



Supporting an Active County



# Impact Report 2022

## Welcome to County Durham Sport’s Impact Report for 2022

We hope this report will give you a flavour of the ways in which we have been pushing for positive change across the physical activity system in County Durham.

We are a learning organisation and a system influencer. We hold learning in high esteem as an indicator that we are doing the messy job of partnership and system influence. If we have learned, we have tried with purposeful intention; we can do better next time and help others to do the same.

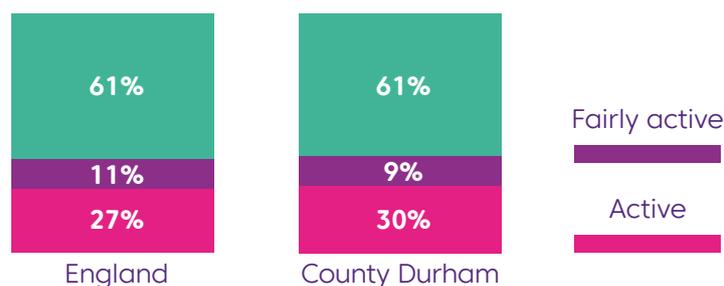
We do not evaluate our impact on the basis of traditional quantitative metrics. Rather, we evaluate our impact by reflecting on whether we have appropriately shifted mind-sets, conditions, and ways of working in the system to make physical activity an easier choice for everyone. We recognise that all of our achievements come about through partnership with local communities and organisations – without whom, we could not achieve our goals.

You can read more about our Vision, Mission, and Objectives in our [strategy](#)

## What’s Our Challenge?

Our county is one of great contrast. From the North Pennines in the west to the Durham Coast in the East, we enjoy Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, those recovering from the legacies of an industrial past, and a range of market towns as well as the beautiful and historical Durham City.

30% of adults in County Durham are classified as “inactive” meaning they do less than 30mins physical activity per week. 18% are doing no physical activity at all (Active Lives Survey, 2019/20).



Tackling inactivity in County Durham is a huge challenge, especially given the significant social, economic and health-related challenges we also face here. There is a 19-year difference in the number of years residents can expect to live in good health, depending on where in the county they live (ONS, 2009-2013). Two in 5 people in County Durham have a limited income, and 24% of the population report a limiting illness or disability which affects their day-to-day activities (Census, 2011).

We believe that positive change is possible. But it requires a collaborative whole-systems approach, with a holistic understanding of people’s day to day lived experience.

## How Can We Help?

Despite the challenges we face, the county has a strong sense of community identity and an abundance of natural and cultural assets. County Durham Sport works with communities to capitalise on this. We empower local people to be more active. And, we work with local organisations and senior leaders to encourage a more equal, collaborative, and proactive approach to making a healthy lifestyle an easy choice for everyone. Here are just a few examples of our work.

### Partnership

A partnership approach is part of everything we do. But, perhaps our most significant piece of partnership development over the past year has come via the **Tackling Inequalities Fund** (TIF) which we distributed locally on behalf of Sport England. For County Durham Sport, this was an opportunity to reach out to groups in the community who we had not engaged with before. We funded a diverse range of community organisations, some who were delivering physical activity for the first time to support local people through the pandemic. We offered bespoke support, guiding organisations through the application process to make it smooth and stress-free.



Through three rounds of TIF funding, we allocated nearly £150,000 to local organisations, with a particular emphasis on supporting those communities facing social and economic hardship. The activities funded range from allotments, to museums, to **paddle sports!** Aside from the fantastic difference this made to local communities, we established new partnerships. New partners who we can now call part of our ever-growing network of physical activity champions.

### Policy

We have worked hard to find our place at the table to influence local policy. Specifically, in the areas of health, ageing, infrastructure, planning, and environment. We have also been a key player in progressing the emerging County Durham Physical Activity Strategy. We bring an insight-led, whole-systems perspective to the table, helping our partners to understand the complex issues which influence physical activity. For example, we commissioned a researcher to review existing policy documents (from across Durham County Council's departments) to identify gaps and opportunities in creating a joined-up approach to tackling the inactivity and climate crises together. This review was presented to policy-makers at the Physical Activity Strategy Committee and shared to wider partners via [a blog](#) and [news article](#).

Here are some more examples of our wide-ranging collaboration with Durham County Council...

<p><b>Mental Health</b></p> <p>Member of local forums such as the Resilient Communities group</p>	<p><b>Older People</b></p> <p>Supporting local Health Needs Assessment and Ageing Well Strategy</p>	<p><b>Physical Activity Strategy</b></p> <p>Key partner in development and consultation</p>	<p><b>Children's Health</b></p> <p>Members of Healthy Weight Alliance and Active 30 steering group</p>
<p><b>We Are Undefeatable</b></p> <p>Partner on the local WAU steering group</p>	<p><b>Leisure Service and Facility Transformation</b></p> <p>Providing insight and advice on public consultation</p>	<p><b>Move Campaign</b></p> <p>Advising on effective and inclusive physical activity promotion</p>	<p><b>Club Durham</b></p> <p>Supporting to Locality Officers and local sports clubs</p>

## People

Internally, developing our staff (personally and professionally) is crucial for our work as a system influencer. Skills and confidence in partnership, politics, and systems-thinking are essential. We have invested heavily in staff development over the past year to help everyone at County Durham Sport embrace our role as a system influencer, and spread our mission and values across the local system. This has been through both formal and informal training, and the development of tools and frameworks.



Externally, we have worked hard to shift the mindset of local partners, from one of delivering traditional sporting activities, to one of tackling inequalities. We support our partners to understand how physical activity policy and practice might better accommodate those people who have historically found it more challenging to be active. Some key examples of this influence work include:

- Working with School Games Organisers to create a more diverse, inclusive, and participation-based physical activity offer for local school children.
- Working with senior leaders in education to encourage a Physical Literacy approach to sport and physical activity – based around promoting motivation, confidence, competence, and understanding.
- Collaborating with **UK Coaching** and in consultation with the **Active Places** networks, we are developing “Active Friends”, a community champion programme which gives local people the skills, knowledge and confidence to promote physical activity to others in their neighbourhood.
- Investing in young people through our **Activity Volunteer Programme**. Co-developed with young people, this training builds transferable life skills for those not in employment or education, with additional needs, or from less affluent communities. Over 65 young people have completed this programme to date.

## Place

Our flagship place-based work, **Active Shildon** and **Active Valleys**, aims to support people living in disadvantaged communities to fit activity into their lives in a way that works for them.

We take a holistic approach to tackle the wider challenges these communities face, enabling them to live happier, healthier lifestyles. The **Active Places** partnerships have created new local opportunities for people to get active where they live. For example, by facilitating local initiatives (such as Parkletics, **Borrow a Bike** and **Play Streets**).



Beyond the **Active Places** pilot, we have adopted a place-based approach to our work with children, young people, and families. We have established five **Park Play** sites, using existing community green spaces as a hub for family-based activity.

We have also managed **Active North East**, a series of televised physical activity sessions aimed at children and young people in County Durham. These TV episodes were specifically filmed in recognisable County Durham places.

The benefits of this have been twofold: viewers are engaged and encouraged by seeing their own local community on TV and this has even encouraged people to get out and visit nearby places which they haven't previously been to.

## What Have We Achieved?

Our achievements over the past 12 months have been both significant and numerous. Mechanisms for assessing our impact and effectiveness range from formal academic evaluation, to informal conversation - and everything in between. We assess our learning and impact via appropriate methods for the environment and situation. Through all our work, we encourage continuous learning and reflection (individually and as a team). In this short impact report, we will highlight just a few of our proudest accomplishments through examples of where we have shifted mind-sets, system conditions, and ways of working.

**Partnership Successes**

A key tool for assessing the health of our partnership working is the annual partner satisfaction survey (coordinated by the **Active Partnerships Network** and Sheffield Hallam University). This is an opportunity to take stock, understand how we are perceived by our partners, and ask for some honest feedback on our working relationships. Our most recent annual partner satisfaction survey has highlighted improvements in the way we are seen by our partner organisations. The words our partners used to describe their working relationship with us included: **supportive, professional, positive, growing, collaborative, and friendly** to name just a few!

The things our partners valued most about working with us were:

- Working together and partnerships
- Knowledge, advice and support
- Communication and information sharing
- Support with impact and delivery
- Our listening and openness to ideas

This feedback demonstrates that we have cemented County Durham Sport as a system-influencer locally. We have transitioned from a former County Sports Partnership to a new system partner organisation. Well-placed to be the local arm of Sport England in County Durham. Shaping the local physical activity system.

A particularly successful example of our collaborative, partnership approach has been the development of Active Friends. Partnership has been embedded throughout the programme which will be launching soon:



**“ This work relies heavily on the input of community partners to co-produce the content as well as in the creation of marketing plans and the dissemination of the course and promotion to target audiences. This collaborative work has been ongoing and continues through to the evaluation process. ”**

## Policy Successes

Through our connections (especially with [Durham County Council](#) and [Live Longer Better](#)) and communicating our expertise, we have secured influential positions in the policy areas of health, ageing, infrastructure, planning, and environment.

**“ The work with the physical activity strategy has led to improved relationships and closer collaboration with Public Health...We have also worked to influence the County Durham plan for the NHS commissioning and delivery 5-year plan ”**

specifically relating to...

**“ the issues of frailty and loneliness and the Health Needs Assessment for older age. ”**

**“ Being acknowledged as a consultee on any future planning policy documents produced by Durham County Council provides the opportunity to comment and influence the content of these documents prior to formal adoption. ”**

**“ Being a member of the Environment and Climate Change Executive Board allows discussion at regular meetings and through subsequent feedback regarding policies and guidance within County Durham which link directly to the climate change agenda. ”**



## People Successes

### Internal Development

Internally, we have invested time and energy into developing a learning culture within the team. This began with exploring fundamental questions about what learning is with external support from [Shipway Consulting](#) and [Collective Impact Agency](#). Since those early sessions, we have developed templates and mechanisms to support individuals to reflect. These include: monthly success and reflection shares, a reflection log, an insight sharing template, and regular training sessions on topics such as evaluation and insight. Our people now have the skills and support to embrace our learning culture and put it into practice.

Through all these efforts, we have created a team where curiosity, reflection, and honesty thrive. We support and challenge one another. We assess our impact through our People Plan and also through our staff survey. In 2021, 100% of staff consulted felt that:

“My organisation gives me opportunities to learn and grown”

### External Development

Externally, we have made great strides in influencing key stakeholders working with children and young people. By connecting with those people working directly with young people, we promote an evidence-based approach to inclusive physical activity provision. We do this by directly providing people with the information, skills, and resources they need to understand inequalities and implement physical literacy-based provision.

We presented School Games Organisers (SGOs) with a [new vision for the School Games](#), oriented around inclusion, diversity, and participation. This new vision has led to some hugely successful initiatives, such as [Skip into Spring](#) and a new focus amongst SGOs on using [local data](#) to inform funding plans, such as the Commonwealth Games Legacy fund.

We presented the [County Durham Sport](#) Strategy and the [new vision for the School Games](#) to the Easington Primary School Headteachers' Network. Following this, we secured a regular slot at this meeting to continue sharing important physical activity-related updates and insights with senior leaders in education. Further, the School Sports Partnerships have committed to working with us to develop a “Physical Literacy Informed Whole School Approach” policy document which school senior leadership can commit to.

We have also directly supported young people to build confidence and skills via our [Activity Volunteer Programme](#):

“Before attending the programme, most participants were understandably nervous about volunteering but once the programme had concluded, over 90% of them felt more confident and likely to volunteer in the future. 100% of participants agreed they would recommend the programme to a friend!”

## Place Successes

The **Active Places** pilot has generated new energy and funding in two communities in County Durham. For example:

- Throughout the **Tackling Inequalities Fund** programme, we directed investment to organisations working directly with communities in our priority places (Shildon and the Deerness Valley).
- Public Rights of Way are expecting some additional investment into public footpaths. As a result of the Deerness Valley being involved in the Active Valleys partnership, they plan to target some of the additional funding into the Active Valleys area. This will improve the accessibility of walking routes for local people.
- Active Places has led to a place-based approach becoming a local strategic priority.

By working with partners to capitalise on existing community assets, we have successfully established five new **Park Play** sites in local communities. Consequently, County Durham has the highest number of **Park Play** sites in England outside of London. These provide a convenient way for people to get active as a family on their doorstep and give local people the chance to become a **Park Play** leader – a community champion of physical activity in the place they know best.



## Remaining Challenges

So far, the evidence suggests we are going in the right direction to meet the goals set out in our strategy. However, alongside all of our proud achievements, there remain challenges for us to tackle. We are at an early stage in our development and there is more to do.

## Partnership Challenges

By working with partners, we want to tackle the inequalities faced by communities in County Durham (based on a deep appreciation of intersectionality and lived experience). To do this, we must ensure all staff have the necessary partnership working skills and understanding of local communities.

## Policy Challenges

To influence the system at a strategic level, we need to ensure we have a positive reputation with partners (including senior figures and policy-makers). We can achieve this by continually showing partners what value we can add.

## People Challenges

There is still more to do to embed a deep understanding of complexity, systems working, and systems thinking (both within the County Durham Sport team and amongst our partners). We are grappling with the best way to show impact in a complex system. But we do feel we have many examples of change in our local system.

## Place Challenges

Capturing the impact of our work as part of a complex, whole-systems approach is not easy. We are exploring mechanisms for capturing both intended and unintended consequences of our work. Following a **Durham University**-led evaluation of the whole-systems approach in year 1 of the the **Active Places** pilot, we are planning for a new phase of evaluation.

This will use Ripple Effects Mapping, which will involve collaborative workshops to explore the web of changes and challenges which have arisen through the pilot.



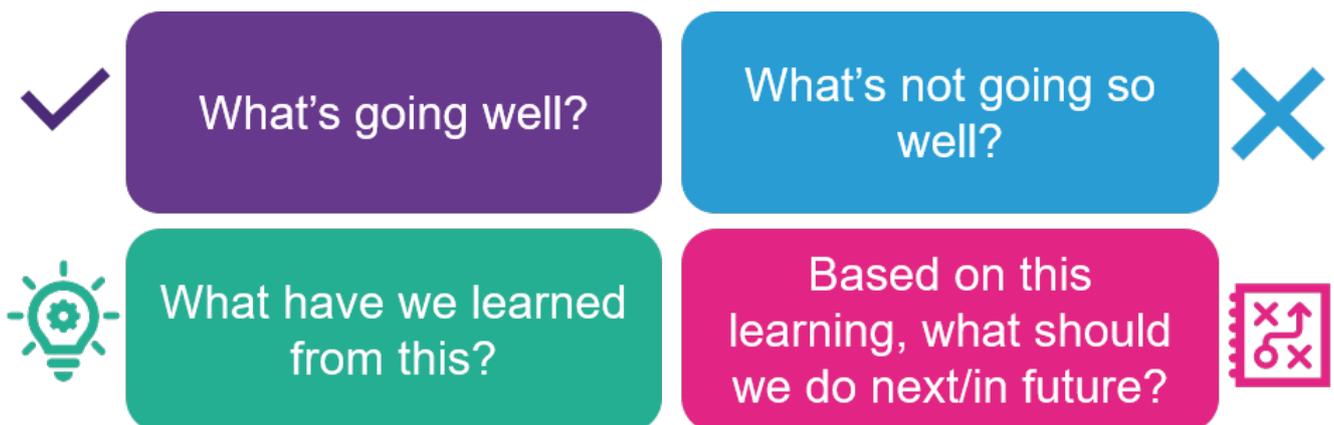
## What Have We Learnt?

Over the past year, County Durham Sport have been holding monthly success and reflection share sessions. This is a chance for the whole team to come together and reflect on what we have learned about being a system partner in County Durham. Here are our top five reflection themes:

### Time to Reflect is Important

Our collaborative, system change work can be slow and requires both patience and persistence. However, finding time to sit back, reflect, and look at the bigger picture can be challenging when our work lives are busy. But, by planning and respecting our time (even saying “No” to some things) we can carve out time to do that all-important reflective thinking.

To support the team to adopt reflective practice, we have developed a reflection log template. We have also introduced a learning and impact framework, which places reflection at the heart of how we assess the performance of our organisation.



### Bringing Our Values Into Everything We Do

When things get busy, complex, or even overwhelming, we come back to our values. Our values guide all of our work. If our work is not contributing towards these values, we reflect and realign our approach.

Internally, to better align our work environment with our values, we have created a new dress code policy based on equality, trust and flexibility. We are also in the process of reviewing and refining our hybrid working policy and annual performance development review processes.

## Collaboration and Communication

Tackling inequalities requires a collaborative approach. Our work is all about working together with partners – building relationships, sharing insight and learning, and co-producing solutions. We spread the word about inequalities through clear and simple messages, always accompanied by an offer of support and advice.

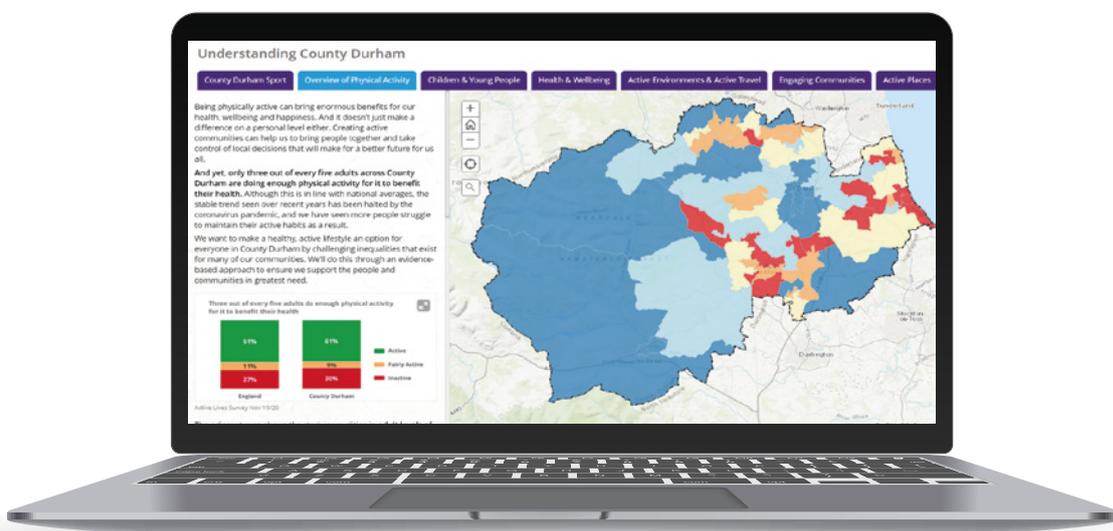
Our collaborative approach and communication skills have been recognised and celebrated by our partners in the most recent annual partner satisfaction survey.

## Confidence and Trust

Shifting from a greater emphasis on delivery to our system partner role has been a challenge. But, by staying true to our values, mission, and vision, we have built confidence in our role as a system influencer. Through a process of staff training, and collective development, we have become much clearer on what systems working means to us. We have faith in our approach to tackling inequalities, and confidently introduce ourselves to partners as an influencer, advisor, and critical friend.

## Insight and Learning

We have excellent understanding of our local landscape. To share this with partners, we have created **open access interactive tools** which allow anyone to explore local data on physical activity, health, social and economic factors.



We support our partners to access and understand data, and to design and interpret evaluations. But we also help to translate insight into learning. We help partners move from data to recommendations, from insight to influence. We also help academic researchers to communicate with practitioners and communities in meaningful ways.

**For example, researchers have undertaken placements with County Durham Sport to work on translating their academic knowledge into recommendations for local partners.**

## How Are We Learning and Improving?

We embed learning into both formal processes, and our informal interactions and culture. This is the case for our core staff team and our board members.

### Formal Mechanisms for Learning and Improvement

We have a number of formal mechanisms in place to support learning and improvement. In 2021, we underwent a **Quest** assessment in which we were praised for our challenging and questioning approach and our clear progress in staff learning and leadership.

Two areas highlighted for improvement were: development of clear measures and demonstrating impact; and communication of what the partnership does. Over the past year, we have made real strides in both of these areas, by developing and implementing a new learning and impact framework and through developing our engagement with partners. Our learning and impact framework distributes responsibility for learning and reflection across the staff team.

### Staff and Board: Development and Learning Culture

As a new team, with new leadership, we see staff development and team building as crucial to our systems work. County Durham Sport staff share their skills and develop new skills both inside and outside the sport sector. For example, through skills sharing workshops, engagement in Sport England and **Active Partnership Network** discussions, facilitated learning about complexity, and further training courses. Staff recently engaged in the Essential Skills for Leading Change course, helping them to develop the skills needed to influence our own local system. Following the course, a team member said:

**“ I have applied this by being aware and focusing on listening when having conversations with colleagues and partners. The benefit of this to partners is that they know I am engaged in the conversation and feel listened to ”**

Going forwards, our board strategy subcommittee will be considering what methods of evaluation are valuable for assessing our impact in the complex physical activity system.

### Operational Planning

To align better align ourselves with the launch of Sport England's **Uniting the Movement Strategy**, we are developing a new operational plan. This operational plan will cement our transition from a programme deliverer to a system influencer. Focused on tackling inequalities, our operational plan will clearly communicate to our team and partners what we care about, and how we will support these causes. It will help us say “no” to work which does not align with our priorities and approaches. It will help us better collaborate as a team. And, it will embed learning, evaluation, and communications into our planning. Learning, evaluation, and communication will be crucial parts of the work, and no longer an add-on at the end.

## Equality

We hold equality as one of our core values. As such, we have invested significantly into working with **Sport Structures** on an audit of our performance related to equality, diversity and inclusion. Sport Structures conducted an intensive review of our work, team, board, strategy and policies. They conducted workshops with the team and board to further explore and challenge our approaches and produced a set of recommendations for improvement. This audit is feeding directly into our operational planning process, which focuses primarily on tackling inequalities, and promoting a more equal system for all.

## Safeguarding

Following our annual Safeguarding Assessment by the **Child Protection in Sport Unit** (CPSU), we have identified the following areas as priority for improvement:

- As a relatively new team, we have been working to ensure safeguarding is embedded into the operations and culture of the organisation. This means clarifying: **our role as an Active Partnership**, our policies and procedures, internal mechanisms to track and monitor our learning and progress, staff training, and the setting up of an internal safeguarding team.
- We have recognised the need to engage our board in safeguarding issues. To do this, we are working with CPSU and the **Ann Craft Trust** to develop board training and bring back learning and good practice from safeguarding conferences and events. Our board safeguarding champion has signed up to the virtual board champion network to explore with other Active Partnerships how to embed safeguarding principles.



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