowing	Mix of ages Mix of abilities
Swimming with children	Younger women with children
Boxercise	Younger women who are already active
Netball	Mostly women in their 20s who are already active

5.8 As set out in Table 5.2, the cycling and rowing sessions have appealed to women of a range of abilities, while the netball and boxercise sessions have appealed to women who are already active. In Year One the netball and boxercise sessions were only offered on a one-off or infrequent basis, but they have been firmly established in Year Two as interest in them has become apparent.

*‘Netball was only introduced as a taster at a ladies day last year. We had thirty odd ladies at that session and they said they wanted their own club.’*

**(Project Lead – East Durham Belles)**

5.9 Continuing to offer some new sessions and taster sessions, alongside ‘core’ activities, has also been important in Year Two, in order to attract new women and keep current participants engaged. Increased partnership working has facilitated projects’ ability to offer these opportunities (as discussed in Chapter 8).

5.10 B-inspired project staff, for example, spoke about the success of badminton, fitness and swimming, which have been established as ‘core’ sessions in some areas of the city. Alongside this they spoke about their on-going development work; they’re looking to offer golf and netball as new activities, while badminton and other ‘core’ activities are continuing to be trialled as taster sessions in new areas.

*‘We now have badminton, one-to-one mentoring, group taster sessions, drop-in weekly club sessions, swimming, fitness sessions and we are trialling cycling. The hope and aim is that in the New Year we will have golf and netball too.’*

**(Project Lead – B-inspired)**

### Type of sports / activities offered

5.11 Each project is working within a unique local context – with a different mix of ethnicities, religious orientations, levels of deprivation, and ages – so the package of activities offered by each project is very specific. It is therefore difficult to identify if there are particular activities that are working well across projects.





- 5.12 At an overall level, projects have been offering a combination of individual activities and team sports as a way of appealing to a range of women. Individual activities, such as fitness classes and Zumba, were viewed as a good introduction to sport and exercise as they're not competitive and give women an opportunity to improve their fitness. Team-based sports require some skill and can be competitive, so there can be more of a barrier to taking part for some women. Given the Active Women target group – women with no or low levels of engagement in sport and exercise – it has been important for projects to offer entry level opportunities.

*'We have found that people are more interested in fitness based activities. People are not even on the ladder, so to expect someone to go to a running group or to play badminton is just impossible. I think people get more out of it if they start with the fitness type activities that are enjoyable and sports and games are introduced afterwards.'*

**(Health Improvement Team Leader – B-inspired)**

- 5.13 Other activities that have been successful across several projects include badminton, running and swimming.
- 5.14 Badminton has tended to be particularly popular with Muslim women and older women, although it has also attracted women from outside of this demographic; it is a 'core' activity on Think Fit and Sport4Women, both of which are based in areas with large Muslim populations. There seem to be a number of reasons for badminton's appeal: it's not necessary to be very fit in order to take part, it's social and, although it does not have to be competitive, it has the potential to be so for those that are interested. The way in which sessions are run has also contributed to their success. Think Fit and Sport4Women have ensured that badminton sessions are held in closed venues. This privacy is important for most Muslim women taking part; they can relax and have time to themselves, put aside their family responsibilities for a short while and socialise with other women, which the coaches encourage.

*'We have been holding badminton tournaments, which the ladies love. We had 32 come to the last one. We are organising tournaments every 6 months so they can challenge themselves and know how to improve. All different kinds of ladies seem to like it, not just Muslim ladies...you don't have to be particularly fit to take part in badminton.'*

**(Head Coach – Sport4Women)**

- 5.15 Jogging or running sessions have also been successful as they can easily be tailored for different abilities and taking part doesn't require any technical skills or equipment, which makes it inclusive. On East Durham Belles, for example, women have been encouraged to walk first and build up their stamina. As their fitness improves, and they are able to run further and for longer, their confidence improves and a virtuous circle is established. Indeed, some East Durham Belles women have gone on to do the Great North Run and regular 10 kilometre runs. Think Fit has taken a similar approach as women have the option of jogging inside first so they can build up their fitness first, joining the outside group once they can do a continuous jog. Underlining the fact that this is a 'best practice' approach, Think Fit has received external recognition for this session, winning the 'Run England Project of the Year' award.



- 5.16 The success of swimming has been somewhat surprising as wearing a swimming costume can make some women feel self-conscious. However for some women, who have had limited opportunities to learn before, low cost or free classes and a female only environment finally makes it accessible and a less daunting prospect. B-inspired staff reported that their swimming level 1 and level 2 courses have been fully booked. Sport4Women meanwhile reported that swimming was particularly popular among older Muslim women. Reasons for its appeal include that it is relaxing rather than strenuous, not competitive and non-weight bearing, while the environment is such that women can remain covered, wearing leggings and long T-shirts if they choose to. Once again it is the atmosphere and tone of the sessions, as well as the activity itself, that has been crucial to its popularity.
- 5.17 Cycling has been successful for some projects, but faces the challenge that buying a bike can be a significant barrier to participation. Breeze has sought to address this through working with bike hire and recycling schemes (but arguably they would have more success in recruiting the target groups if they could provide more bikes).

*'We work with bike hire schemes and recycling schemes to make it a lot cheaper but if you are a single mum or a young girl at college or even a busy mum, you are not even going to have fifty pounds to buy a bike ... in an ideal world you would be able to provide bike pods everywhere.'*

**(Project Lead – Breeze)**

- 5.18 East Durham Belles has also been running a cycling session, but have managed to avoid the equipment barrier by utilising an NHS loan scheme.

### Type of session within each sport / activity

- 5.19 It has been important for projects to consider the type of session, as well as the activity itself, so that different needs are met.
- 5.20 Some sessions have been tailored to a specific sub-group of women, for example, those focused on workplaces or colleges seeking to engage groups of staff or students.
- 5.21 In addition, in Year Two many projects have introduced mother and children sessions. Childcare is a known barrier to participation and these sessions are one way in which projects have tried to address this barrier (explored further in Chapter 8). Think Fit, for example, runs an exercise / fitness class, which has been set up so women can bring their babies in their buggies into a class. The venue is also convenient, next door to a nursery and primary school. Similarly, Breeze has introduced 'Mums with tots' rides, so mothers can bring their children along, rather than having to arrange for childcare. East Durham Belles meanwhile has a swim session where mothers can bring their children.

*'One thing that has worked well is our Baby Belles session, which is a mum and baby swim session. The focus is very much on the baby, mums have been happy to get into the water particularly if they are carrying post pregnancy weight.'*

**(Project Lead – East Durham Belles)**

- 5.22 Offering classes for a range of abilities, including more challenging classes, is also apparent across projects in Year Two. Staff clearly felt that it was important to provide participants with opportunities to progress, so their interest is maintained and they keep coming back.



Progression opportunities as a tool for retaining participants are given further consideration in Chapter 8.

- 5.23 Breeze, for example, in partnership with Cycletta, has been offering longer 20 to 50 mile cycle rides, to cater for more experienced cyclists or those that have been on shorter rides and want more of a challenge. Alongside this they have continued to offer shorter, traffic-free rides, for beginners or women who are less confident in their cycling abilities.
- 5.24 Competitions have also become more widespread across projects. They provide another opportunity for women to advance their skills and progress.

*'We're also running a female only football tournament. It's a different type of woman we're engaging with here, someone who's quite competitive.'*

**(Full-time Development Coach – Think Fit)**

- 5.25 Given some of the more challenging classes and competitions on offer in Year Two, it is not surprising that many sessions have been appealing to a wide variety of women, not just those in the target groups (women with child caring responsibilities or from deprived areas not previously taking part in sport in exercise). However, projects have been mindful of this and have reported making on-going efforts to recruit and retain women in the target groups as they are more difficult to engage with. This will need to continue in Year Three if the Active Women Programme is to meet its key objectives.

*'We have found that by advertising a running or cycling group, we are more likely to reach ladies who are already active and perhaps already cyclists or runners, which is fine, but because we have limited resources, we can't fill a club with experienced runners or cyclists because then we are not reaching the ladies we want to reach. We have had to focus on this. The drop-ins have been working well...with a bit of hand holding over two or three weeks they might think about joining in.'*

**(Project Lead – East Durham Belles)**



## 6 Staffing on the Active Women Projects

### Summary

Projects have had a great deal of success in engaging (and retaining) staff and volunteers in Year Two, enabling the delivery of more sessions for participants, a greater diversity of activities and more support for individuals.

However, encouraging an increased level of volunteering among women from deprived areas would be a worthy area of focus in Year Three.

The training offered to staff and volunteers has increased in terms of its quantity, its range (focussing on both activity-specific and 'softer' skills) and its level (with a greater number of staff aiming for or achieving level 2 qualifications).

Although some projects have started to provide more advanced sessions alongside their beginners offering, there is some unfulfilled appetite for receiving more traditional 'coaching' as a majority of participants would like coaches to provide them with more tips to help them improve their technique.

Mentoring and buddy schemes are providing on-going support for volunteers and new coaches, but staff could benefit from more regular team meetings (which will need to be organised well in advance).

### Introduction

- 6.1 This chapter explores to what extent Active Women projects have been successful in engaging and retaining coaches and volunteers as well as what projects might be able to do to overcome any outstanding challenges in this area. It discusses the training provided and how this has developed since Year One of the programme as well as the optimal balance between hard and soft skills in those delivering activity sessions. Finally it discusses how projects are supporting and communicating with their staff and volunteers and if there is still a perception that they have to deal with too much administration.

### Engaging and retaining coaches and volunteers

- 6.2 As discussed in Chapter 3, across the majority of projects, and at an overall level, coach and volunteer targets have been exceeded. This is very positive both in terms of sustainability and as keeping familiar faces is important for the retention of participants. Although some projects continue to face difficulties recruiting *experienced* female coaches with the skillset to deliver to deprived women as opposed to children, projects are increasingly training up participants to be volunteer coaches (and, in some cases, paid coaches). In some projects, it feels as if a critical mass is starting to be built up whereby existing volunteers are gaining in confidence and experience and hence encouraging others to start getting more involved too:

*'The women are becoming more self-sufficient. We have more trained up in a few of the sessions...and we have other women who have seen this and want to do the course...they see that there is a bigger goal than just turning up each week and exercising. When the funding stops there's no reason why the sessions can't continue.'*

**(Full-time Development Coach – Think Fit)**



- 6.3 The increase in the number of volunteers has enabled the delivery of more sessions, better cover for staff absences and, in some cases, more than one staff member to be present at a session which means more attention can be paid to individual participants, therefore having a knock-on effect in boosting participant engagement.
- 6.4 However, it is an on-going challenge as volunteer recruitment is not always spread evenly across areas or activities within a project and not all volunteers would yet be confident (or in some cases able) to deliver sessions on their own. B-inspired also pointed out that volunteers are not always felt to be accountable in the way paid staff are, for example there are some issues with using volunteers in leisure centres because of the need for CRB checks.
- 6.5 There is, unavoidably, some staff turnover at projects and this can prove challenging if there is an interim period between appointments when sessions cannot be run and also because knowledge and personal relationships can be lost if key staff leave. Developing and implementing comprehensive staff handover procedures (including, if possible, a period of shadowing and introductions to key partners) may be something for projects to consider if they have not done so already.
- 6.6 Quantitative interviews with participants certainly indicate some appetite for coaching and training:
- One in five (20%) participants had signed-up or enquired about coaching as a result of taking part in Active Women project sessions, whilst slightly fewer (15%) reported volunteering at a session, for example as a referee or coach.
  - Unsurprisingly, less demanding forms of volunteering had more take-up: one in four participants (25%) mentioned having volunteered on their Active Women project in some other way, for example by helping out with publicity or an event.
- 6.7 A possible concern is that women from deprived areas were less likely to have signed up or enquired about coaching (15% vs. 24% non-deprived) or to have volunteered at a session (11% vs. 16% non-deprived). As volunteers and coaches from deprived areas may have more success at recruiting and engaging other women like them, encouraging further volunteering among this group may mean that the participation levels of women from deprived areas are boosted as well as it being a positive thing in itself for the women concerned.

## Training

- 6.8 Providing suitable training and support are critical to ensuring staff, and particularly volunteer, engagement.
- 6.9 The amount of training delivered in Year Two has increased across projects as well as diversifying and becoming more suitable / tailored to staff and volunteer needs (as projects have learnt what worked well and less well from Year One).

### Types of training offered

- 6.10 In terms of the range of training now being offered, Sport4Women provides a good example with activity-specific training having been undertaken in basketball, badminton, walking, swimming, football, exercise movement and dance.
- 6.11 Several projects have felt the benefits of upskilling their staff so that they are able to teach more activities, thus offering more variety and keeping women interested in attending sessions. For example, coaches at B-inspired can now teach rounders and cricket as well as



badminton and one of the main coaches at East Durham Belles undertakes regular training to respond to changing needs as the women choose what activities they want to do during Wednesday taster sessions.

- 6.12 As the programme progresses, more volunteers are reaching higher level qualifications and some projects are now aiming higher in the training of their volunteers, for example Sport4Women are aiming to get more coaches qualified to Level 2 standard.
- 6.13 Training is also being used to cater better for particular groups of participants for example Sport4women has run disability awareness training in order to attract more disabled participants to the project and B-inspired is looking into staff becoming GP referral trained, which will enable them to better understand and cater for participants with particular health needs.
- 6.14 Non-activity specific training also encompasses leadership training, for example East Durham Belles found the Sport Makers course particularly useful for volunteers (and feel that Sports Leaders Awards may perform a similar role):

*'It helped when we have been organising different events – how to talk to people and encourage them to come.'*

**(Volunteer – East Durham Belles)**

- 6.15 Overall, projects expressed less concern about the quality of coaching than they did towards the end of Year One and this is likely to be as a result of the focus on training which has occurred since.

#### Hard and soft skills

- 6.16 The balance between hard and soft skills, however, continues to be something critical for projects to consider. Some of the projects previously focussing more on 'hard' skills have begun to put more emphasis on soft skills. For example, Think Fit's basic training for coaches now includes training on mentoring and working with hard to reach groups. Likewise Breeze training previously focussed on aspects such as risk assessment and health and safety but is now 'lighter touch', given that some potential champions were finding the risk-focussed approach a little daunting.

*'In year one there was a lot of emphasis put on [being] on a pre-risk assessed route which put a lot of people off because they were saying I can't risk assess.'*

**(Project Lead – Breeze)**

- 6.17 As discussed more fully in the retention section, the vast majority of participants (96%) felt that staff were friendly and welcoming, showing that basic 'soft skills' are well embedded at all projects. However, there is considerable appetite among participants for more traditional coaching as well. When asked what improvements they would like to see, only 4% of participants mentioned that sessions should be more focussed on coaching, rising to 9% among Back to Netball participants, so it is clear that this is not a 'make or break' issue for most. However, it is worth noting that when specifically asked, over half (53%) of women agreed that they would like the coach 'to give them more tips to help improve their technique', including almost three in ten (28%) who strongly agreed, whilst only one fifth (21%) disagreed.





- 6.18 There was considerable variation across projects with between 28% and 76% women agreeing that they would like the coach to give them more tips on how to improve their technique.
- 6.19 Groups of women more likely to want a more 'active' role from the coach in terms of giving pointers and advice, were those aged 35-44 (60% vs. 53% average), those with childcare responsibilities (57%) and BME participants (71%).
- 6.20 From the in depth interviews with participants it feels as if there may have been some progress made over the last year in terms of coaches providing more tips as there was only one mention in these discussions of 'not being pushed properly' in Year Two compared to a number of similar comments in Year One. That said, there is still some room for improvement here.

#### Cost of training

- 6.21 The cost of training was not something brought up by many projects in Year Two although Breeze mentioned that they have now been able to subsidise First Aid training and Think Fit mentioned that volunteers, who are given the option of additional training depending on their interests, can 'pay this back' through volunteer time. Meanwhile, B-inspired has used partnership working to improve its Continued Professional Development for staff, having been able to offer better training opportunities through linking up with the Achievement Project. Likewise, Breeze provided bike maintenance workshops through teaming up with retailers resulting in 191 champions gaining additional skills. It is likely that funding training is still an issue for some projects (particularly if aiming to get deprived women up to Level 2 coaching standard) so options such as partnership working should be fully explored by all.

#### Support and communications

- 6.22 As well as training, projects are well aware of the need for on-going support for new volunteers and coaches and many projects have set up (more or less formal) mentoring or buddy schemes to enable newer coaches to learn from more experienced ones, or to team up two 'newbies' together to offer mutual support, either in terms of the joint delivery of sessions or on an ad hoc / as needed basis.
- 6.23 Training sessions themselves have also been structured / scheduled to make on-going support easier in some cases, for example Breeze schedule their training sessions to avoid the run up to Winter given that they know volunteers are less likely to take sessions then and so more likely to drop out during the critical early weeks. Making training sessions a networking opportunity can also help volunteers make links which will enable them to keep engaged for longer:

*'We have a video which shows some champions talking about their experience and we leave time for the group to ask questions and also exchange contact details for each other because they might live in the same area and that might help them get going ... they go away feeling enthusiastic about the programme.'*

**(Project Lead – Breeze)**

- 6.24 Social media can also be used to ensure on-going networking and mutual support amongst volunteers post-training: for example Breeze has a closed Facebook group for its volunteer 'Champions'.



- 6.25 In terms of contact between volunteers and the central project teams, communications need to be prompt and (as with participants) throughout the life of the volunteer's experience with the project. Breeze has been working on communications with its volunteers by providing much quicker contact following initial training in the form of a thank you message, a volunteer agreement and website details. They have also improved contact with lapsed volunteers to persuade them to get involved in the project again.
- 6.26 Most projects recognise the value of regular team meetings for paid staff (for example allowing any issues to be shared and addressed more promptly) but several are still finding this challenging to implement, due to the variety of staff schedules (in terms of both hours and locations) making them very hard to organise. Social media and other forms of communication are often felt to be the next best thing:

*'It was getting more and more difficult to get everyone together so we are relying more and more on Facebook and on text messaging and emails to get some regular feedback from coaches.'*

**(Project Lead – Think Fit)**

- 6.27 An alternative may be to try and organise meetings well in advance to a set schedule or to 'black out' a certain part of the week for all staff so that they can attend staff meetings (or, for weeks when these are not running, to catch up on marketing or development activity).

### Administrative burden

- 6.28 In Year One projects reported an unexpected administrative burden, partly due to Sport England reporting requirements. This issue was not raised as much in Year Two but this may just be as the 'unexpected' has now become 'expected' and so work-around solutions have been developed. Breeze actually mentioned a decreased level of administration burden as they now require less risk assessment from volunteers, have amended training so that it includes FAQs (heading off later enquiries) and have also managed to make some volunteers regional co-ordinators which has reduced the administrative workload for the central team (as well as increasing capacity for some important administrative work such as communicating with recently trained volunteers to encourage them to get started).





## 7 Partnership working on the Active Women Projects

### Summary

As in Year One, partnerships have:

- helped with promotion and recruitment, allowing projects to reach a larger and more diverse selection of participants,
- provided funding, staff, equipment or facilities enabling more sessions (and more types of activities) to be offered

Partnerships will also be crucial to ensure the sustainability of projects.

If projects that have formed successful partnerships with commercial organisations could provide tips on how best to do this, and if this could be shared more widely, it could be very valuable.

### Introduction

- 7.1 This chapter discusses partnership working, including the range of partners which have helped Active Women projects (and how they have done so) as well as issues encountered when working with partners.
- 7.2 The extent of partnership working has stepped up a gear since Year One as projects start to think more about the sustainability of their projects going forwards as well as novel ways to recruit and retain volunteers and participants (including through offering a wider programme of activities). While in Year One many partnerships were in their infancy or still being explored / in development, it feels that they have now started to deliver, as partners have bought into the success of the projects and relationships between staff and organisations have strengthened.
- 7.3 Partners that Active Women projects have teamed up with have largely been public and third sector organisations falling into two broad categories: organisations with a sports focus and those which help women, or a particular sub-section of women, to become healthier, fitter or more engaged in their local community. Some projects, although fewer, have also teamed up with commercial partners.

### Sports-related organisations

- 7.4 The sports-related organisations were an obvious 'first port of call' for projects to link up with, as they have an established infrastructure and knowledge of existing sports provision, barriers and opportunities within local areas. These organisations will also be particularly important for ensuring the sustainability of the projects' work as paid staff will be in post at many of them after the Active Women funding has come to an end.
- 7.5 The following list details types of sports-related partners as well as giving specific examples of successful partnerships developed by projects:



- Councils and leisure centres
    - These have often been crucial in providing low cost facilities. Whilst most projects quickly established these links, the level and type of their involvement has sometimes evolved over time, for example Leicester City Council's Sports Services is now overseeing the swimming element of the B-inspired programme after the initial partner lined up for this was unable to spare the staff to do so.
    - Where key staff members have been based at local councils, it has sometimes been particularly beneficial – for example England Netball won Partnership of the Year at the Leeds City Council annual awards due to the ease of pooling resources and working towards a common goal when regular contact is maintained.
  - National Governing Bodies, County Sports Partnerships (CSPs), local sports clubs and sports charities / organisations
    - New links have been formed by projects during Year Two to allow additional activities to be offered for example Sport4women has teamed up with England Athletics to deliver the new 'Athlefit' programme of circuit based athletics as well as having begun working with England Hockey, the England Cricket Board, the Barry McGuigan Boxing Academy and the Ramblers Association
    - Several projects mentioned the Sport Makers programme, delivered by CSPs, as a useful way to recruit volunteers.
    - Back2Netball have found CSPs particularly helpful when these have had a marketing function which can help promote activities.
    - Think Fit and Breeze both linked up with Sport England's national partner the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) during Year Two to present at and attend their 'Fit 4 Women' conference. Breeze also supported WSFF at the Vitality show and WSFF will, in turn, be supporting Breeze by providing additional research to help inform the development of the project.
    - Partnerships with local clubs are felt to be particularly important for ensuring sustainability, for example East Durham Belles have been working with Durham Amateur Rowing Club to give women the opportunity to take part in a 10 week Explore Rowing Programme, following which some have gone on to become recreational rowers with the club.
- 7.6 There has been some collaboration between Active Women projects (for example a team from East Durham Belles now regularly competes in a Back to Netball league and Breeze and StreetGames have worked together to provide some targeted Us Girls projects in the North West) but it feels that there is still potential for such links to be developed further, for example national and local partners working together to promote each other's sessions.

### Organisations targeting (sub-sets of) women

- 7.7 From the outset projects have focused their promotional activity in areas where they know women already get together and at organisations they know women regularly attend. In Year Two links with partners who already deliver services or activities for women have become even more established. The range of such partners projects have formed links with include:
- Women's groups
    - For example Sport4women have used Wapping Women's Centre as a base for some of the walks it offers, encouraging women to have a coffee together at the centre either before or after the walk



- Children's / Sure Start centres
  - Partnerships with children's centres have been explored by most projects as women with childcare responsibilities are one of the Active Women Programme's target groups making the centres a good place for recruitment / promotion of activities as well as sometimes being able to hold sessions or, occasionally, provide childcare. Sport4women are currently looking to cater for a specific sub-group of women with childcare responsibilities by delivering some post natal and pelvic floor specific classes in partnership with Sure Start and the National Childbirth Trust (NCT).
- Schools and colleges
  - Education providers are another example of a type of partner which most projects explored throughout the programme, for both recruitment and facilities. Projects have targeted a mixture of staff, sixth formers and parents.
- Other workforce groups
  - For example in Nottingham, a Back2Netball Festival took place in July targeting local police.
- Community groups or charities for particular ethnicities
  - As reported in Year One, several projects have formed link with organisations for BME groups, for example the project lead at Sport4Women has been to outreach sessions of the Somalian charity Takawala Lifeline which tries to engage women refugees who don't speak English to take part in more community activities.
- Other local community groups
  - For example Sport4women provide a Brazilian dance class at South Poplar & Limehouse In Action for Secure Housing
- Health services and charities
  - Some Back2Netball areas have been working with charities who are using the project as part of the rehabilitation process for their clients.
  - Sport4women visited a local GP referral gym to speak to people with physical impairments and a gym within a mental health hospital to make patients and staff available of opportunities available to them. Taster activities have also been run at a day centre for women with severe mental health problems.
  - Women hoping to lose weight are being targeted by Sport4Women, who are now supporting 3 Brazilian dance sessions as part of the weight management "My Weigh" programme, as well as by Breeze who are working with Slimming World.
  - Think Fit participants took part in the Finsbury Park Race for Life with Cancer Research UK.
  - Breeze have been able to use the British Heart Foundation's database for marketing activity and are also engaging on a wider PR drive about the partnership including having a 'Team Breeze' taking part in the iconic London to Brighton ride.
  - Following a recruitment exercise at an NHS open day at Stepping Hill Hospital, a Back2Netball session was set up for NHS staff.



## Commercial partners

- 7.8 National projects seem to have had most success getting commercial partners on board, for example Breeze has formed partnerships with Halfords, who provided a bike for a competition and mention Breeze in newsletters, and with Specialized – a bike manufacturer – who donated a bike accessories ‘starter pack’ for a prize draw to act as an incentive to volunteers. In addition, Breeze has provided newsletters to accredited ‘female-friendly’ bike retailers and 10 such shops have delivered bike maintenance workshops for Breeze volunteers. Back2Netball are also trying to develop relationships with national organisations such as supermarkets so that they can develop sessions in partnership with their local subsidiaries. If these national projects are able to share any tips for securing commercial partners, this could benefit other Active Women projects.

## Events

- 7.9 Many projects have seen events as a key way to boost their profile and promote their activities / attract participants as well as, in many cases, to give existing participants the opportunity to take part in challenges and meet other like-minded women. Such events have sometimes involved partnership working, with projects getting involved in existing events as co-promoters.
- 7.10 As Breeze is a project particularly focussed on mass participation events, they have particularly looked to engage such partners and have linked up with two major event providers: Cycletta – a women only event series - and UK Cycling Events. Whilst both partnerships were initially formed during Year One they have since developed – in the case of Cycletta by integrating Breeze messaging and ethos further into the events. It has also been arranged to include a shorter distance at each Breeze-supported event to engage more existing and potential Breeze participants.
- 7.11 Breeze have also targeted independent events and have been working with established events such as the Tour of Wessex and the Great Western Ride as well as with newer women-only events such as Dartmoor Debutante (an event inspired by a Breeze champion who has links with the cycling club who organise the event) and Divas on Wheels (a pilot run by Pilgrims Hospice).
- 7.12 Breeze may be well placed to share some of its success in terms of working with event partners with other Active Women projects.

## Issues with partners

- 7.13 Not all partnership have been successful – for example some projects mentioned that some partners are not particularly proactive in terms of marketing or promotion, for example one project explained that even if there are expectations or hopes that the partner will get more involved, sometimes they just want to be the venue hire.
- 7.14 Some projects encountered issues with support from original partners having dried up due to funding cuts and re-structuring and this has left the projects without promised funding / resources or having to spend unexpectedly.
- 7.15 To some extent, partners changing and having different expectations / goals to Active Women projects is inevitable and other partners can often be found to fill the gap (albeit after a period of some disruption). That said, if Sport England can do anything to suggest or facilitate



alternative partnerships or to provide additional funding where it turns out that this is not forthcoming from other sources this would surely be welcomed by projects.



## 8 Retention of women on the Active Women Programme

### Summary

There are indications that projects have struggled to retain participants in Year Two. Most projects have not met their throughput targets. Additionally, the proportion of women surveyed that considered themselves to still be attending has significantly decreased (61% Year One, versus 35% Year Two).

However, one of the key roles of Active Women is to provide exit routes for participants into other sport and activity sessions and qualitative interviews with project staff and participants suggest that this has been on the increase in Year Two; a potential side effect of this is reduced retention on Active Women projects. It is important to take this into account when looking at the throughput figures and drop-out rates.

There is also evidence that projects have been taking positive steps to boost retention in Year Two:

- Reviewing the timing of sessions on a frequent basis, to account for changing personal circumstances;
- Ensuring classes are low cost and affordable;
- Increasing communications from project staff;
- Tailoring sessions by looking at the needs and profile of participants, to ensure that women feel comfortable and at ease;
- Increasing 'soft' skills training for coaches;
- Improving the staff-to-participant ratio, by increasing the number of volunteers and so enhancing the class experience;
- Offering more incentives, such as loyalty cards;
- Giving participants the chance to progress, through more challenging classes and competitions as well as volunteer and training opportunities;
- Offering more classes and a greater variety of activities on an on-going / permanent basis.

But there are a couple of key areas for improvement:

- Childcare facilities are still only offered by a minority of projects, largely due to limited funding. Many projects identified this as one of the biggest barriers to on-going participation. Projects have explored ways around this through partnership working and running classes involving children, which have been moderately successful but there is an appetite for more so such avenues should continue to be explored in Year Three.
- Communications from project staff could be more consistent. Although most projects were reasonably good at contact before women attend a session, they were less good at providing on-going and follow-up contact (although as discussed in Chapter 4, perhaps less so than in Year One).



## Introduction

- 8.1 The Year One research explored issues relating to retaining participants in terms of a two-tier relationship. Firstly there were factors that *enabled* women to attend on an on-going basis – convenient session times and venue locations, childcare facilities, offering drop-in sessions and reasonable cost. Subsequent factors – contact from project staff, the social dynamic of sessions, atmosphere and tone of the sessions, the quality of project coaches and incentives – then *encouraged* and motivated participants to keep attending.
- 8.2 This chapter begins by considering the extent to which projects have become better at retaining women at the overall level, looking at throughput figures, drop-out rates and patterns, why women drop out of sessions and how easy women have found it to keep attending. Attention is then turned to look at what projects have been doing to address *enablers* and *encouragers* that affected retention in Year One, alongside new issues affecting retention in Year Two.

## Throughput figures

- 8.3 Throughput (i.e. the average number of attendances per participant) tended to be much lower than targeted in Year One and projects are still struggling to maintain attendance among participants in Year Two.
- 8.4 As highlighted in Chapter 3 (Analysis of Management Information), projects varied considerably in their throughput figures. Although some projects exceeded their targets, most did not reach them.
- 8.5 It is disappointing that some projects didn't reach their targets, but it is worth remembering that some targets may have been over-ambitious. Additionally, one of the roles of Active Women projects is to provide exit routes for participants into other sport and activity sessions – doing this successfully could result in fewer attendances overall at Active Women sessions but is certainly to be encouraged.
- 8.6 It should also be noted however, and is highlighted in Chapter 9, that the amount of sporting activity done by survey participants (either at the Active Women project or elsewhere) had reduced from Year One to Year Two. This was especially the case among women in the target groups (women living in deprived areas and women with childcare responsibilities), whose Year Two levels of sporting activity had returned to nearly the same levels as the month before they started on the Active Women Programme.

## Drop-out rates and patterns

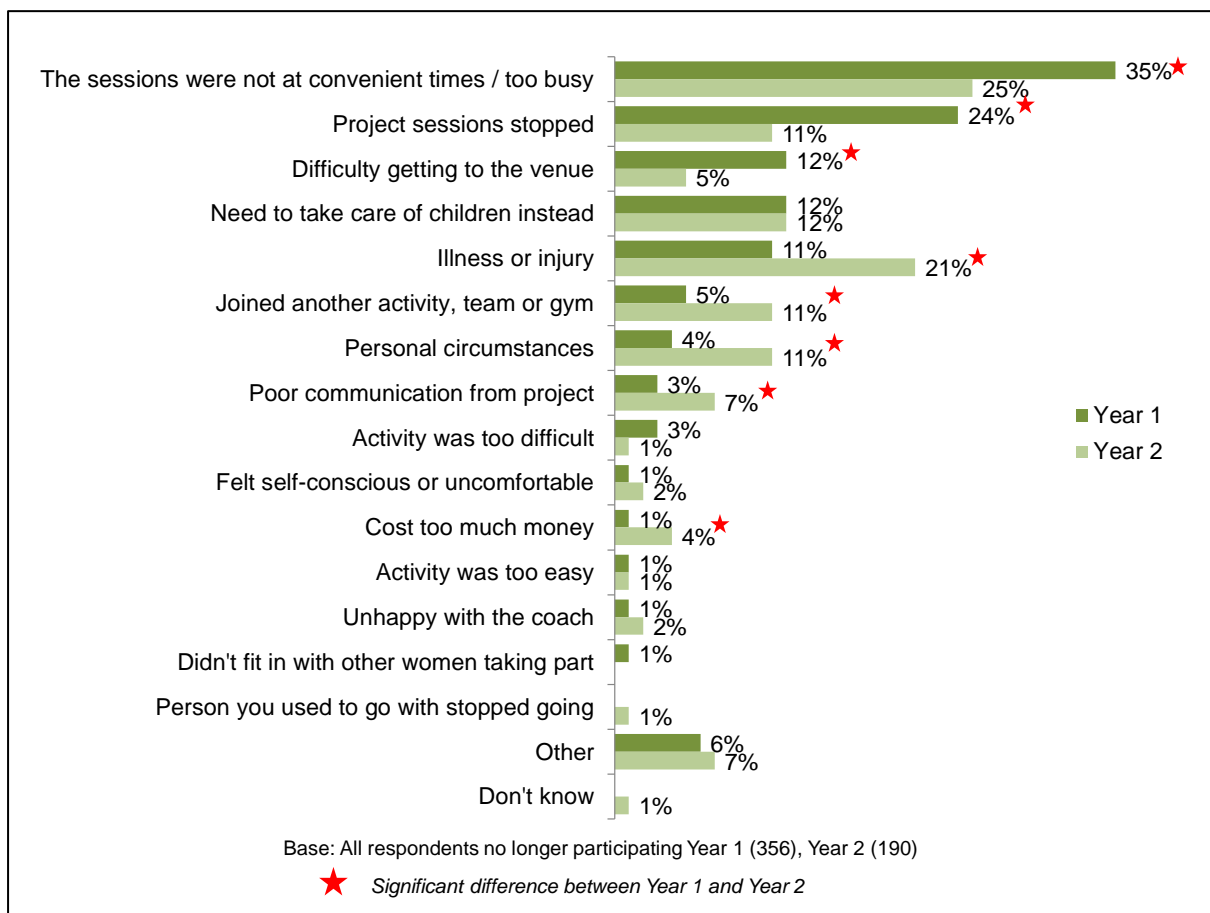
- 8.7 Around one in three (35%) participants considered themselves to still be attending Active Women sessions at the time of the survey, which is a significant decrease compared to a year ago (61% Year One). Retention varied across projects; with between 20% and nearly 60% of participants reporting that they still attend.
- 8.8 Among those still attending, around three in four (77%) had attended a session recently, in the last three months.



## Reasons for dropping out of sessions

8.9 Figure 8.1 shows respondents' reasons for no longer attending Active Women sessions.

**Figure 8.1: Reasons for no longer taking part in Active Women project sessions**



8.10 Consistent with Year One, inconvenient session times or being too busy remained one of the most cited reasons, although significantly fewer women mentioned this (35% in Year One, versus 25% in Year Two). There was also a significant decrease in the proportion of women mentioning that the project sessions had stopped (24% in Year One, versus 11% in Year Two) and difficulty in getting to the venue (12% in Year One, versus 5% in Year Two) as reasons for no longer participating. This is encouraging as it suggests that projects have made some progress in addressing factors raised in Year One. For example, some projects in Year One were too oriented towards running one-off or standalone sessions, partly because of funding. They were therefore missing opportunities to convert one-off attendance into long-term attendance. The significant decrease in the proportion citing that 'projects sessions had stopped' indicates that projects have taken steps to address this, offering more sessions on a sustained basis. Evidence from project staff supports this; sessions have become more established as projects have discovered the activities and classes that work and focused their energies on these.

8.11 Looking at some of the other factors that were reasons for dropping out, the proportion of women that cited illness or injury has increased (11% in Year One, versus 21% in Year Two),





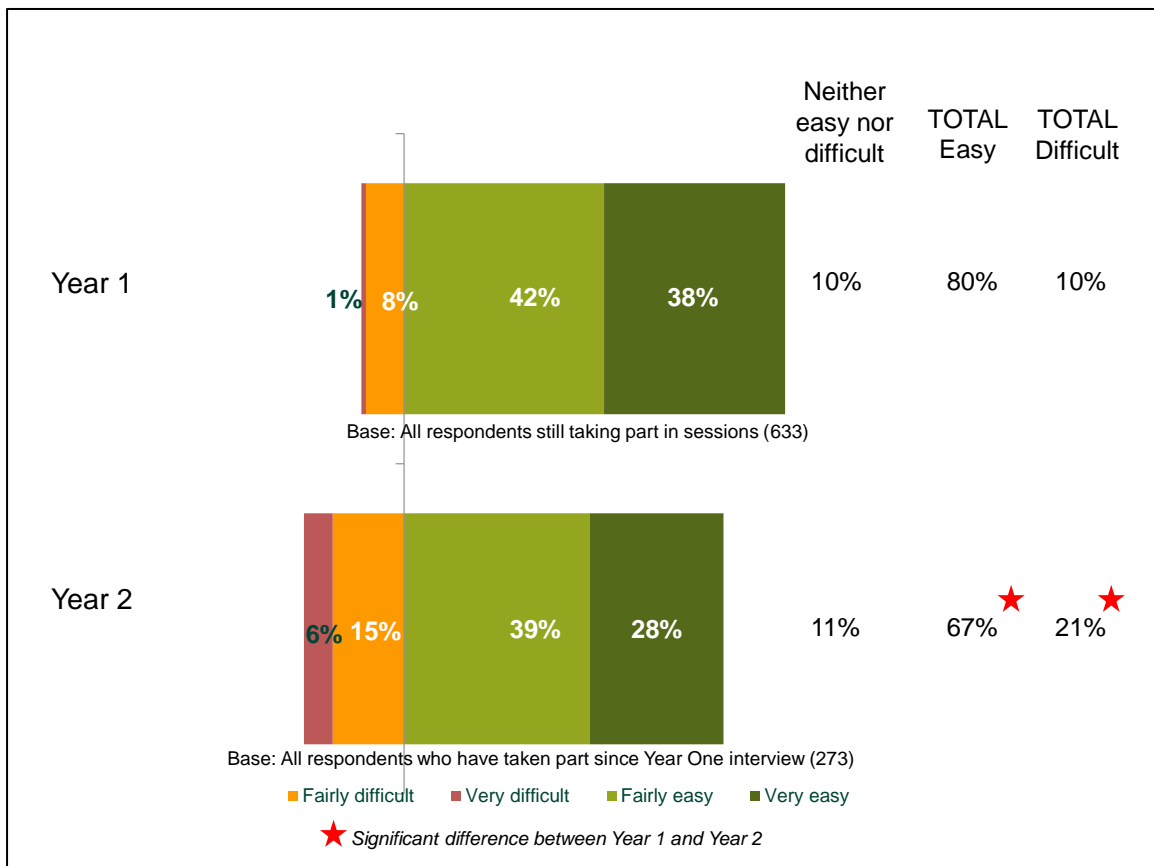
as has the proportion that mentioned personal circumstances (4% in Year One, versus 11% in Year Two), having joined another activity, team or gym (5% in Year One, versus 11% in Year Two), poor communication from the project (3% in Year One, versus 7% in Year Two) and the cost (1% in Year One, versus 4% in Year Two).

8.12 Changes to personal circumstances and illness or injury are largely outside the project's control; there is little projects can to do to mitigate increased work or family commitments, for example. However poor communication from the project and cost are issues that the project could address, and given the increased proportions citing these as reasons, they are issues that some projects perhaps need to be more attentive to. In terms of the increased proportion that cited having joined another activity, team or gym, this is encouraging; it may indicate an increased interest in sport and exercise more generally, which could be the result of having participated in Active Women project sessions. It could also indicate that projects have been signposting women on to sport and activities outside of Active Women.

### Ease in attending sessions

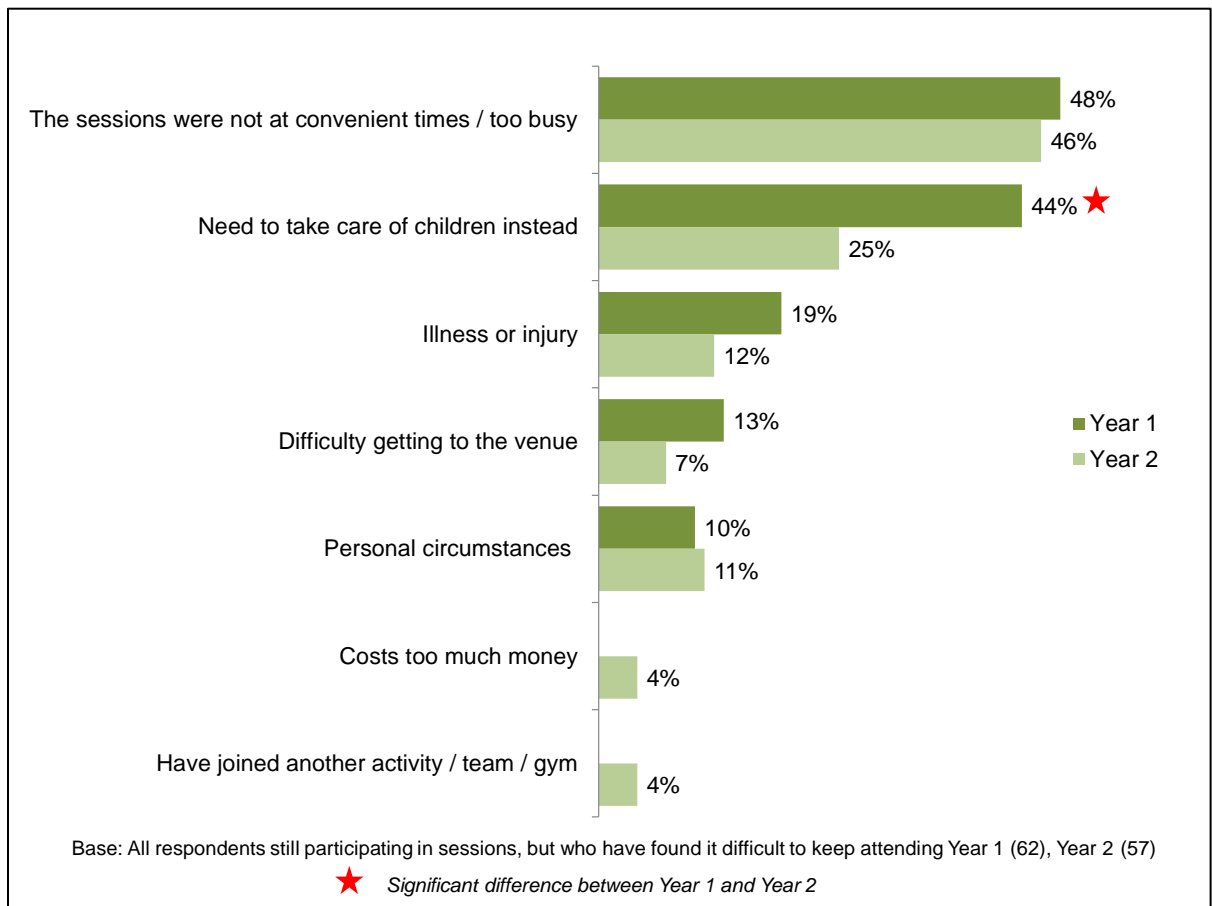
8.13 Participants who had taken part in Active Women sessions since the Year One interview were asked how easy or difficult they found it to keep attending, with the results shown in figure 8.2. Around two in three (67%) reported that they found it easy to keep attending, including 28% who stated that they found it very easy to keep attending, which is a significant decrease on the proportion that reported finding it easy to keep attending in Year One (80%). This is perhaps to be expected because personal circumstances are more likely to have changed with more time lapsed, potentially introducing factors that make attendance more difficult.

**Figure 8.2: How easy or difficult it has been to keep attending Active Women project sessions**



- 8.14 In Year One younger participants (aged 16 – 24) and Muslim women were less likely to report finding it very easy to keep attending (28% and 34% respectively compared to 38% overall) but in Year Two there were no significant differences by age or ethnicity, possibly suggesting that projects' efforts to tailor sessions to these groups have been effective.
- 8.15 There was however a difference by deprivation, with 72% of those from non-deprived areas finding it easy to keep attending compared with 58% of women from deprived areas.
- 8.16 Respondents who reported that they found it difficult to keep attending Active Women sessions were asked to explain their reasons for this. Consistent with Year One, the sessions being at inconvenient times / being too busy or needing to take care of children instead were the top two reasons, shown in figure 8.3.

**Figure 8.3: Key reasons for difficulty in attending Active Women project sessions**



- 8.17 Even though qualitative interviews indicate that projects have been making efforts to respond to women's changing needs in Year Two by frequently reviewing the timing of sessions, clearly projects cannot meet the needs of all women or cater for all changes in personal circumstances; hence inconvenient session times will inevitably make it difficult for some women to attend.
- 8.18 There has been a significant decrease in the proportion of women who mentioned needing to take care of children as a reason for having difficulty attending (44% Year One, versus 25% Year Two), although this may partly reflect that there are significantly fewer women still taking part in Active Women sessions who care for children under 16 in Year Two.



## Enablers and encouragers of attendance

8.19 This chapter has already touched on some *enablers* of attendance and the extent to which they have affected attendance in Year Two, such as session times, venue locations, cost and childcare facilities. Mention has also been made of some *encouragers* of attendance, such as communication from project staff.

8.20 The rest of this chapter will look at these enablers and encouragers of attendance in more detail. Largely drawing on qualitative interviews with participants and project staff, it will consider the extent to which projects have addressed some of the factors that were enablers and encouragers of attendance in Year One, alongside new enablers and encouragers to attendance in Year Two.

8.21 Enablers of attendance that will be considered include:

- Session times
- Childcare facilities
- Venue location
- Sessions offered on a continuous basis
- Cost

8.22 Encouragers of attendance that will be considered include:

- Contact from project staff
- Social dynamic of sessions
- Atmosphere / tone of sessions
- Project staff (coaches and volunteers)
- Incentivisation
- Progression opportunities within Active Women sessions
- Offering a variety of sessions / classes

## Enablers of attendance

### Session times

8.23 Consistent with Year One, offering sessions at suitable times has continued to be important in enabling women to keep attending sessions.

8.24 Participants are subject to different demands on their time, whether it's work or study commitments, family commitments or both, which affects when they're able to attend a session. This has been an on-going challenge for projects in Year Two; personal circumstances change, which means that what was once a convenient time may no longer be so.



*'The main problem has been a change in my work. I'm now teaching at night, so I am unable to get to the session, complete it, get home, drop-off my daughter off and then get to work in time.'*

**(Longitudinal Participant, 35 – 44 – East Durham Belles)**

- 8.25 From the qualitative interviews with project staff in Year Two it's clear that staff across projects were largely aware of the need to review the timing of sessions on a regular basis and most actively do so. However it's not possible to meet everyone's needs, particularly given that these needs change, which Think Fit staff pointed out. There are always going to be some women for whom the time isn't convenient; it is not possible to remove the timing of sessions as a barrier to attendance entirely, although it is possible to minimise it as a barrier to attendance.
- 8.26 Both project staff and participants gave examples of session times that have been working well, suggesting that projects have been taking steps to mitigate the timing of sessions as a barrier to sustained attendance, and through speaking to women and responding to their needs. Most projects have been taking account of potential childcare barriers, by running sessions after the morning drop-off or just before pick-up, for example. Work commitments have also been taken into consideration. Back to Netball project staff, for example, noted that their 6pm sessions have been working well for this group of women.

#### Childcare facilities

- 8.27 Women with child caring responsibilities are a group which the Active Women Programme was set up to actively target as women's need to take care of children is a known barrier to participation in sport.
- 8.28 In Year One the majority of projects did not offer, or offered fairly minimal, childcare facilities. This has continued to be the case in Year Two. B-inspired was one of the exceptions; they have begun to offer a mobile crèche in partnership with Sure Start.
- 8.29 Overwhelmingly, project staff cited lack of funding as the main reason for not offering childcare facilities, as was the case in Year One. Lack of childcare facilities was also identified as one of the biggest barriers to on-going participation by project staff. This view was echoed in the qualitative interviews with participants.

*'I think that is almost beyond their remit. They haven't got the money or the facilities to organise a crèche. It would take a lot of organisation'*

**(Longitudinal Participant, 35 – 44 – Breeze)**

*'Most of it, the main reason for not attending, is childcare issues and if they could help that would make a big difference for me and I suspect for quite a few people I know. It is a shame. I have hardly seen any projects that do offer childcare.'*

**(Longitudinal Participant, 35 – 44 – Think Fit)**

*'The first time I stopped was in the summer (June/July) when the kids were at home. It was holiday time. I started after the summer holiday. I stopped again in December because of holidays and work.'*

**(Longitudinal Participant, 35 – 44 – Sport4Women)**



- 8.30 Yet, a number of projects have still made efforts to adapt and meet the needs of women with child caring responsibilities. Mother and children sessions are one way around the lack of crèche facilities in leisure centres, which is a widespread problem.
- 8.31 Where childcare is offered, it is clear that this is appreciated and does contribute to retention, however it is not widespread enough to suit all women.
- 8.32 Women that need some kind of childcare, and attend a project where childcare is provided (47 women in total), were asked about their satisfaction with the childcare provided by the project. Far more women were satisfied than dissatisfied (49% vs. 4%) which is a very positive finding. However, it should also be noted that almost half of women either felt neutral (13% reported that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) or couldn't give an opinion (34% did not know), which is likely to be as where projects do provide childcare, it is often only for certain sessions or certain age groups which means that not all women with children are catered for. When asked how childcare could be improved at the Active Women project, a majority of women (60%) felt that childcare should be provided for more sessions and almost half (47%) would like to see a broader range of age groups catered for.
- 8.33 Other desired improvements included that children should be given the opportunity to take part in sport, which was mentioned by half (51%) of women: this is positive in that it means mothers being active is having an effect on them wanting to make their families active too. As discussed above, some projects have some provision for getting children involved in sport but mothers clearly want to see more of this. In addition, almost two in five (38%) would like the childcare to be less expensive, which is an issue discussed in more detail below.
- 8.34 In the context of limited funding, projects have shown some creativity in addressing the childcare barrier. However as interviews with project staff and participants indicate lack of childcare facilities on projects and child caring responsibilities have nevertheless continued to negatively affect retention in Year Two.

#### Venue location

- 8.35 In Year One, most project staff identified that an inconvenient venue can be a barrier to women attending because of the time and monetary cost. There can be a time cost if women have to travel far to get to and from the venue, and a monetary cost if it becomes necessary to drive or take public transport; it puts women at high risk of dropping out of the project. This was a particular challenge for projects with a large catchment area, such as Breeze.
- 8.36 However, during the quantitative interviews with participants in Year Two, only 5% mentioned 'difficulty in getting to the venue' as a reason for finding it difficult to keep attending.
- 8.37 Qualitative interviews with project staff indicate that as sessions have become more established in Year Two outstanding issues, such as the venue location being inconvenient, have been largely ironed out. With some exceptions, women were largely positive about the venue locations during the qualitative interviews and had little to comment on here.

*'There are enough venues nearby. Schools are the ideal venue, no more than a mile away'*

**(Longitudinal Participant, 35 – 44 – B-inspired)**

- 8.38 Drawing together findings from the interviews with project staff and participants (quantitative and qualitative), we can be reasonably confident that inconvenient venue location is having less of an impact on retention in Year Two.



Sessions offered on a continuous basis

- 8.39 In Year One, projects were trialling sessions, and exploring the activities, sports, session times and venues that do and do not work. From the qualitative interviews with project staff, it was clear that this has helped projects to better meet participant needs in Year Two.

*'We're interacting with different types of women on each of the sites. We don't have a one-size-fits all model or programme. Our expertise is the knowhow about how to tailor our classes. It's more of a needs led approach, putting something on after having spoken to the women.'*

**(Project Lead – Think Fit)**

- 8.40 However projects have lost participants as a result of stopping and starting project sessions. In Year One 24% of participants mentioned the project sessions stopping as a reason for no longer attending and, although this has fallen significantly to 11% in Year Two (Figure 8.2), this is something projects need to continue to address. It is not just a case of women dropping out when project sessions stop altogether, but of women dropping out when there are gaps between blocks of sessions. Back to Netball is one project that has addressed this latter need, offering sessions throughout the year, with no gaps between blocks. But it was not evident from the qualitative interviews with staff and participants that many projects have addressed this.

- 8.41 In order to improve retention in Year Three, projects need to give greater consideration to offering sessions on an on-going basis. At the very least, where there are gaps, projects need to communicate when the sessions re-start or signpost women to other opportunities.

Cost

- 8.42 As in Year One, projects have continued to focus on keeping the cost of a session low, in recognition that cost can be a big barrier to participation for a lot of women. For women with child caring responsibilities, affordability is closely linked to having to pay for activities for their children or a crèche.

*'If I pay £2 that's okay, but not £4 like I pay for my son. We all probably have three or four children going on activities. I pay for my children to go to scouts, which is £2 each and pay too for the girls and boys brigade, which is £2 each.'*

**(Longitudinal Participant, 35 – 44 – B-inspired)**

*'As I have two young children it was more about the costs of childcare as this gets expensive. Because my youngest has now turned two, the crèche will look after her for 2 hours rather than one so it's a bit better now.'*

**(Longitudinal Participant, 25 – 34 – Think Fit)**

- 8.43 In spite of widespread recognition from projects about the importance of affordability, quantitative interviews with participants highlights that number of women citing cost as a reason for no longer attending has remained fairly low (1% Year One, versus 4% Year Two). How best to price sessions can be a challenge, particularly as the affordability of a session can change with personal circumstances, such as switching from full-time to part-time working, or going back to study.



- 8.44 Clearly it is important for projects to review their pricing structure on an on-going basis and most staff across projects mentioned doing so.
- 8.45 The real issue with cost is arguably the cost of childcare i.e. having to pay for childcare in addition to the session price. From the in-depth interviews it is apparent that it is the cost of childcare, rather the cost of sessions, which is most negatively impacting on retention in Year Two.

### Encouragers of attendance

#### Contact from project staff

- 8.46 Maintaining contact with participants is an important way of encouraging women to keep attending. On a practical level, contact from staff – whether via social media, email, telephone or face-to-face – keeps women up-to-date and informed about upcoming opportunities on the project.
- 8.47 On a more personal level, contact from staff can encourage women to feel valued on a project, part of a community, and therefore more committed to attending.

*'It does feel like there is a sense of community amongst the Breeze networks and a sense of belonging. That is evident in the way they talk about Breeze and constantly post pictures up – it is a community ... a sense of belonging. As it builds and develops there will be a lot of loyalty towards Breeze.'*

**(Marketing and Communications executive – Breeze)**

- 8.48 Quantitative interviews with participants indicate that women were largely satisfied with the level of contact they received from project staff as when asked how the project could be improved, only 3% mentioned that staff could improve communication with participants (consistent with 4% in Year One).
- 8.49 Qualitative interviews with participants and project staff, however, reveal a more complex picture. It is helpful to think of contact from project staff in five parts – before attending a session, after attending a session, on-going contact and updates, contact when a session has been missed and contact when they haven't attended for a sustained period of time. While the majority of participants were satisfied with the contact from their project prior to attending a session, fewer women were satisfied with the on-going and follow-up contact provided and projects are losing some participants as a result of this.
- 8.50 Evidently the contact process between staff and participants is varied and resource intensive. Therefore it is perhaps not surprising to still find gaps in the communications participants receive from projects in Year Two.
- 8.51 However, most projects have expanded the communications they have with participants in Year Two. Use of social media platforms and websites in particular, have been on the rise and have become more established.

*'In general, the website is used as the focal point for everyone to send information to and we've have produced a flyer that backs it up. It is quite connected the way it works.'*

**(Team Leader – B-inspired)**





- 8.52 Project staff recognised that social media platforms are a good way of keeping women in the loop about upcoming events and have the added benefit of not being particularly resource intensive. There is slight concern, however, that too many communications from projects in Year Two have been IT oriented; emails, social media platforms and websites all rely on women having good internet access and being IT savvy. While the internet is an efficient and effective way of communicating with participants, it discriminates against those with less IT access.
- 8.53 Fortunately, not all efforts have been focused on social media or websites. East Durham Belles, for example, intends to send an 'I miss you' postcard to those who haven't attended for a while.
- 8.54 These findings suggest that projects have been taking a variety of positive steps towards expanding their communications with participants, improving retention. It will be important to continue to offer a mix of communication channels to stand the best chance of reaching all participants, no matter what their level of IT literacy.

#### Social dynamic of sessions

- 8.55 In Year One all projects recognised the importance of the sessions being fun and social as an encourager of attendance. Feedback from the quantitative and qualitative research with participants confirms that this is still the case in Year Two.
- 8.56 The overwhelming majority of participants have had fun as a result of taking part in Active Women project sessions (98% Year One, 97% Year Two). The majority have also made new friends (85% Year One, 76% Year Two) and although significantly fewer respondents mentioned this in Year Two compared to Year One, this may have been because they made their new friends in Year One.

*'The people are friendly so that makes me want to come more. If they were not friendly, I would be put off'*

**(New participant, 16 – 24 – Sport4Women)**

- 8.57 It would seem that projects have continued to do well in setting a fun and social tone during project sessions. Qualitative interviews with participants and project staff suggest that projects have been doing well at providing opportunities for women to socialise and make new friends.

*'A lot of ladies like to meet up and sit and have a chat before they start ... the thing with the Belles is it is all ages so no one is competing against each other and everyone is so friendly.'*

**(Volunteer – East Durham Belles)**

- 8.58 There was a suggestion in Year One that projects could do more to actively encourage women to branch out of existing friendship groups; often women stop attending when their friends do. However it is not apparent from the qualitative interviews that this has notably affected retention in Year Two.

#### Atmosphere / tone of sessions

- 8.59 Understanding the profile and needs of participants is important for setting the right tone during a session and tailoring the activities appropriately. Women are unlikely to come back if they feel uncomfortable or out of place. Consistent with Year One, 88% of participants surveyed agreed that the Active Women sessions are aimed at people like them (89% Year



One), while only 2% mentioned feeling self-conscious or uncomfortable in some way as a reason for no longer attending (1% Year One).

- 8.60 Evidence from the qualitative research also indicates that projects have carried on with the good start they made in Year One, taking steps to set a positive atmosphere and tone during the sessions and paying particular attention to women not traditionally engaged with sport.

*'We just try and make sure women feel included and are enjoying themselves. We don't want women to feel that if they can't do something then they can't be involved. In certain cases we'll adapt things and that works well.'*

**(Volunteer – Think Fit)**

*'One lady fell over the other day and hurt her ankle and it was her first time, and afterwards all the other women were telling her about all the times they had fallen over, and saying 'come back, come back' and not to worry ... things like that have more impact on retention than anything we could do.'*

**(Project Lead – Sport4Women)**

#### Project staff (coaches and volunteers)

- 8.61 The Year One research highlighted the importance of project coaches to continuing participation. A coach with a friendly and welcoming attitude can put a nervous or shy participant at ease, making them more likely to return in future, and in the long-run, facilitate trust between project staff and participants. Staff across projects recognised the importance of these soft skills in setting the right tone during a session. Staff were also highly rated by participants in terms of being friendly and welcoming (96% in Years One and Two). This sentiment was mirrored in the qualitative interviews with participants.
- 8.62 A positive development in Year Two has been that the volunteer base across many projects has expanded. This has improved the overall staff-to-participant ratio, making it easier for projects to establish the friendly and welcoming environment that is so important in encouraging women to keep coming back.

*'It's very much a partnership between coaches and volunteers. That team work has helped us to create an environment that women feel comfortable in. They can see that it's a friendly environment. The volunteer I work with is very good at learning the women's names, so straight away it helps everyone feel welcome.'*

**(Full-time Development Coach – Think Fit)**

- 8.63 Many volunteers were once participants themselves, making them invaluable in encouraging trust, friendship and rapport between staff and participants on projects; participants are more easily able to identify with them. Volunteers have also provided a unique set of skills, for example at Think Fit where volunteers have been helping with translation for women who do not have English as their first language.

#### Incentives

- 8.64 Incentives can be a useful tool for encouraging participant and volunteer engagement. It is a way of making women feel valued and it can give them a sense of belonging, in turn making them more likely to keep attending.



- 8.65 Participants surveyed in Year Two were asked whether particular items or incentives would affect their attendance. Thirty-nine percent responded that free T-shirts or hoodies would make them more likely to attend; a similar proportion (40%) would be more likely to attend if they were offered small gifts, such as free water bottles or wrist bands, while two in three participants (67%) would be more likely to attend if they could pay half-price for the session if they bring a friend along. However, loyalty cards proved to be the greatest incentive; 78% would be more likely to attend if there was a loyalty card, whereby you get a sports session free if you attend a certain number of sessions.
- 8.66 In Year One project staff and participants rarely mentioned incentives during their qualitative interviews. Projects were in the early stages of delivery, so there had been little opportunity to put incentive structures in place. However the landscape has changed somewhat, as projects have become more established and more projects have begun to offer incentives.
- 8.67 Breeze offers a variety of incentives, from a branded kit for Champions and participants, to a prize draw competition. Project staff felt that the branded kits had been important in providing women with a sense of belonging. It has also created brand awareness; participants wearing the kit have been approached by women asking how they can take part.

*'The Breeze jackets – a genius idea ... if you see a group of women and think I would love to do that and you are a complete beginner you wouldn't know where to start. With the jackets having Breezebikerides.com you can go home and look it up and see what Breeze is about.'*

**(Regional Co-ordinator – Breeze)**

*'If the Champions attended eight rides from May to September then they had a choice of a free gift and that was really popular. We are also doing a photo competition. I mentioned themed rides, so if they upload a photo, the best one wins a prize, incentives are key.'*

**(Support Officer – Breeze)**

- 8.68 B-inspired is another project that has begun to use kit, in their case T-shirts, as an incentive. They are also looking into introducing a leisure card that offers women a 10% discount off activities. Think Fit has also been doing more in terms of offering goodies or freebies every few weeks, at the end of a block of sessions, to encourage women to attend the next block.

*'A mystery shopper for the leisure centre came to my spin class...we had our purple Belles T-shirts on and she asked about the T-shirts. It was the girls (participants) who said it was great. They told her what we were about.'*

**(Coach – East Durham Belles)**

#### Progression opportunities within Active Women sessions

- 8.69 Providing progression opportunities has been increasingly important in Year Two as a way of maintaining participant engagement. From qualitative interviews with participants it was clear that most women have experienced increased confidence and interest in sport and exercise as a result of attending Active Women project sessions, in turn prompting an interest in new sporting opportunities and challenges.



*'I'd like to volunteer and eventually become a coach and then move into it more competitively. It would be good to volunteer and be able to help others out. It would encourage me to attend more often.'*

**(New participant, 16 – 24 – B-inspired)**

- 8.70 For some women it is a case of having more challenging classes available. Qualitative interviews with project staff indicated that most projects have tried to offer classes for a variety of levels. Back to Netball, for example, has introduced 'Next Step' sessions, which are more focused on tactics, allowing beginners to progress. Breeze participants have also expressed an interest in doing more challenging and difficult rides and the project has responded to this need.

*'Where they might start with five to ten miles, they then really want to go a lot longer at a quicker pace than we first thought. We have spoken to Champions ... we have identified there is a bigger demand for longer rides and have changed the volunteer agreements for new Champions so 50% of their rides are for beginners, the other 50% can go those longer distances.'*

**(Support Officer – Breeze)**

- 8.71 Across projects there also appears to be an appetite for competitions. All participants surveyed were asked about their interest in competitive opportunities; 62% wanted the opportunity to have friendly competitions within sessions, while a similar proportion (63%) wanted the chance to have friendly competitions with women or girls of a similar standard from other sessions. Qualitative interviews with participants and project staff support this finding.

*'Bringing that competitive element in for those who want it helps retention. The noise levels and laughter are incredible. They're now starting the regular leagues, which will help those women who want a bit more and have got the bug.'*

**(Bristol partner – Back to Netball)**

- 8.72 One particular example of a successful competition was the "Belle-lympics" run by East Durham Belles to mark the 2012 London Games. This was successful in terms of the engagement and enthusiasm from volunteers (14 volunteers completed the Sports Makers course to help them develop the skills they would need to plan and deliver the Olympic themed event) as well as in terms of turnout: 180 ladies and their families attended the event which included an opening ceremony, games, closing ceremony and medal presentation by a local torch bearer.

- 8.73 In terms of volunteering and training opportunities, it was clear from the qualitative interviews that this was not of interest to all participants. Work or family commitments rule this out as a possibility for some women.

*'The coach will bring stuff up all the time, like the other day she mentioned netball training or coaching. I think it was a six week course...quite a few were interested in opportunities outside the class, maybe I would if I had the time. At the moment I'm working full-time and studying on Saturdays.'*

**(Longitudinal participant, 45 – 54 – Think Fit)**

- 8.74 But for some highly engaged participants without these ties, volunteering and further training is of interest. It has been a tool for encouraging attendance in the long-term and acts to boost women's confidence and give them extra skills.



*'Becoming a Champion has given me a lot of confidence...I have organised people and to do that you have to have organisational skills and go onto the computer to upload the route, keep up-to-date with health and safety and go on a cycle maintenance course.'*

**(Longitudinal participant, 35 – 44 – Breeze)**

Offering a variety of sessions / classes

- 8.75 In a similar vein to the importance of providing progression opportunities, offering a variety of sessions and classes is a useful tool for encouraging attendance as it keeps the sessions fresh and the women engaged. Increased partnership working across projects has given projects the resources for this.

*'We are adding walks to the programme of activities, collaborating with the Rambler's Association and Wapping Women's Centre to get women walking around their own communities and hopefully getting them to walk to the leisure centre too. We are also getting cricket off the ground. The Cricket Board is really keen to push Muslim Women's cricket...We are also looking at Hockey. England Hockey are trying to change the middle-class image of Hockey and make it more accessible so we'll be trialling that.'*

**(Project Lead – Sport4Women)**

*'Working with other projects at the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation has increased the diversity of what we're able to offer. The project can reach more people through the bigger range of activities that we're able to provide.'*

**(Full-time Development Coach – Think Fit)**

- 8.76 From the qualitative interviews with project staff it was also evident that projects have now developed sound knowledge of the sessions that work and do not work. From some projects retention has improved because there is a better fit between what women are interested in and what is on offer.

*'Our retention is getting better. I think that it's because there are more sessions running, so there are more opportunities for retention. And by dropping certain sports and implementing other activities, it has made it more appealing to women.'*

**(Project Lead – B-inspired)**



### Individual stories highlighting retention issues:

8.77 The following portraits tell the story of some women's experiences of the Active Women project, illustrating issues surrounding retention.

#### PARTICIPANT STORY: "MARIA"

Maria, aged 45 – 54, started attending Think Fit sessions in September 2011 and has attended a one hour multi-sports session once a week since then, aside from the occasional missed session due to illness or holiday.

Maria has been encouraged by project staff to try out new activities, such as swimming and other Think Fit sessions, such as jogging, but Think Fit's multi-sports session has appealed the most. She has done this alongside walking and cycling, which are not part of the Think Fit programme.

Maria is working full-time and training to be a youth worker, but has found it easy to continue attending sessions because her son is older, so she doesn't have any child caring responsibilities, and she lives and works locally. The sessions are convenient and suit her needs.

*My son is older now so he doesn't need childcare anymore so I have more freedom...It is really easy for me because I live and work locally really.*

The friendships she has developed with staff and other women taking part have also encouraged her to keep attending, while the competitive element of some of the multi-sports sessions is something that Maria has enjoyed in Year Two and she felt it has helped her to progress.

*You get to know the girls and they are like your second family ... you know if something was to happen, someone would be there to help you out.*

*We have matches as well where we will have two teams playing and whoever wins stays on, so it has become a lot more competitive, which makes you a lot fitter because you are running around more.*

Think Fit staff have made Maria aware of volunteering and associated training opportunities, which Maria would be interested in if she had the time.



### **PARTICIPANT STORY: “BECKY”**

Becky, aged 35 – 44, started attending Breeze sessions in December 2011 and has only missed sessions due to bad weather.

In Year Two Becky explored volunteering opportunities on Breeze, becoming a Breeze Champion. It was speaking to another Breeze Champion on the project that encouraged her to take this step. She has been impressed with the training provided.

*To be able to lead, you need a first aid certificate and Breeze was really good. They sent me an email with all the dates and places applicable around Rotherham, Chesterfield and Sheffield...and they paid £25 towards it, the course was only £5.*

Becky has enjoyed being a Breeze Champion and the associated improvements in her fitness and confidence; she has led six rides already. Alongside being a Breeze Champion, Becky cycles for two hours each week, which is more than last year and more than before taking part in Breeze, partly because she has been fitter and also because there have been more sessions running.

*I have been doing back to back sessions on the same day. One ride around a park and the hour after that we have gone on the road. Before I wouldn't have actually done two lots in a day – two different rides.*

Although Becky has been very involved with Breeze, family commitments have meant that she can't attend rides during the week. She has tried some of the rides where she can take children, but has found them less enjoyable because the rides are less challenging and she worries about looking after the children.

*I have taken my daughter out, but those rides are a bit restrictive because you are doing a different type of ride and it is more worrying because have children to look after...It is almost like you haven't had a physical workout but more of a mental workout.*





## 9 Impact of the Active Women Programme: Year Two Findings

### Summary

The amount of sporting activity engaged in by participants has dropped since Year One, however participants are still doing more activity at Year Two than in the month before they got involved in Active Women. Prior to joining their Active Women project, women were doing an average of 7.0 sporting sessions per month. This rose to 10.6 at the time of the Year One survey before falling to 8.7 at Year Two.

Just under a half (46%) of participants had done more sport in the previous month than they had done before their involvement with an Active Women project. This compares to 61% from Year One (**gross impact**). Of this 46%:

- 22% were not doing any sport before Active Women but had done so in the month prior to their Year Two interview.
- 24% had done sport before Active Women and increased the frequency of activity since.

Nearly one in three (28%) women felt that they would not have done any sport without Active Women, while a further half (49%) would have done less sport, indicating that the majority of women feel that the introduction of the Active Woman Programme has impacted on their activity levels. Only one fifth of women (21%) stated that they would have done “at least as much sport or activity anyway” (**deadweight**)

Nearly two-fifths (38%) of all participants reported that both their activity levels rose and, crucially, that without Active Women they would have done less, or no sport (**net impact**).

Women from the target groups (especially those living in deprived areas) were more likely to have seen the amount of sporting activity decline from Year One compared to women not in the target groups, indicating the importance of maintaining engagement with the target groups once they have started on the Active Women Programme. Indeed, these women were significantly closer to their levels of activity before starting Active Women sessions. Looking at the average number of sporting sessions women living in deprived areas participated in per month, this started at 6.7 in the month before they joined their Active Women project, rising to 10.5 at Year One before dropping to 7.2 at Year Two.

Over four in five women (85%) had recommended their project or spoken about enjoying the sessions to someone else while three in five (61%) had brought a friend or family member along to a session (**multiplier effects**).

Participants were slightly less positive about the **softer impacts** (such as having fun or feeling better about themselves) of their Active Women sessions compared to Year One, although this can be explained by the higher proportion that were no longer participating in Active Women sessions at Year Two.



## Introduction

- 9.1 A key objective of the evaluation is to estimate the impact of the Active Women Programme in terms of participant behaviour and experiences. Critically this is in terms of whether it leads to an increase in sporting activity among women but also whether the Programme impacts on women's lives more broadly in terms of their health, confidence and self-esteem. It also looks to explore knock-on effects such as encouraging others to take part in sport.
- 9.2 To establish the *net* impact of the Active Women Programme, it is necessary to establish the counterfactual, i.e. to answer the question:

*What would have happened had the Active Women programme not been introduced? And therefore what difference did it make?*

- 9.3 The longitudinal nature of the survey has allowed an analysis of longer-term impacts which can evaluate the sustainability of behaviour change.

9.4 This chapter will therefore cover:

- To what extent women have increased how often they take part in sport since attending an Active Women project (and to what extent any increase in sporting participation would have happened without the Active Women Programme)
- To what extent women have felt physical, social or psychological benefits from their participation in sport
- To what extent any positive impact of participation has extended to friends, family or the wider community
- How likely it seems that Active Women projects will lead to sustained behaviour change amongst participants

## Gross impact – frequency of sporting activity

- 9.5 The 'gross' impact of the Active Women Programme is (the sum of) all reported increases in participation. We refer to gross impact as the frequency of activity before participation at an Active Women project compared to activity in the month preceding the Year Two survey<sup>6</sup>. The figures for activity since involvement with Active Women therefore include all sport, whether or not it is delivered by an Active Women project (on the basis that taking part in Active Women may have encouraged women to take part in more sport in general).
- 9.6 Figures from the Year One report illustrated that a relatively high proportion of participants had fewer barriers to participation in sport than may have been anticipated at the time that funding was awarded. These figures showed that before their involvement with Active Women, 28% of women were doing sporting activity three or more times a week, 13% twice a week, 15% once a week, 9% less often and 34% not at all.

<sup>6</sup> Participants were asked which sport or activities they had done in the month prior to the interview. For each sport mentioned at each stage, participants were then asked how often they had taken part in it during the timeframe in question. Comparing the information given at this stage and information gathered from the Year 1 interview shows how participants' overall sporting activity had changed since their involvement with the Active Women Programme and gives us an estimate for the gross impact of the Programme. The activity of walking was excluded from this part of the analysis, in line with Sport England's sport indicators.



9.7 In the month before the Year Two survey occurred, nearly four in ten women (37%) were doing sporting activity three or more times a week, 14% twice a week, 11% once a week, 11% less often and 27% not at all. While this represents an increase in activity since before involvement with Active Women, it also shows a decline from Year One results, as Figure 9.1 shows.

**Figure 9.1: Frequency of activity before starting Active Women, in Year One and Year Two**



9.8 Another way of highlighting this trend is to assess the average number of sporting activities women were doing per month. This shows that while women participated in an average number of 7.0 sporting activities in the month before joining their Active Women project, this rose to 10.6 at the Year One survey, before falling to 8.7 at the Year Two survey.

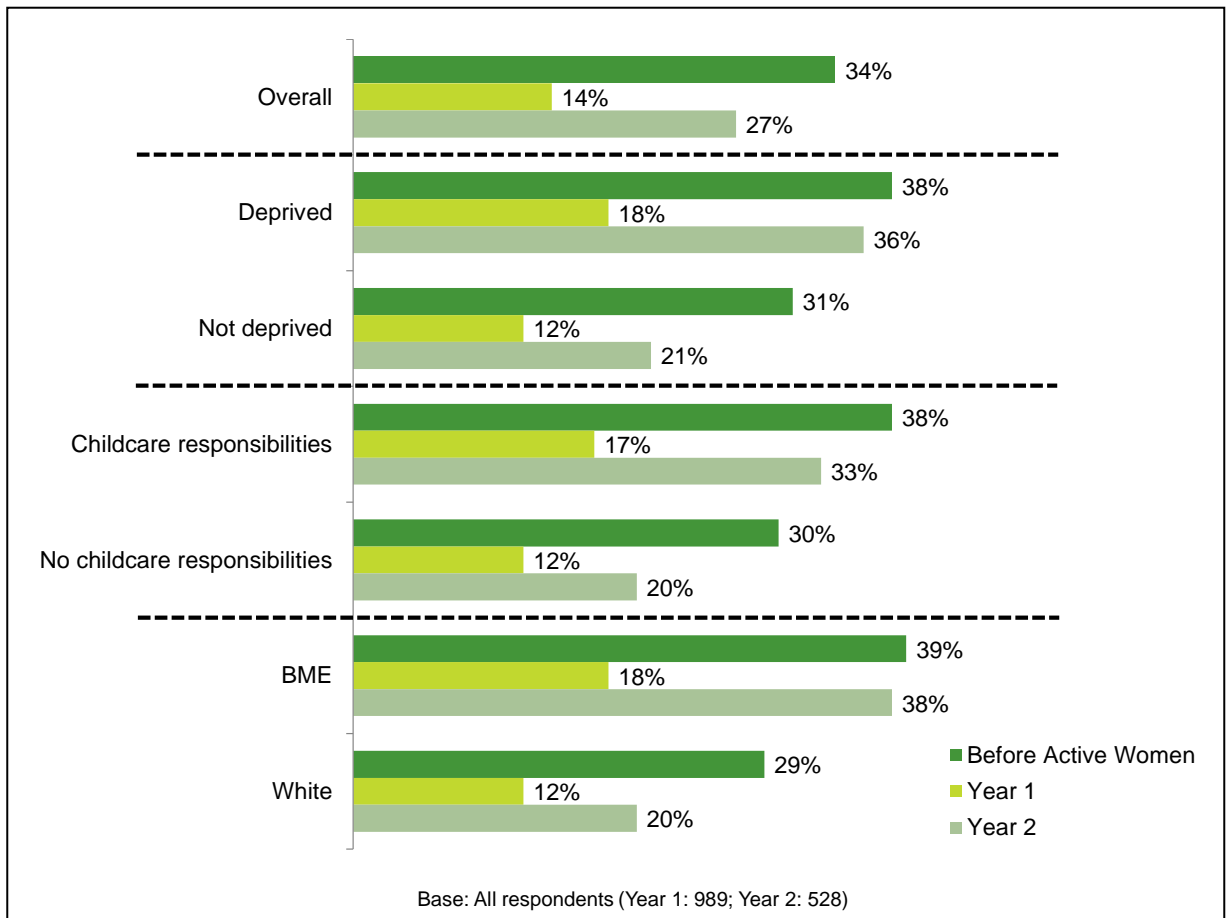
9.9 This drop off in sporting activity from Year One to Year Two appeared more prominently in the two main target groups, those women living in deprived areas and those with childcare responsibilities, highlighting that not only are these participant types less likely to participate in sporting activity from the outset, they are also less likely to maintain a level of sporting activity once they have been engaged. For example, nearly two-fifths (38%) of women living in deprived areas were doing no sporting activity in the month before joining Active Women. The proportion doing no activity was much lower at the Year One survey (18%) but then rose again to 36% at Year Two. Meanwhile, those women not living in deprived areas were far less likely to have returned to their level of sporting activity prior to joining an Active Women Programme (31% doing no activity before, 12% at Year One and only 21% at Year Two).



9.10 Examining the average amount of sporting activity done per month across the three years by participants from target groups tells a similar story. Participants with childcare responsibilities did an average of 6.1 sporting activities in the month before joining the Active Women Programme; this rose to 9.5 at Year One before dropping to 7.4 at Year Two. The contrasts were even greater among participants living in deprived areas: starting at 6.7, this then rose to 10.5 sporting activities per month at Year One before falling away to 7.2 at Year Two.

9.11 Figure 9.2 highlights the disparity by subgroup, looking at the proportions not engaged in any sporting activity across the three years. The figure demonstrates that those in target groups (including women from BME communities) are much closer to their level of activity before Active Women at the Year Two point than at Year One.

**Figure 9.2: Comparison of participants doing no sporting activity by demographic**



9.12 It is interesting to note the progression of those participants who weren't engaged in any sport prior to Active Women, as shown in Table 9.1.



**Table 9.1: Progression of participants not engaged in any sporting activity prior to joining Act**

	Three times a week	Twice a week	Once a week	Less often	None
<i>Base – All respondents not doing any sporting activity before joining Active Women (Year One: 332; Year Two: 189)</i>					
	%	%	%	%	%
Before Active Women	-	-	-	-	100
Year One	25	18	20	14	23
Year Two	23	14	12	14	38

9.13 While around a quarter appear to be consistently doing sporting activity sessions at least three times a week since they joined an Active Women project, nearly four in ten (38%) have returned to doing no activity at all. Positively however, this still leaves a healthy proportion (62%) of participants who were not engaged in sporting activity before Active Women, who are now taking part.

9.14 Figures were markedly different between those who still participated in Active Women projects and those who did not, with half (50%) of those who were still participating reporting that they had done sporting activity three or more times a week in the month before the survey compared to 30% who no longer took part.

9.15 This is a strong indication that continued attendance at Active Women sessions is crucial for many to ensure engagement in sporting activity. One of the aims of the Active Women Programme is to signpost participants on to alternative sporting sessions, but these figures suggest that a high proportion of participants who leave the Active Women Programme will see their level of activity reduce subsequently.

### Gross impact –comparison of activity levels

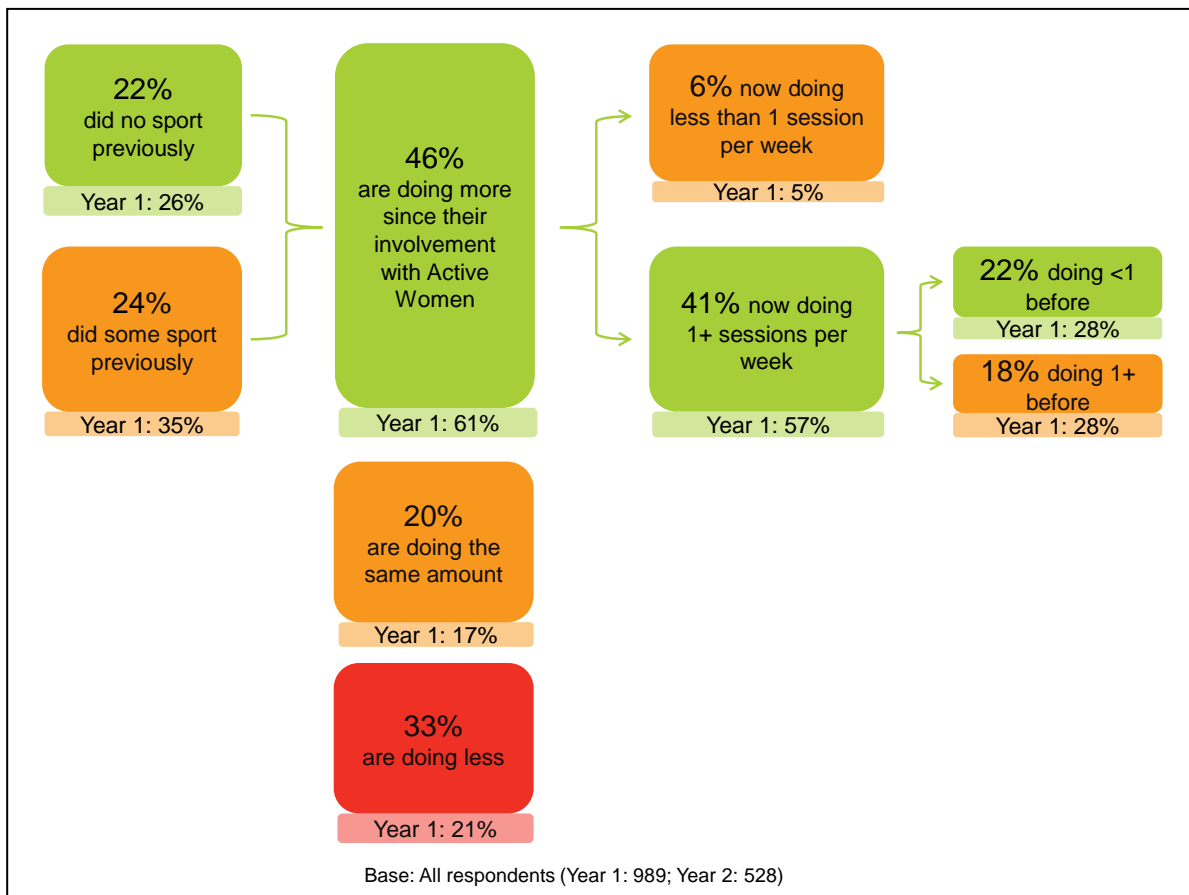
9.16 Just under a half (46%) of participants had done more sport in the previous month than they had done before their involvement with an Active Women project. This compares to 20% who were doing about the same and 33% who were doing less. The proportion doing more sport is lower than last year’s figure (61%), as one would expect given the decline in sporting activity moving into Year Two.



- 9.17 Participants from target groups were less likely to be doing more activity in Year Two, compared to those in the non-target groups (43% vs. 54%). There were, however, no significant differences between these groups at Year One. This shows that women from deprived areas or with child caring responsibilities are more likely to see their level of activity drop off over a longer period of time. It could therefore be suggested that the impact of the Active Women projects are more long-lasting among the non-target groups than they are among the target groups, indicating the importance of maintaining engagement with the target groups once they have got involved in Active Women sessions.
- 9.18 Of some concern is the 33% of participants doing less activity since the beginning of the Active Women programme.
- 9.19 Looking further into the 46% of women who had done more sport in the previous month than they had done before their involvement with an Active Women project:
- 22% were not doing any sport before Active Women but had done so in the month prior to their Year Two interview.
  - 24% had done sport before Active Women and increased the frequency of activity since.
- 9.20 There were few differences by subgroup here, although those not in the target groups were more likely to have done some activity in the month before participating in Active Women and increased this activity further (34% vs. 19% of target group).
- 9.21 As Sport England are focussed on women participating in at least four sessions of sport every 28 days (i.e. roughly once a week), it is also of interest whether women who had increased their levels of sporting activity since being involved with Active Women had reached this threshold. As has been shown, just under half (46%) were doing more activity since becoming involved with their Active Women project. Splitting this group further shows that:
- Only a minority (6%) of women were doing more activity than they had been previously but still less than one session per week.
  - Just over two-fifths (41%) of women were doing at least one activity session per week:
    - Over one in five (22%) women were previously doing less than one session per week but reached this level of frequency following their involvement with Active Women;
    - A further one-fifth (18%) of women had already been doing at least one session per week but increased this frequency further.
- 9.22 Figure 9.3 shows a summary of the impact which the Active Women Programme has had on participants.



**Figure 9.3: Summary of the gross impact of the Active Women Programme**



### Net impact

- 9.23 The net impact of the Programme can be assessed by considering how much sport women feel they would have taken part in if it did not exist. This differs from the gross impact as it asks women to consider to what extent the Active Women project they attended was directly responsible for their participation levels and excludes increases in activity which may have happened anyway.
- 9.24 Year Two findings were very similar to Year One, suggesting that the perception of the impact of the Active Women Programme has not changed over time. Nearly one in three (28%) women felt that they would not have done any sport without Active Women, while a further half (49%) would have done less sport, indicating that the majority of women feel that the project they attend has impacted on their activity levels. Only one-fifth (21%) of women stated that they would have done “at least as much sport or activity anyway”. This is the deadweight of the Active Women Programme.

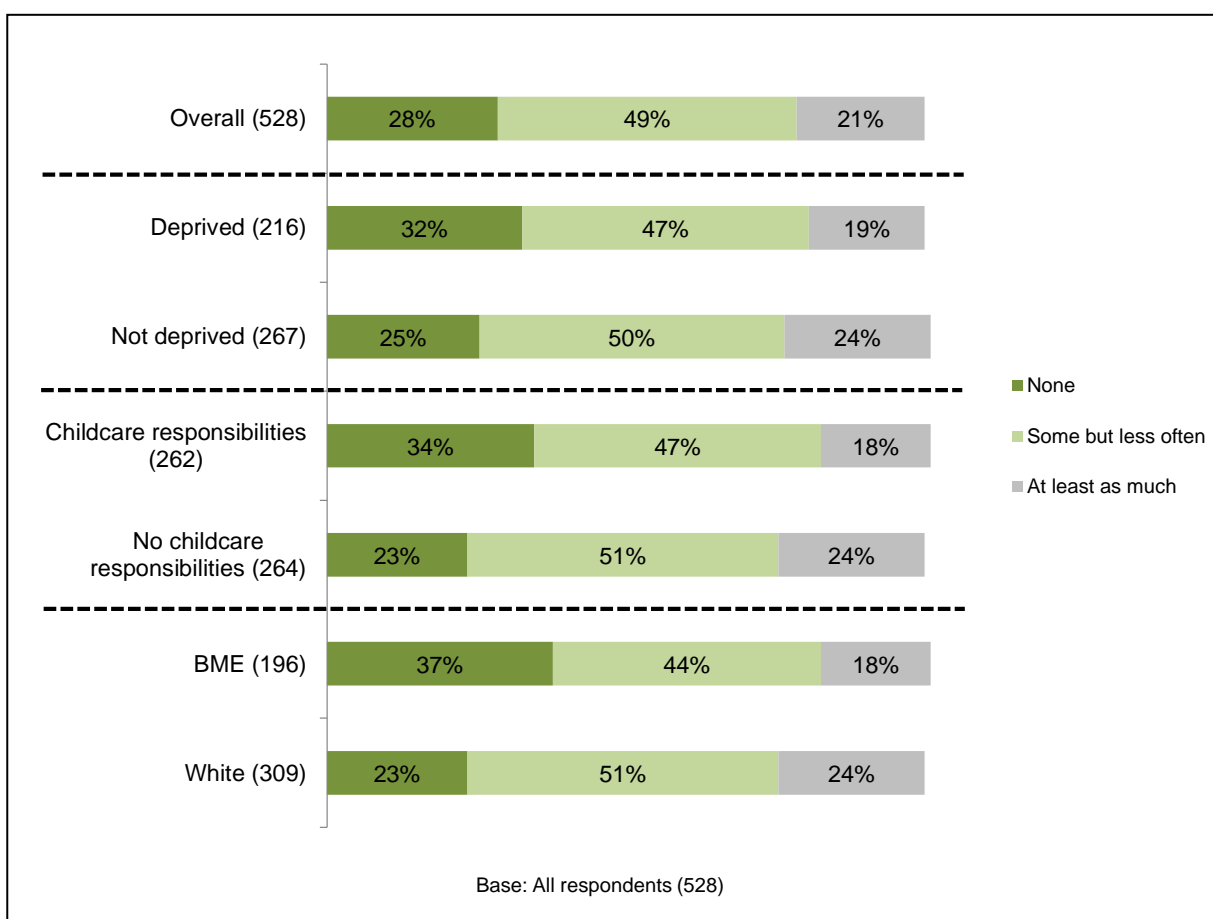




9.25 Positively, around half (53%) of participants who did not take part in any sporting activity in the month prior to starting Active Women sessions reported they probably wouldn't have done any sport without the Programme, once again confirming the importance of the Programme in engaging women not previously involved in sporting activity. That said, around two-fifths (41%) of these particular participants are now no longer engaged in sporting activity, once again highlighting the difficulty found by Active Women projects of driving longer-term sustained behavioural change.

9.26 Women from the target groups (deprived and / or with childcare responsibilities) were more likely to report that without the Active Women Programme they probably wouldn't have done any sport or activity. The difference was slightly greater among participants with childcare responsibilities (34% vs. 23% without childcare responsibilities) than participants living in deprived areas (32% vs. 25%) but this represented minimal change from Year One results. There was a larger difference by ethnicity, with 37% of participants from ethnic minority backgrounds reporting they would have done no sporting activity without Active Women compared to 23% of white participants. Figure 9.4 illustrates these differences by demographic.

**Figure 9.4: Comparative amount of sport participants would do if they had not got involved in Active Women by demographic**



9.27 Of those participants who are *now doing more activity* compared to the month before they first got involved in Active Women sessions (the 46% as shown in Figure 9.4), one-third (32%) reported that they probably wouldn't have done any sport or activity were it not for Active



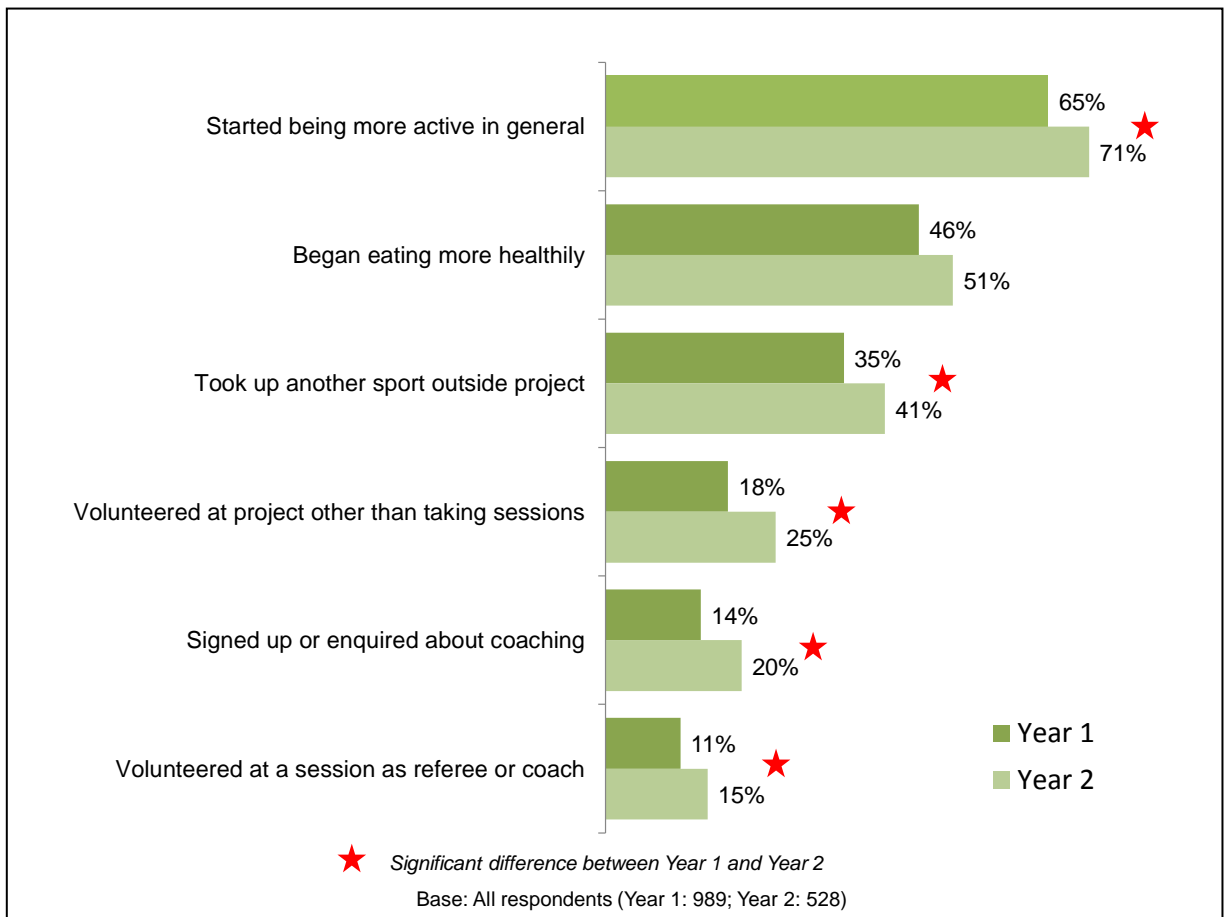
Women. In addition, around half (49%) of these participants reported that they would have done some activity but less often. Combined, these figures account for 81% of participants who are now doing more activity who say this increase in activity can be attributed to the Active Women Programme.

9.28 At an overall level, this means that nearly two-fifths (38%) of *all* Year Two participants are now doing more activity than before Active Women and effectively ascribe this increase in activity, at least in part, to their involvement with Active Women (net impact).

### Wider benefits of participation

9.29 Beyond an increase in the number of women participating in regular sporting activity, the evaluation also explored the impact of the Active Women Programme on wider well-being and community participation. Figure 9.5 presents these wider benefits.

**Figure 9.5: Wider benefits of participation – comparison between Year One and Year Two**



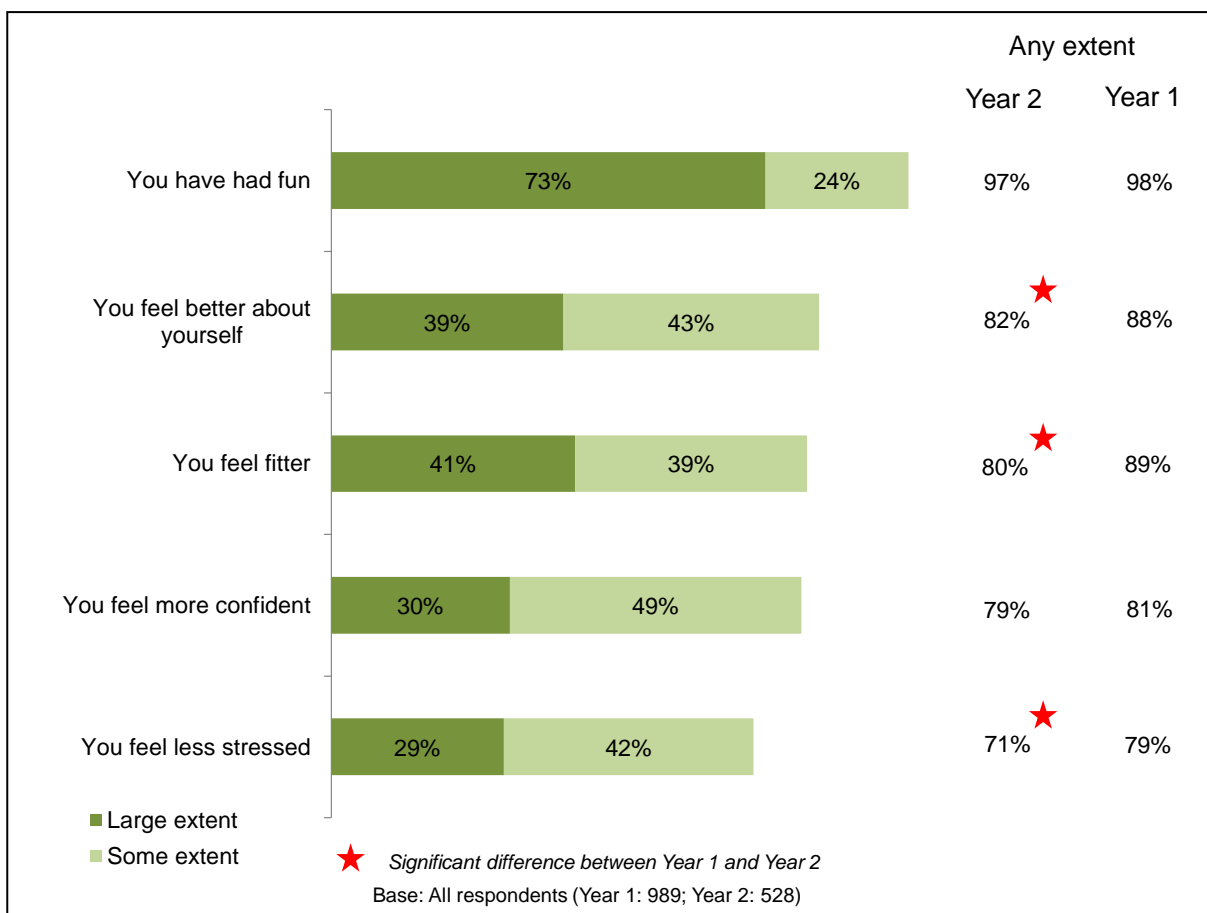
9.30 As Figure 9.5 shows, wider benefits of participation increased slightly from Year One to Year Two. These slight increases are likely to be a result of the question capturing 'total' wider benefits, i.e. any benefits that had occurred as a result of the Active Women Programme since starting on the sessions.



- 9.31 As per Year One the majority of participants reported that the Active Women Programme had had a positive impact on their overall activity levels. Seven in ten (71%) felt that they had started being more active in general as a result of participating in an Active Women project while around four in ten (41%) women had taken up another sport or activity outside the project indicating an increased appetite for taking part in sport more broadly. Both areas represented significant increases from Year One (where figures were 65% and 35% respectively).
- 9.32 One in seven (15%) participants had volunteered at an Active Women session, for example as a referee or coach, while 25% of participants volunteered in some other way, for example helping out with publicity or at an event. In terms of coaching, one in five (20%) women had either signed up or enquired about coaching. All these figures represent small, but significant increases from Year One.
- 9.33 Participants from deprived areas were however less likely to have volunteered or got involved in coaching. Only one in ten (11%) volunteered at a session as a referee or coach (vs. 16% participants not from deprived areas) while 15% signed up to or enquired about coaching (vs. 24% participants not from deprived areas).
- 9.34 As shown in Figure 9.6, there has been a decrease in the proportion of participants citing 'softer' benefits in Year Two, although generally these results are still very positive.



Figure 9.6: ‘Softer’ benefits of participation



9.35 Participants are less likely to feel fitter (80%), to feel better about themselves (82%) and to feel less stressed (71%) in Year Two compared to Year One. Comparing the proportions of participants citing these benefits by participant type (i.e. whether they still participate or not) is key to understanding this decline. Those who no longer participate in sessions were, understandably, far less likely to report that they had noticed such benefits. Given this group represents 62% of Year Two survey respondents this appears to be the key driver behind reported benefits being lower in Year One. Indeed there were no significant differences from Year One to Year Two among participants who still attend Active Women projects.

### Multiplier effects

9.36 The importance of word of mouth to attract women to Active Women sessions was covered in Chapter 4 (Recruitment and marketing on the Active Women Projects). Over four in five women (85%) had recommended their project or spoken about enjoying the sessions to someone else while three in five (61%) had brought a friend or family member along to a session. Neither figure represents a significant difference to Year One proportions.



## Sustainability of behaviour change

- 9.37 Women's motivation to continue exercising / taking part in sport in the next 12 months was high, with nearly three in five (58%) intending to do more exercise over the next 12 months. Positively, this showed no significant change from Year One results (57%), although with participants engaged less frequently in sport than at Year One, motivations clearly don't quite match up to subsequent activity. There were few differences by subgroup.
- 9.38 Only a minority of participants (6%) expected their level of exercise to decline in the next 12 months. Again there was little difference by subgroup, however, those women with childcare responsibilities were more likely to expect to reduce their level of exercise than those without such responsibilities (8% vs. 3%). This signals a shift from Year One results where women with childcare responsibilities reported that they were actually more likely to intend increasing their activity levels, and highlights how important it is that projects engage with this group. Women from BME communities were also more likely to expect to reduce their level of exercise (9% vs. 4% White).
- 9.39 Those who still take part in the Active Women sessions were asked how likely they would be to continue with the same level of sporting activity if the Active Women project ceased to exist.
- 9.40 Three in five women (59%) felt they would be either very (28%) or fairly (32%) likely to do this, whilst 40% felt they would be unlikely to do so. There were minimal significant differences by subgroup and these figures show no significant change from Year One results.



## Participant story highlighting impact issues: Nadine

### PARTICIPANT STORY: "NADINE"

Nadine, aged 35-44, started attending Active Women sessions (Back to Netball) in June 2012. She now attends the session once a week. She originally found out about the sessions through a social networking site and one of the parents at her child's school.

Before starting, Nadine felt nervous about whether she would be able to participate properly. She was concerned she would be too old for sport. However the coach was very professional, down to earth and patient meaning her nerves dissipated. Being accompanied by a friend encouraged her to participate too.

*I was nervous...what if I can't do it anymore? Am I too old for this? But the coach is really patient with us and we just have fun.*

She was already attending the gym but found this activity quite dull. Without Active Women she probably wouldn't have done anything else.

The lack of pressure during sessions is very important to Nadine, and her confidence, and this encourages her to keep attending. Nadine enjoys the activities and coaching although feels that they could do more skills training as opposed to fitness. She would also appreciate additional instructions for what to do in between sessions, such as midweek fitness runs.

The benefits of the sessions for Nadine have been vast and she feels proud of herself for attending.

*I feel better about myself and invigorated. The hard work means I get a sense of pride when talking to people.*

Nadine has already brought four or five friends along to sessions, while she believes it is valuable to her young children seeing their mother being active and understanding the benefits of sport.

*I have been able to tell other friends and they have gone along and really enjoyed it. There must be four or five of us who go now as a result of someone mentioning it to me and me mentioning it to someone else.*

She has also started considering her diet more as a result of the Netball sessions.

In terms of alternatives to her current Netball session she is aware of other Active Women sessions but they don't happen in her locality. She is also not interested in being part of a competitive team. If the funding stopped for her session, she wouldn't know where else to go.

Her one concern with the sessions is that sometimes attendance can be poor (as low as three or four participants), which restricts the activities that can be done.



## Participant story highlighting impact issues: Eden

**PARTICIPANT STORY: “EDEN”**

Eden, aged 45-54, first attended an Active Women session (Sport4Women) in May 2011. She attended these sessions once or twice a week, usually doing Zumba, Belly dancing or Swimming. She attended fairly regularly, although tended to stop during the school holidays so she could look after her children.

She stopped exercising earlier in the year due to the poor weather, school holidays and an increased workload, but intends to return to the sessions as soon as possible.

*Work and training courses take up my time. I miss going, because I used to go with my friends and I don't see anybody at the moment. I need to do more exercise, I can feel it.*

Although Eden reported there was nothing Sport4Women could have done to help her continue to participate, no-one from the project personally contacted her to enquire about her attendance. She does however still receive programmes every three months detailing new classes.

*I don't know what Sport4Women could do [to encourage me to attend]. I don't think they're aware of when you go or when you stop. Whenever I've got time I'll go.*

While she no longer attends, Eden is nevertheless very positive about her experience of the Sport4Women sessions, citing principal benefits of feeling fitter, being more active, greater happiness, socialising more, and cheap sessions (free or £1).

The one negative point she had about sessions was that sometimes they were so full that participants (including herself) would be turned away.

On the benefits of increased levels of fitness, Eden was effusive in her praise. As a result of the exercise, she found herself concentrating more on her diet and was generally more positive at home or with friends. She's now more relaxed around her family and has encouraged her son to do exercise and eat more healthily. Additionally she has brought two friends along to sessions, although they didn't stay long.

*I'm more relaxed now with the family. You can take more whatever they are pushing at you. When you're stressed, every little thing makes you go. I also try and get my son to do exercise and to eat more healthily.*





## 10 Sustainability of the Active Women Projects

### Summary

In Year Two projects have been taking an increased number of measures to improve the sustainability of their project.

Projects have been particularly successful at improving and increasing the training opportunities available to participants, providing women with some of the skills they need to run sessions themselves.

Community-based partnership working has also progressed in Year Two, as projects have developed and/or strengthened links with community groups and local councils.

Collecting feedback is a chance to involve women in future decisions affecting their project and give them an interest in its sustainability. While all projects have provided women with informal feedback opportunities, the opportunity to use more formal feedback channels should be considered in Year Three.

Securing alternative funding continues to be a challenge for all projects and any best practice which can be shared in terms of securing commercial partners would be highly beneficial. Many projects have introduced or increased charges to participants during Year Two in order to facilitate sustainability but they are mindful that this can only go so far, as cost is a key barrier to exercise among the Active Women target groups.

Some projects have been offering more challenging sessions in Year Two to make the transition to clubs and groups outside the Active Women project less daunting for participants.

### Introduction

10.1 Sustainability has become particularly pertinent in Year Two. Projects are keen to ensure that women can continue to take part in regular sport and exercise in the future, after the three years of funding from Sport England comes to an end.

10.2 There was already evidence in Year One of projects taking steps to facilitate sustainability. This chapter will consider some of the processes projects have been putting in place in Year Two, looking in particular at:

- Training opportunities for participants;
- Involving participants in decision-making;
- Community-based partnership working;
- Securing alternative funding;
- Gradual introduction of charging / increasing fees; and
- Level of activity.

10.3 While these sustainability measures are being examined separately here, they should be thought of as a package of measures that all projects should be looking into when addressing their sustainability.



## Training opportunities for participants

- 10.4 Chapter 8 (Retention) considered the role of training opportunities as a tool for encouraging retention on projects: they give more engaged participants, and those with the inclination for coaching and volunteering, the opportunity to progress. In addition, these opportunities provide women with the skillset to lead and take on the coaching of sessions themselves, aiding sustainability.
- 10.5 Breeze is an example of a project that has been particularly good at providing training opportunities. In Year One Breeze was already providing participants with opportunities to train and become a Breeze Champion, which involves organising and leading cycle rides; the training and toolkits were in place as the project entered Year Two. Breeze has continued to provide these opportunities in the second year with some success. Breeze staff fed back that Champions have been taking ownership of sessions. Staff were therefore positive that project sessions would continue even after the funding stops, although there was recognition that there would need to be some central management to oversee the process.

*'We wanted it to be shaped by the women involved and I would say that has been a massive achievement. The Champions feel proud of Breeze and proud to be part of it. It is a network they feel they have had such a hand in shaping which is why we are lucky with the level of commitment they give – they see it as their programme.'*

**(Project Lead – Breeze)**

- 10.6 As a whole, projects have increased the amount of training on offer. However, for the sessions to truly become sustainable there need to be further skill building opportunities. To run and sustain a project session, women need to have sound knowledge of the industry, of how sessions work and of how best to run their own sessions. Training must therefore be provided to an appropriate level. Projects have made progress in Year Two, with an increased number of volunteers reaching higher level qualifications and more projects aiming to train their volunteers to a higher standard: such work will need to be continued and consolidated throughout Year Three.

## Involving participants in decision making

- 10.7 Alongside training opportunities, participants can also be given a stake in the project and an interest in its sustainability through being involved in decisions affecting the future of the project. Even in Year One most projects recognised this; for women to be able to participate in the long-term, and to be interested in doing so, it's important that their needs are met.
- 10.8 It is evident from qualitative interviews with staff that all projects collect feedback on an informal basis. Informal feedback may simply involve project staff taking the time to speak to women throughout a session, ensuring they are friendly and approachable. Women are more likely to provide candid feedback about what they like and don't like about a session when they feel at ease, feel welcome, and trust the individual they are speaking to. Feedback collected face-to-face in this way has more of a personal touch so it can make women feel more valued and part of the project, which aids sustainability. Projects have used this 'on the ground' approach to gathering feedback to tailor and improve sessions and have generally found it a very useful exercise. However best practice would be to use this in conjunction with formal feedback processes.



*'At the end of every quarter we'll do feedback with participants. There's also feedback at festivals, lot of stuff on Facebook, polls like 'What would you like to do most, a festival, a league...'. I'd like to think this is happening on the ground without us having to be too prescriptive. The coaches are out there talking to the participants all the time.'*

**(Project Lead – Back to Netball)**

*'We'll be looking at doing case studies next year, and as part of my Masters I want to look at what the project means to the women in their own words or their own language, even little poems or something. And nearing the end of this year there probably should be some evaluation done by asking the women what they liked and didn't. But they tend to come and tell us that anyway.'*

**(Project Lead – Sport4Women)**

- 10.9 Only a minority of projects that staff spoke about had formal processes in place for collecting feedback. Providing more formal feedback avenues for participants is something for projects to consider in Year Three, as it would give a larger audience the opportunity to have their say.

### Community-based partnership working

- 10.10 Community-based partnerships, i.e. Active Women projects working with community groups and/or local councils, are important for sustainability. Community groups and local councils can be a good source of in-kind support, whether it's volunteer time or a venue that is being offered up for free or on a discounted basis. In-kind support has the potential to continue beyond the three years of a project's funding and therefore play a pivotal role in its sustainability. Working with these groups is also a way of rooting a project in the community, by getting the buy-in of key players – individuals and groups with the resources, contacts and drive to keep the project going. Feedback from projects is that local partnership working has strengthened over the last year and there are already signs that it has helped some sessions to become self-sustaining.

*'We've been working more with (local) partners to signpost women to existing exit routes and clubs. A couple of the sessions I'm confident will become their own sustainable sessions. Others we've given the partners some skills and experience to start delivering it.'*

**(Project Lead – Think Fit)**

*'I work a lot with Active Newcastle, a brand run by the council. They've got a whole host of different people doing different schemes so I do a lot of work with them. They've got a massive database of people so they advertise my sessions to them. Because they're all council employed they know all the facilities managers and staff at the centres so they're pretty useful at finding venues.'*

**(Newcastle NDCC – Back to Netball)**

### Securing alternative funding

- 10.11 The need to begin the search for alternative funding streams was highlighted by all projects in Year Two. Developing other partnerships, including with non-commercial and commercial partners, is one way projects have been trying to source alternative funding. Commercial



partnerships can provide a direct link to commercial sponsorship, while non-commercial partnerships can provide more indirect links.

*“It’s proven that if you put money into women’s sport you can get women playing sport. There needs to be continued emphasis and funding.”*

**(Project Lead – Back to Netball)**

*‘The opportunities created through more commercial sponsorship give us ways of sustaining the project beyond the life of the grant.’*

**(Project Lead – Breeze)**

10.12 In terms of securing alternative funding it is early days for all projects, although there are signs that some projects are further along than others in terms of developing the necessary partnerships. Breeze, for example, is part of the British Cycling network and has therefore been able to benefit from the resources of a larger organisation. Independent consultants have been assessing Breeze and helping them to develop a commercial strategy for sourcing the right partners. If Breeze could share this expertise with other Active Women projects, it feels that this could be highly beneficial.

*‘Our central marketing department that looks after commercial sponsorship is currently getting consultants in to look at the value of a few of British Cycling’s programmes...Breeze are the lead so we have independent people who will be looking at the whole programme so we go out with a commercial strategy that is true to value and to know the right way to sell or get the right partner rather than go with the first one that comes along.’*

**(Women’s Network Project Manager – Breeze)**

10.13 Some Active Women projects, for example Back to Netball and Sport4Women, have also been able to access Sport England funding through the Sportivate stream, which targets 14 – 25 year olds that aren’t engaging in sport, including those with a disability and from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. StreetGames meanwhile has obtained additional Sport England funding through Doorstep Clubs (DSC), a pilot scheme aimed at getting more young people (aged 14 – 25) in disadvantaged communities active. Although projects report that additional funding has allowed increased sports provision (i.e. more sessions / smaller more targeted sessions / more activities on offer), there remains a slight concern that there is the possibility of cannibalisation, whereby some Active Women projects are sustained through a variety of Sport England funding streams, rather than becoming self-sustaining.

### Gradual introduction of charging / increasing fees

10.14 In Year One some projects offered sessions for free, but these projects have found it necessary to introduce some form of charging in Year Two or have made plans to introduce charging in Year Three in order to make sessions sustainable.

*‘We have implemented the charging now, not in all the sports, we will do that later on in Year Three. We have implemented it in some of them so they start to get used to it.’*

**(Project Lead – B-inspired)**

*‘We will probably have to start charging a small amount (c. £1) per session in Year Three and see how that goes. But essentially we just*



*want to continue to build awareness and create even more links with the community.'*

**(Project Lead – Sport4Women)**

10.15 Across projects the cost of sessions has been kept low in order to maintain participation levels but charging a small amount has enabled sessions on some projects to become self-sustaining. On East Durham Belles, for example, women have been paying £2.50 a session (as it is the maximum possible price women were prepared to pay), which has covered the venue hire. At the moment Active Women funding pays for the coach, but project staff felt that the charge to participants could potentially cover the coach's fee as well if the number of participants regularly attending sessions (and therefore paying the fee) increased.

10.16 Amongst projects that did have charging in place in Year One, some have moderately increased their fees in Year Two. Projects have become more established and monitored how much women are prepared to pay on an on-going basis, making it possible to increase charges and so improve their sustainability without negatively impacting on participation.

### Level of activity

10.17 Providing exit routes to sport and activities outside Active Women projects is another way of making individual increases in participation sustainable and a key aim of the Active Women Programme. Offering sessions at a range of levels within Active Women projects can be an important intermediary step to achieving this, particularly for traditionally more competitive sports; some women need to have an appropriate level of skill in order to feel confident about exploring other sporting opportunities.

10.18 From the qualitative interviews it is apparent that some projects have been offering classes at a range of levels in Year Two. Back to Netball, for example, has provided more challenging classes through the introduction of leagues and its 'Next Step' programme. Alongside this, staff have been developing links with local netball clubs, which some women have been passed on to.

*'We have leagues starting across projects so we're increasing that 'menu of activity'. We ensure that everybody is involved, nobody sits on the side-lines....In most areas we've now got 'Next Step' Netball as well as 'Back to Netball' because we have got groups of women at the next level now.'*

**(Project Lead – Back to Netball)**

*'I've made sure I have links to local clubs, so when women do want to go to clubs, I know who to send them to.'*

**(Newcastle NDCC – Back to Netball)**

10.19 Quantitative interviews suggest that some women across projects have been taking up the exit routes on offer. Indeed, 11% of those no longer attending an Active Women project explained that this was because they have joined another activity, team or gym (up from 5% in Year One). Among women still attending, two in five (41%) reported that they have taken up another sport or activity outside of the Active Women Programme as a result of attending their project.

10.20 This dual approach of diversifying the level of activity on offer and establishing links with local clubs is something for all projects to develop or consider in Year Three.



## 11 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 11.1 Overall, the conclusions at the end of Year Two of the Active Women Programme are positive. Projects continue to grow in terms of numbers of participants, volunteers, activity sessions and partners, with project leads driving projects forward with the same dedication and energy as in Year One.
- 11.2 The core aim of the Active Women Programme is to increase activity levels among women living in deprived areas and / or those with childcare responsibilities, and for these activity levels to be maintained over time.
- 11.3 To some extent, this seems to have happened. Considering activity levels, around half of women interviewed reported doing more activity now than they did in the month before they became involved in the Active Women Programme (compared with 33% doing less). In addition, the majority of women said they would have done less activity, or none at all, if they had not attended Active Women sessions, suggesting that the Active Women Programme was the decisive factor in getting these women more active.
- 11.4 That said, overall women are doing less activity now than they were at the end of Year One, though still more than they were doing before they became involved in Active Women. Women living in deprived areas and / or those with childcare responsibilities are more likely than women overall to have reduced their amount of exercise in Year Two compared to Year One. As well as this, they are more likely to have fallen back to the lower (or non-existent) levels of activity they were undertaking in the month before they attended an active women session for the first time.
- 11.5 This means that while the Active Women Programme has raised the activity levels of many women, keeping women active for longer periods of time is a challenge, particularly among the target group, whose activity levels 'drop off' quicker than women as a whole.
- **Retaining women in deprived areas and those with childcare responsibilities is a key challenge as the Active Women Programme continues. This chapter will highlight some suggestions for doing this. In addition, projects should take opportunities to share examples of best practice in this area (as they did at Sport England's workshop last summer) as much good is currently being done.**
- 11.6 On the subject of targets, at the end of Year One there were some concerns that projects may struggle to meet their higher Year Two targets with access to similar levels of resource as utilised to meet the lower Year One targets.
- 11.7 Despite this, the majority of projects continued to meet their participant targets in Year Two, though as in Year One there was large variation across the board with some projects sailing past their 100% targets and others only getting some of the way there.
- 11.8 As in Year One, project staff report that recruiting from the target groups continues to be a challenge. While many projects demonstrated increased efforts in Year Two to attract more women from deprived areas and / or with childcare responsibilities, several also reported concentrating more on hitting their overall targets than attracting this ideal demographic.
- 11.9 Although projects were closer to hitting their throughput targets in Year Two than Year One, as only 51% of the throughput target was achieved at an overall level in Year Two, there are clearly on-going difficulties involved in getting women to keep coming back, particularly those in the target groups.





11.10 Volunteer and coaching targets have largely been exceeded in Year Two which is very positive and has enabled the delivery of more sessions, cover for absences and more than one staff member or volunteer at sessions. This means more personal contact with participants during sessions, boosting participant engagement and their likelihood to return to future sessions.

11.11 As commented last year, projects are still seeing a mix of women, with some participants seeming to 'need' the initiative more than others. Some women attending are relatively sport-confident already and would be (or indeed are) happy also doing exercise elsewhere; these women welcome the Active Women sessions as an additional, sociable, low-cost option. Other women have low sporting confidence and would not spontaneously attend another kind of sporting activity, needing the very open and friendly, non-threatening approach in which the Active Women Programme specialises. Many of these women would fall into the target group (particularly those living in deprived areas).

- **Arguably, projects should concentrate more on attracting and keeping more women from the target group who would not be comfortable doing sport elsewhere. It may be worth Sport England communicating to projects that overall targets, while they should not be forgotten entirely, are less important than creating a positive impact where need is greatest.**

11.12 Related to these central themes of recruiting and retaining women in the target groups, key considerations for projects in Year Two are marketing and publicity, and additional personal communication with potential and existing participants.

11.13 Many put increased resource into marketing and publicity in Year Two, from hiring marketing staff to putting extra thought into adjusting paper-based publicity, for example: printing in several different languages, adjusting the images and language used to make them particularly welcoming for women who may be feeling apprehensive about taking part, and developing a tool that can edit posters quickly and easily so that the information is always up to date. Projects' online publicity also grew in Year Two, something commented on by both staff and participants as something that will be built on in the future as a popular and low-cost marketing option. That said, a few projects noted that they did not want to become too reliant on this option, as it could potentially exclude older women and those living in deprived areas who may be less inclined or less able to use the internet. Therefore projects should continue to utilise all possible publicity channels.

11.14 That said, many participants in Year Two reported not having seen any publicity but instead having heard about the sessions via a friend, colleague or family member. In fact, several new participants in Year Two felt that more advertising of the sessions would be a key improvement, and suggested that visually appealing posters and leaflets should be displayed prominently in 'normal' places that women would go like local shopping centres.

- **A recommendation going forward would be to ensure that more paper-based publicity is used outside of leisure centres and other sport-related areas, in areas where non-sporty local women are likely to see it.**

11.15 Arguably related to this upturn in the level of marketing and publicity produced is a potential downturn in Year Two in the ability of project staff to engage in personal communication with individual participants or enquirers. This includes face to face recruitment as well as telephone and email contact with those enquiring about the sessions, or those who registered or showed interest and then did not attend. This was flagged as a potential future concern in Year One, with the realisation that participant numbers and activities would increase while staffing levels





largely remained the same, such that as projects grew they would be less able to provide the 'personal touch' that is so appreciated by participants. Crucially, it is those women in the target groups (or at least, women who are not confident when it comes to sport, who often fall into the target groups), who respond so well to this personal contact. Several mentioned that while the contact they had with the project was 'sufficient,' they would have really appreciated a more personal response by email or phone so that they felt 'wanted'. Several would have appreciated more reassurance that the session would be fun and for beginners, and a little more detail about what would be involved or the coaches or volunteers that would be there, rather than the 'sparse' information reported by some women, such as simply the provision of a session timetable. Some women who had enquired but not attended said their initial reservations could have been overcome had a reply been quicker, warmer and more detailed.

- **A key recommendation going forward is to find innovative ways of scaling-up this important personal contact, for example:**
  - **Volunteers could be drafted in to respond in a warm and welcoming way to emails. This may appeal to students keen to volunteer in order to boost their CV, so projects could advertise for these volunteers in local schools and colleges.**
  - **Projects could compose a few standard template emails that sound very 'personal' and friendly in tone, which could be used to respond to the majority of emails without staff or volunteers needing to write afresh each time.**
- **This contact should include warm responses to any enquiries, and personal follow-up if a woman does not attend a session she previously expressed interest in.**

11.16A source of confusion for some projects in Year One was the extent to which they could change the activities they offered in response to changing demand, however this has now been resolved. Sport England confirmed at the end of Year One that projects were free to change the activities they offered. Projects used this freedom to increase the breadth of their activities, and to introduce taster sessions in order to attract initial interest from the community that could then be channelled towards more mainstream activities. Experimenting in this way over the course of the year means that projects appear well aware of what activities work for what kinds of women (as well as when and where), and several have been able to develop a central 'hub' of activity sessions that women know will be consistently available throughout the year and are generally therefore well attended. This ability to tailor sessions also means that several projects have introduced 'tag on' or 'introductory' sessions such as a walking club as a precursor to the standard jogging club.

- **A recommendation going forward would be for all projects to develop a core set of popular, consistent sessions where possible, as the consistency is appealing to women who can then drop in and out but know the sessions will always be there.**
- **Equally, continuing to use the same level of creativity and flexibility to introduce new activities to initially attract or 'ease in' new recruits is another good idea.**

11.17 The issue of childcare continues into Year Two. Project staff cited that lack of childcare is one of the main barriers to attending sessions, for women with childcare responsibilities. The problem remains that childcare is expensive for projects to provide, and that it isn't a sufficiently widespread problem (i.e. not all women have childcare responsibility, or indeed need childcare even if they have) to warrant the expense. In addition, several participants comment that their children are older and so would not be happy being left in a 'crèche' even if one were to be provided. Related to this is the guilt that many women express when it comes to leaving their children in order to have 'me' time. Some mothers felt that active 'family time' should come first, rather than arranging childcare so they could be active alone, particularly as



several mothers mentioned they spend all day at work and feel they should be spending time with their children in the evening. Some projects responded by introducing sessions that older children were able to take part in alongside their mothers, which proved very popular with some. Projects should consider that if a mother needs an 'excuse' not to go to an activity session, maternal guilt at not spending time with her children and family is a very powerful justification.

- **Going forward, projects could ensure that more sessions are suitable for older children to come along to (while not putting off women who don't have children), as well as using publicity that highlights the importance of active family time.**
- **Projects could also make sure that publicity highlights sympathy with mothers who are time-poor, but suggests ways to fit activity sessions into busy parenthood, perhaps using a 'normal' busy mother as its subject.**

11.18 Another main consideration at the end of Year One was the importance of good quality coaching as absolutely central to maximising retention (retention being a key and consistent challenge for projects). Coaching levels and skills were reported as varying hugely in Year One, even within projects. However as projects became more established, and knowledgeable about what was needed to suit their staff, volunteers and participants, training for both staff and volunteers increased and diversified. Overall, projects expressed less concern in Year Two than Year One about the quality of coaching, which is likely to be due to the focus on training that has occurred since.

11.19 All projects showed an increased focus on sustainability in Year Two, as would be expected given projects are now approaching their third and final year of funding. The main pushes towards sustainability come in the form of increased training of volunteers (as well as increased recruitment for volunteers in general), and increased partnership working. An increasing number of trained volunteers is good news, giving local women ownership of the activity sessions and increasing the likelihood of volunteers being available to lead sessions even when the funding is no longer available. Partnership working has increased across the board in Year Two, with projects making connections with a broad range of local organisations, from children's centres to religious and health-based groups. The largest, national projects have also made links with commercial organisations, though this is not the case for the majority of smaller projects, though these could be useful links to make in the future.

- **Going forward, inter-project advice on how to make connections with local companies could be valuable for many projects. Perhaps Sport England could broker connections between businesses and the smaller projects, or at least signpost towards viable opportunities and offer advice where needed.**
- **Projects should continue their excellent work forging links within the community, as this leads to greater awareness, recruitment from a wide range of areas, and generally embedding the project as a consistent and welcoming presence in the local area.**

