



**SPORT FOR
DEVELOPMENT
COALITION**



IMPACT OF COVID19 ON THE SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

CONFIDENCE

Executive Summary

This report explores the impact COVID-19 has had on Sport for Development (SFD) organisations in the UK. SFD is the intentional use of sport and physical activity to bring about positive changes in the lives of people and communities. The report was written on a voluntary basis on behalf of the Sport for Development Coalition (SFDC); a movement of organisations who believe and use the power of sport as an effective intervention tool.

Information in this report was collected, through various methods, from organisations in the SFD sector and their participants. The findings highlight main trends, themes and point to many examples, but does not claim to be exhaustive of the whole sector.

Young people particularly are suffering from significant disruption to their regular support channels and prolonged isolation. SFD organisations are likely to see increased demand on their services and may not be equipped to deal with the increased need for mental health support. The SFD sector has made significant progress towards reducing inequality (in participation of sport and physical activity) between demographics and creating

opportunities for those marginalized in society. COVID-19 has halted this progress towards equality.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on organisations in the SFD sector, from reduced funding and financial security, to a forced reduction and adaptation in delivery, and increased challenges in engaging participants. Immediate support needs are around understanding guidance and how to get back to their regular delivery. Organisation's long term concerns are largely determined by how they are funded.

Despite the exceptional efforts of the sector, in terms of innovation, adaptability and directly supporting the pandemic response, organisations are left feeling vulnerable and uncertain of their futures. SFD organisations are well placed to support the most vulnerable members of our society, having built up significant trust over their years of delivery. The current threat to the SFD sector is having a profound effect on those vulnerable people. It is essential that resources are available for SFD organisations to continue providing the support so vital at this time.

Content

A note from the author...

In my role at Sported I read and hear about the incredible work small organisations achieve in their communities, showing the greatest determination and gusto I have ever seen. Community leaders give up significant amounts of time (and often their own money) to support people around them, week after week. Becoming aware of their response to COVID-19 was no different. Adapting in the most wonderful and flexible ways, groups were: delivering food parcels and activity packs; organising virtual competitions; reaching out to the most vulnerable and the example that really hit me supporting gravediggers when extra hands were needed.

The fact so many of these organisations are still around is testament to their own resilience. I hope they can get the support they need and so deserve. I am thankful for the opportunity to represent some of those organisations, and that I could utilise my time on furlough to write this report.

Rose Chilton

Insight Manager at Sported

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Introduction

Being physically active has benefits, however the secondary effects of taking part in sport and physical activity are often larger than the well-known physical effects; e.g. being part of a team or community, feelings of achievement, developing personal skills such as commitment, resilience or leadership, establishing routine, and feeling valued.

SFD recognises this wide range of benefits and harnesses them to achieve positive social change. SFD is defined as the intentional use of sport and physical activity to bring about positive changes in the lives of people and communities.

The SFD sector is broad and is made up of both traditional sporting organisations (sports clubs, national governing bodies and leagues of sport) and non-traditional groups such as youth clubs and community organisations who are major delivery agents for SFD. The organisations delivering SFD will work towards outcomes across a number of areas, including but not limited to; mental wellbeing, physical wellbeing, community cohesion and development,

dissidence of anti-social behavior and crime, gender equality, individual development including employability, and economic development. Using sport as a tool to achieve these outcomes means they are able to engage with different communities that traditional structures fail to.

This report is written on behalf of the [Sport for Development Coalition](#) (SFDC); a growing Movement of charities, governing bodies, funders, networks and delivery organisations who all believe in the power of sport and physical activity to act as effective interventions tools for generating positive social outcome.

The information included in the report has been collected from SFD organisations via reports they individually generated, social media, anecdotal evidence as well as national data, recent news sources, and other direct responses to the SFDC with regards to COVID-19.

2. Impact across the five Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) outcomes

2.1. Summary of impact across all outcomes

In 2015 DCMS released their Sporting Future Strategy, in which they outline how the outcomes of sport can positively impact individuals, communities and society. The strategy highlights five outcomes; physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Below we have looked at how COVID-19 has impacted on organisations working across these outcomes as well as the individuals they work with.

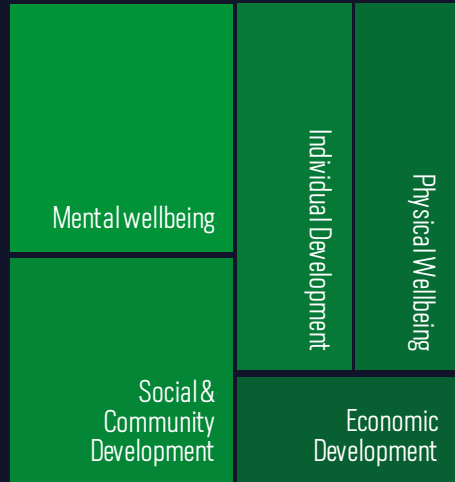
2.2 Mental Wellbeing

Young people miss having structure in their lives and organisations are not set up to respond to the increased demand.

Individuals report significant impact on their mental wellbeing due to the lack of connection and support. A survey by [Young Minds](#) found 83% of young people said the pandemic had made their mental health worse.² They reported increased anxiety, problems with sleep, panic attacks and more frequent urges to self-harm.

Young people miss the structure and support that was previously provided by SFD organisations. The 10 participants

Analysis of feedback from participants indicated the largest negative impact is on mental wellbeing (figure 1), closely followed by social and community development.



summarised in figure 1 reported:

- increased crime and anti-social behaviour
- reduced self esteem
- self-harm
- very disrupted routine

“they are struggling with a lack of structure and routine – with some boys waking up at 5pm after playing PS4 until 8am” [Football Beyond Borders](#)

The people that directly and primarily give support to young people are also showing high levels of anxiety. In the initial weeks of lockdown [Sported](#)'s group leader's average anxiety score was 5.5 out of 10, almost double the national average of 2.9 in 2019.³

The mental health support that would typically be available to young people is experiencing additional challenges in provision. Services through schools are no longer available to most children, and community structures are not always in place.⁴ Many service providers are not set up to deliver digitally; they may lack the necessary infrastructure, policies and procedures for digital provision (GDPR and safeguarding) or lack the specific training for delivering remotely.⁵

Those in need may also struggle to find private space at home, to be able to access support.⁶ Most indicators suggest an increased demand for mental health support however in some localised cases fewer referrals are being made, suggesting those in need are not reaching out for support. Since March 2020 (when lockdown measures were introduced) CAMHS⁷ in Birmingham have seen a 50% reduction in referrals.⁸

The increased need will put more pressure on SFD organisations, some of whom may not be qualified or equipped to provide the necessary support.

2.3 Social and community development

Young people are suffering from prolonged social isolation.

80% of comments⁹ in this area were about reduced social connections. The disruption is particularly felt for adolescents; adolescence is a key time for development of the brain, a heightened sensitivity to social interactions and an increased need for peer interaction. Reduced social connections could have far reaching

consequences for adolescence.¹⁰

Social media is a key tool for connecting during this time, and active social-media use (messaging or posting directly) increases well-being and can help maintain personal relationships. However, passive uses of social media (such as scrolling through newsfeeds) negatively influence wellbeing.¹¹

Young people are feeling the effects of this isolation, in a survey by *Emerging Minds* it was found two-thirds of school children felt lonely in May 2020, the a 50% increase on normal levels. More children called Childline in March, after school closures and social distancing measures were increased¹² and *State of Life*'s COVID-19 tracker indicates life satisfaction is down since January 2020.

The impact of reduced connections are heightened for those young people who are already vulnerable. There are 50,000 children are on child protection programmes¹³, 830,000 children that live in homes where domestic abuse has taken place in the last year¹⁴ and there are 102,000 young carers in England. These groups are likely to be shouldering significant additional responsibilities without the previous respite that school or activity clubs such as sports gave them.¹⁵

SFD organisations provide vital and regular support to these young, vulnerable, and often disadvantaged people. For many the SFD organisation is their only regular connection to support;

"They see our staff and centre as a second home." [Carney's Community](#)

"We believe our role in their lives is more important than ever." [Football Beyond Borders](#)

"We work with young people facing disadvantage so at times like this, they will rely on our support more than ever." [Dame Kelly Holmes Trust](#)

Without the support that SFD organisations provide there is a risk of further deterioration in loneliness, isolation and for some abuse or neglect.

2.4 Individual Development

Developmental progress and opportunities for young people are severely disrupted.

40% of comments¹⁶ in this area were about disruption to schooling or training. Whilst a great substitute right now, virtual delivery has limitations.

"Everything has changed. I feel like I'm walking into my future with a blindfold on." Participant, age 14, [Football Beyond Borders](#)

"We do face chats everyday but it's not the same as being there." Participant, age 17 [Street League](#) Scotland.

Particularly suffering are those with additional needs; there are 270,000 children with a special education, health and care plan.¹⁷ [University College London](#) explored the impact of 'unplanned endings' to school life, they found there were increased feelings of

disappointment, loss, abandonment, confusion and sadness.¹⁸

Those who access the support available through SFD organisations are often people who require extra support. SFD organisations provide programs specifically targeting at those who are homeless, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), at risk of getting involved in crime, have health conditions such as being obese and overweight or suffering from ill mental health. For such people, missing out on regular and robust support is hugely detrimental to their development.

"They need consistency, to lose that nurturing and mentoring element is a huge blow." [School of Hard Knocks](#)

"For some NEET young people there is a high risk of losing their engagement all together." [Sported](#) member

COVID-19 has prevented SFD organisations from supporting individual development and tailored support. This support can take a preventative as well as reactionary approach. Without that early intervention there is risk of an increase in unemployment, homelessness, crime and poor mental wellbeing impacting both individuals and the UK economy as a whole.

2.5 Physical wellbeing

Progress towards equitable activity levels and physical wellbeing across demographics has been stilted.

The benefits of being physically active is well evidenced in the context of health [Sport England](#) found that activity levels were at an all-time high before Coronavirus hit.

Since 3rd of April 2020 through weekly surveys Sport England have found that feelings and motivations towards physical activity and sport significantly dipped but have now (June 2020) stabilised as people change their habits and find new ways to be active such as jogging, walking and cycling.

“The virus has been a stark reminder of the intrinsic enjoyment of being active and the benefits it brings”

[Sport England](#)

Adaptability to online delivery varies hugely by activity for example fitness sessions are relatively easy to deliver virtually, whereas technical sports and activities such as gymnastics, require in person support from a coach, are not possible. Delivery organisations, coaches and instructors are also experiencing confusion over insurance and liability when delivering online.

For SFD organisations being active in and of itself, although important, is not the primary concern. It's more worrisome that familiar inequalities in participants are replicated, even

exacerbated.¹⁹ For example the gender gap in participation has re-opened significantly since Lockdown.

If large demographics and communities further disengage with sport and activity generally then the appeal of an intervention using sport reduces for

2.6 Economic Development

Huge economic downturn affect's SFD organisation's sustainability and reduces opportunities for young people.

[Office for National Statistics](#) estimate GDP²⁰ fell by 20% in the month of April; three times larger than the contraction felt in the economic downturn of 2008. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) suggest the UK could be the worst hit economy.²¹ The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) reveal there were nearly a million new claims for Universal Credit in a fortnight (compared to the 100,000 claims that would usually be expected).²²

Government lockdown is hitting young workers the hardest.²³ The 10 participants at SFD organisations summarised in figure 1 reported issues such as:

- qualifications being frozen
- unemployment
- reduced opportunities

Many SFD organisations provide vital apprentice opportunities, often to NEET young people with limited other opportunities. These rely on 'on the job'

02

experience, but apprentices have been paused and participants have been particularly affected by the furlough scheme.

To add to the confusion and uncertainty for young people SFD organisations often work with multiple employment partners – who have a very different set of circumstances, both structurally and financially. Understanding guidance and support available has been complex and difficult.

Some apprenticeship providers have been helping employers understand the specific guidance. SFD organisations such as [Coach Core](#) have consolidated the information provided by the government and present back to employers via a weekly newsletter.

“We have continued to help young people who have lost their jobs or faced reduced hours to move into opportunities with supermarkets, care sector and warehousing.”

Street League

Disruption to these programs has a significant impact on participant’s education and employment opportunities, earning potential and confidence both in the short and long term.



3. By Demographic

3.1 Summary of demographics

Each of the demographics below were chosen because they are systematically disadvantaged in our society. Sport England find that each of these demographics are consistently under-represented in terms of activity levels²⁴ a symptom of the inequalities that exist within our society. They are often the focus of multiple policies and initiatives, and as such the target audience of many SFD organisations. This section explains how each group is disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and what this means for their engagement with sport for development.

The intersectionality of demographics should be acknowledged; those living in poverty are more likely to be disabled, in poor health, caring for others or experiencing other mental health issues²⁵, therefore for some individuals, these issues are compounded by the multiple layers of disadvantage that they face. It is also acknowledged there may be other demographics disproportionately affected, which are not covered in this report.²⁶

Women are more likely to suffer from domestic abuse and domestic abuse is escalating under lockdown... However, 84% of domestic abuse service providers say they have had to reduce services.³¹



3.2 Women and girls

COVID-19 has reinforced outdated gender roles. The resurfacing of cultural feelings that sport is 'not for girls' will be a challenge for SFD organisations.

The direct risk on health and economic situation is worse for women. They are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 with 2.5million of the 3.2million workers in highest risk roles are women.²⁷ Women are also doing the bulk of unpaid care (for children, elderly, disabled or vulnerable relatives)²³ and proportionately more childcare, reinforcing stereotypical gender roles. This is illustrated by the trend in academic research; submissions from women plummeted during lockdown whereas submissions from men increased.²⁸

Employment protection schemes are not designed for pregnant women or those returning from maternity leave. Parents just returned from maternity or paternity leave would be entitled to 80% of statutory pay rather than actual pay. Protection for self-employed individuals is based on income over the last three years, so anyone who had been on maternity leave over that period would be disadvantaged. Women of BAME ethnicities are the hardest hit financially.²⁹

Women and girls are also more at risk from the circumstances COVID-19 and the Lockdown has placed us in. Women are more likely to suffer from domestic abuse and domestic abuse

is escalating under lockdown. 72% of survivors responding to *Women's Aid* say their abuser has more control over their lives.³⁰ However, 84% of domestic abuse service providers say they have had to reduce services.³¹ Those women will be less able to seek support, a sport setting could have been the safe space where they could have reached out. Young girls may be more susceptible to the mental health impacts outlined in section 2.2. Pre COVID, one in four girls reported high levels of depressive symptoms, compared to one in 10 boys.³²

In terms of their engagement sport and activity during this time, females are generally less active than males (the latest Sport England figures indicate 61% compared to 65%).³³ and *Sport England* found that females are less likely to say they enjoy solitary exercise, and are more likely to worry about leaving their homes to exercise. Females place a greater importance on being active during the pandemic yet are more likely to feel their exercise regimes have been disrupted.

Barriers to being active have been exacerbated by the lockdown. Women's sport has consistently been less visible (4% of sports media coverage in the UK),³⁴ and due to the younger leagues and competitions in women's sport less financially stable. It's men's elite sport that is coming back first, reinforcing gendered priorities in the sector. There's a risk women's sport at all levels will suffer as budgets are cut.

This lack of visibility of women's sport

along with a regression for women and girls in the perceived gendered role in society, is limiting girl's inspiration and opportunity to take part in sport and activity. For SFD organisations engaging women and girls, in programmes which could help support women with the issues COVID-19 has inflamed such as mental wellbeing and domestic abuse, will be harder.

3.3 Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)

COVID-19 has highlighted the disparities in our society between different ethnicities. SFD organisations will find high anxiety around a 'return to play' for these communities.

BAME ethnicities are suffering from a higher death rate from COVID-19³⁵, the reasons for this are overlapping and complex. Factors that have been cited include higher exposure to risk (e.g. the proportion of BAME ethnicities work in 'front line' occupations), inequalities in some health conditions (e.g. diabetes) and differences in housing situations. 90% of doctors who have died are from ethnic minorities.³⁶

A leaked report from Public Health England acknowledges it could also be a result of the stark inequalities in our society and historic racism.³⁷

Certain BAME ethnicities experienced additional challenges. Those of Muslim faith have had to endure Ramadan without the usual support of family and extended family.

Those young people for whom English is a second language have less support for schoolwork at home.

South Asian ethnicities are more likely to live in multigenerational households, it is therefore harder for older members to isolate and protect themselves, and younger members feel more anxiety on behalf of their older relatives.

As the lockdown restrictions were put in place Group leaders of SFD organisations in London expressed fear their participants of ethnic minorities would be discriminated against in the streets³⁸, indeed a disproportionate number of ethnic minorities were fined.³⁹

In terms of sport and activity levels, most non-white ethnicities are less active compared to white ethnicities (65%); Chinese (61%), Black (58%), Asian excluding Chinese (only 54%) and other ethnic groups (61%)⁹. *Sport England* find that Mixed, Asian and Black ethnicities feel they are more active during lockdown than before, yet this doesn't translate into more regular participation in physical activity.

Elite sportsmen and women of BAME ethnicities are publicly expressing concern over returning to training for health reasons.⁴⁰ This is likely to translate to the community sport setting. Those in multi-generational households may be reluctant to return over fear of putting their relatives at greater risk. As #blacklivesmatter gains momentum, there is hope stark ethnic disparities are addressed.

With an increased risk and anxiety for BAME communities coming out of lockdown, SFD organisations will find it harder to encourage communities back to their settings. And with these fears being reinforced by high profile athletes it could be a long time before SFD is able to support these young people across the social, economic, and individual disadvantage they face.

3.4 People living in poverty or areas of deprivation

COVID-19 has crippled those families already living in or on the edge of poverty. SFD organisations will find their participants more in need but less able to access sessions.

Those living in areas of deprivation are experiencing a higher death rate from COVID-19. (Age-standardised) mortality rate was higher in most deprived areas; 128.3 deaths per 100,000 population compared to 58.8 per 100,000 in least deprived areas.⁴¹

Those trapped in poverty are more likely to have insecure jobs, a lack of employee rights and benefits, and have less savings to cover unplanned income loss.⁴² As panic buying took hold, it was harder to access healthy low-cost essential foods and there were disruptions to foodbanks.⁴³

Parents of low-income households are more likely to feel financial stress in the current economic climate. This increased pressure at home and living

in close proximity could be heightening tensions at home.

Accessing school and other online services is more difficult for those living poverty with many have limited access to internet; in 2018 there were still 5.3 million adults in the UK (10% of the adult UK population) who are non-internet users.⁴⁴

Young People with increased pressures on the family are getting less emotional support from parents with priorities in their lives such as schoolwork and practical resources such as equipment and toys.

"A lot of our families lack even basic resources like a football to play with."
StreetGames Local Trusted Organisations

"Those in toxic backgrounds will have issues exacerbated over next few months, mental wellbeing will worsen and potential poverty and food shortages is likely to mean that they will need more and more support, especially if we want those on periphery of crime to not get groomed by gangs." *Empire Fighting Chance*

Those that have faced additional barriers to staying physically active and may find it harder to return to activity. The first sports that have returned (golf, tennis and angling) are less accessible for those on lower incomes, financially, geographically and culturally. Activities that can more easily adhere to social distancing measures are those that

naturally require more space and are therefore generally more expensive to play.

Those from lower socioeconomic groups have been hit hardest by COVID-19 financially, this has knock on effects for their mental, social and physical wellbeing. SFD can offer support across these issues, but will have to work harder and will need increased resource to be able to do this.

3.5 Disabled people

COVID-19 has further disadvantaged those living with a disability or long-term health condition our society. As physical activity competes with other priorities in life SFD will struggle to re-engage disabled participants.

There has been a wide variety of COVID-19 impacts affecting disabled people across the spectrum of physical and mental health conditions.

Some conditions mean people are more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19, and are therefore shielding as well as experiencing heightened negative impacts outlined in 2.2 and 2.3. A lack of support and carer visits⁴⁵ in some cases, as well as additional challenges with shopping, increased cost or risk of travelling to health appointments has increased the challenge of individual's abilities to cope day to day and those with learning difficulties find it harder to understand guidelines. However, disability and sickness benefits have not risen in the same way Universal Credit has.⁴⁶

Sported, a SFD charity with a wide range of disability groups, has summarised the additional challenges their groups have faced:

- online delivery is more complicated
- lack of appropriate online resources
- participants struggle to understand the situation and guidelines
- participants struggle to understand why their regular, trusted activity has changed.

"We have struggled to find online activities/exercises which support people with learning difficulties."

Sported members are concerned on behalf of their participants about: increased anxiety, higher risk of injury and lack of confidence.

In terms of the return to sport disability sport will find it more difficult to follow social distancing requirements. Participants may struggle to understand restrictions or may require the physical support of carers and coaches. Partners (such as schools) often bring disabled participants to sessions and may delay a return to activity over fear of ensuring safety.

"Blind and visually impaired people will need guiding to the washroom (to wash hands regularly). It is difficult to guide someone whilst maintaining social distancing." *Sported* member

Disabled participants may face additional complications travelling to venues, for example those who

usually use public transport or require adaptable minibuses.

The challenges for those with a disability or life long health condition have been significant, they will continue to feel the effects of COVID-19 for longer than others in society. SFD organisations will have to use innovative approaches to ensure that their offers are truly inclusive to all.

“Blind and visually will need guiding to the washroom (to wash hands regularly). It is difficult to guide someone whilst maintaining social distancing.”

Sported member



4. On Organisations

4.1 Initial impact

In March it was predicted charities would lose £4 Billion over 12 weeks.⁴⁷ SFD organisations are suffering significant financial loss.

The UK's third sector appears adaptable and resilient in this crisis and the SFD sector is no exception.

As well as large and relatively secure organisations the sector is made up of 10,000s of small, community organisations, run by extremely dedicated volunteers. *Sported*⁸ and *StreetGames*⁴⁹ provide a valuable picture of such organisations.

These smaller organisations are likely more vulnerable right now. *Sported* report over 30% of their members have reserves that cover less than three months of expenditure.

StreetGames estimate a third to a quarter of their Locally Trusted Organisations⁵⁰ (LTOs) have stopped operations and furloughed all staff.

Sported find that, since lockdown, one in four community groups are not sure they will exist in six months' time.



4.1.1 Financial

Organisations have experienced financial loss in a variety of ways:

- Loss of subs or membership fees
- Corporate funding more difficult to secure
- Cancellation of fundraising events
- Delays in receiving resources/income

“We have also lost over a third of our income since shutting the centre. Over a third was self-generated through the personal training and boxing fitness sessions we were delivering for members of the public and organisations. (it was this that funded the free work with at risk groups)”

Carney’s Community

“As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic we had to cancel or postpone events in 2020 with an associated lost revenue exceeding £1million... With effect from 1st June we have made 14 roles in the organisation redundant.”

Dallagio Rugby Works

Organisations have also experienced increased financial pressure:

- funding is ringfenced to certain projects
- many rely on one main source of income, which is riskier currently
- smaller organisations are often linked to a small business, which is affected by closures

4.1.2 Emotional

Organisations are really hit by the loss of momentum.

Smaller SFD organisations are

typically under-funded and under-resourced. Those smaller, hand to mouth organisations may not be linked in to support. Information around furlough, funding and other key support mechanisms has either not reached them at all or has been difficult to understand and implement.

There is significant hardship for the smaller, organisations especially those mainly run by volunteers. They are not able to access the Employment Protection Scheme and there is less protection for volunteers. [Sported](#) report 53% of their membership are entirely run by volunteers.

4.2 Adapting delivery

The pandemic has significantly impacted SFD organisation’s delivery. Almost all organisations appear to have stopped physical sports delivery in line with government guidelines. Much of this delivery was free, or heavily subsidised, and provided essential support to participants. Stopping physical delivery has not stopped organisations from providing vital support to participants.

SFD organisations are well placed to support vulnerable people because they already have strong relationships – built up and developed over many years.⁵¹

Many have adapted to online delivery and are doing this at the same time they would have run physical sessions, to maintain routine. For example, live streaming in the morning ensures that young people must get up early and

organise themselves as if they were still attending a breakfast club before school.⁵²

Organisations on the ground are setting up extra safety nets to support participant's wellbeing; regular check ins, one to one socially distant walks where possible. Some have set up support helplines, sent out 'wellbeing packs' and provided youth workers with phones which have remained an important channel to help participants understand the changing situation.

Through virtual delivery which has included interactive creative tasks and activities such as online football gaming tournaments and a zoom youth clubs, individuals have maintained regular connection with positive role models. However, coaches report in this virtual world it is harder to subtly check in with vulnerable people and pick up on subtle clue as to the wellbeing and the most vulnerable might not access support at all.

Organisations have been flexible, adapting their delivery model in a short space of time. This meant re-writing safeguarding policies to cover online safeguarding, re-writing their Theory of Change and rapidly putting together new resources.

Although there is still significant need from participants and even increased demand on certain services, many organisations with paid staff have taken up the furlough scheme, as a way of saving costs whilst income is uncertain. Some are also reporting having to place

This new way of working, although proving valuable, highlights limited access to sufficient IT equipment, and limited experience in online delivery. It may also be harder to track and monitor use and impact of online delivery⁵³.

The few who remain open, as typically they provide education to vulnerable children, report many have not been attending and instead have been self-isolating as a precaution.

4.3 Innovations

Every SFD organisation has an interesting story to tell of how they adapted, found new ways of working and created innovative new partnerships during COVID. The below gives a brief overview of a sample of these innovations, some have responded directly to support the pandemic response and others to support indirect impacts on their communities.

4.3.1 COVID Response

Multiple organisations have adapted to directly support the COVID-19 response, delivering food and supporting the most vulnerable.

"We decided to use the surplus food and our initiative to create a food bank." [Sporting Chance - North East](#)

4.3.2 Developing online resources

Organisations are developing online content and seeing this as an opportunity to make resources more accessible online, and potentially reach more beneficiaries in the future.

"We're providing online support in interview skills, writing applications and CV support and providing individual feedback on applications and CV content – all online." [Dallagio Rugby Works](#)

In some cases, the lockdown has been a catalyst to expand to support in this area and overcome barriers.

"I am a technophobe and had to learn new skills and systems in terms of online practice. It is a good idea to stop putting off the things that you were apprehensive about in the first place, now is the time to test them and perfect them." [Sported member](#), Northern Ireland

[Dame Kelly Homes Trust](#) has utilised world class athletes to support the #StayInWorkOut initiative.

Larger organisations are making resources more accessible, e.g [UK Coaching](#) have made their Mental Health Awareness for Sport & Physical Activity course available for free.

4.3.3 Beneficiary participation

Organisations are taking a more user-led approach.

"The WhatsApp group for parent/ carers has been really useful as it has meant we have shared challenges and resolved issues from learning with and from each other."

4.3.4 Responding to need

To overcome 'IT poverty', organisations report delivering data vouchers to those with limited access to internet. [SLQ Sport Leaders](#) are ensuring their 'I Can, I Am' resilience programme can be accessed by all regardless of access to IT.

Smaller, community organisations who usually provide SFD are adapting to support their audience in new ways. The [Bangladeshi Islamic Centre](#) in Sandwell are helping their community to overcome language barriers; helping them with social services, apply for government grant and are supporting the bereaved.

As well as delivering leaflets and food parcels and providing phone mentoring for vulnerable people a GAA club in Northern Ireland reported their respond to local need had included supporting gravediggers at a local church.⁵⁴

4.3.5 Fundraising

In response to the loss of income from fundraising events London Marathon Charitable Trust initiated the [2.6 challenge](#) to 'save the UK's charities', encouraging people to take part in physical challenges at home. The initiative has raised 11 million so far.

4.3.6 New partnerships

Some innovative partnerships are emerging; [StreetGames](#) report that Jaguar LandRover have provided LTOs in the West Midlands with access to four vehicles to help deliver food parcels

4.4 Support needs

4.4.1 Understanding rules and regulations

Immediate needs for delivery organisations are around implementing new rules and regulations. This includes directional signage in buildings as well as guidance on communicating regulations, cleaning and sharing equipment and online safeguarding.

Specifically, guidance is needed on implementing social distancing measures. Delivering to smaller groups of participants means groups will require more space, volunteers and coaches to deliver to the same number of people, which requires more resources.

The journey back to delivery will also vary hugely by activity (e.g. angling compared to rugby union), or audience (e.g. those with carers). There is a need to provide guidance for different settings. For multisport groups (Sported's membership has over 590 multisport groups) it will be harder to keep up with varying advice from multiple National Government Bodies (NGBs).

4.4.2 Financial support

Financial support is required to cover the loss and ease pressure (section 4.4.1) As social distancing requires more resources, delivery organisations will require financial support to delivery under new rules.

Organisations are and would continue to benefit from professional support around online delivery, insurance, liability, online safeguarding, grant applications, crowdfunding, refreshing first aid training, mental health first aid, and longer-term planning.



5. Positive Impacts

Not all impacts have been negative – many organisations have reported positive impacts in the sector, within organisations and on their participants.

5.1 On the sector

In a sector which sometimes feels competitive over limited funds, the pandemic has provided the opportunity for improved collaboration. Organisations are providing important signposting and referrals to other services that young people need, operating as more of a network.

“We’re supporting local organisations and mutual aid groups to do the same.” [Sported](#) member

The sector typically relies on the dedication of volunteers and if the nation’s increased desire to volunteer in our local community continues the SFD sector could benefit.

Larger partners and funders have released new funding streams, including Sport England Emergency Funding, Tackling Inactivity Fund, Innovation Fund, Sport Wales Resilience Fund, Virtually Active fund which is designed to support organisations to move their services online, along with numerous [Community Foundations](#).

Some report funders have increased their flexibility or extended the use of existing contracts to reflect needs of organisations e.g. to support IT

refurbishment projects, or been more flexible on rollover of funding.

There’s increased recognition of SFD and how sport can be used as a tool for social good. A recent survey by [Youth Sport Trust](#) found that 80% of school and PE leads say that they would be interested in receiving a set of tips and ideas of how to use PE and sport to help address some of the emerging needs of young people after COVID-19. 72% were interested in hearing more about how to adapt PE lessons to focus on the teaching of life skills through activity and sport.

All of these positive impacts indicate a significant opportunity for the sector. With some time to take stock and reflect on the lessons learnt there is a significant step change that can be had on SFD and the communities it serves.

“It’s the whole resetting support – grass-roots sports against elite sport. Up until COVID a lot of money gets pumped into elite sport and grass-roots sports are fighting for it. Now in New Zealand they are using this chance to have those discussions – do you put more money into the grass-roots sport which then over time will feed your elite sports?” [Sported](#) member, Scotland

5.2. On organisations

Group leaders and coaches are more comfortable accessing online support. [Sported](#) partly attributes the significant increase in webinar attendance to this.

Increased access to online resources could bring an opportunity for organisations to be more creative or innovative, to rethink their organisation, make improvements, and place a greater importance on resilience and sustainability.

Online delivery has highlighted other benefits. It is easier to identify participants as individuals and give personal feedback when they are on individual screens, rather than seeing the 'group' as a whole. Some plan to continue using online resources for coaching.⁵⁵

For many groups in the past, online engagement was sporadic and dominated by specific individuals. Now with it being the only form of access, it has provided an opportunity for the organisations to ensure that everyone can access online content and is being communicated to equally.

5.4 On the workforce

As resources move online and workers have more flexible working conditions at home, employees and volunteers in

the sector are also taking advantage of online resources. *Sported* find that group leaders in their network are looking at new ways to contribute to their group and take the opportunity to strategise for the year ahead. National support agencies report seeing new and different audiences accessing their online resources.

5.3 On participants

Some smaller SFD organisations have noticed stronger family connections in the families they usually support; in some cases, parents are stepping up because they are spending more time with their children, appreciate the gap that has been created with the closing of schools and youth settings as well as the opportunity to be active together. Some report increased knock on effect on siblings or other family members, as online activity can engage a whole household rather than just the individual.



6. Long Term Impacts

Organisations are concerned about their long-term viability; concerns are largely determined by how organisation are funded.

6.1 On the sector

Organisations are concerned for the long-term funding landscape of the sector. This is related to the overall economic downturn and the budgetary effects on public spending which will mean schools or partners may be squeezed financially, may be forced to end partnerships.

6.2 On organisations

Organisations themselves are concerned over their financial security. This depends largely on how different organisations are funded.

Clubs that rely on subs and membership fees will have experienced a significant financial loss during lockdown, for which it will likely be hard to find an alternative source. The impact on affordability of low-income families means organisations will need to redesign and rethink their pricing structure. Organisations may be less able subsidise participation as they did before.

Small-scale organisations with no assets and no utilities to pay may have found it easier to press 'pause' right now, and reduce outgoings, but are concerned about preserving cashflow over an extended period.

Organisations that rely heavily on grant

funding are surviving now but are deeply concerned about their future viability based on future funding opportunities. As are those that rely on corporate funding and sponsorship may find those relationships harder to come by as the economy contracts.

Those who capitalise on fundraising events (e.g. [Dallagio Rugby Works](#) in 4.4.1) or summer events have experienced significant fall in expected income, and are unsure as to when such events can run again in the future.

Those who have been financing assets or owned facilities throughout lockdown have relied heavily on government funding, but not all have been eligible. In these cases, there have been drastic consequences.

Those with diverse sources of income have reported more security and confidence. [Cornic Relief](#) who fund several SFD initiatives, have found that organisations with a higher proportion of unrestricted funding (which is normally positive) are struggling the most.

Financial solutions will not work across the board and any sector wide policies will need to be targeted and designed to specifically address different financial models.

6.3 On the workforce

Some organisations may be working with a reduced workforce, after having to make workers redundant or furloughed. Volunteers and coaches may lack confidence, due to disruption as well as fear over safety and following new guidelines.

7. CONCLUSION

The SFD sector intentionally uses sport and physical activity as a tool to achieve social outcomes.

COVID-19 has significantly impacted SFD organisation abilities to achieve outcomes that positively impact on individuals and communities. The most detrimental impacts of COVID-19 were found in mental wellbeing and social and community connections.

Physical Development - If large demographics and communities further disengage with sport and activity generally then the appeal of an intervention using sport reduces for communities that could most benefit.

Mental Wellbeing - The increased need will put more pressure on SFD organisations, some of whom may not be qualified or equipped to provide the necessary support.

Social and Community Development - Without the support that SFD organisations provide there is a risk of further deterioration in loneliness, isolation and for some abuse or neglect.

Individual Development - COVID-19 has prevented SFD organisations from supporting individual development and tailored support. This support can take a preventative as well as reactionary approach. Without that early intervention there is risk of an increase in unemployment, homelessness, crime and poor mental wellbeing impacting both individuals and the UK economy as a whole.

Economic Development - Disruption to these programs has a significant impact on participant's education and employment opportunities, earning potential and confidence both in the short and long term.

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected certain demographics with devastating and fatal consequences. The way each of these demographics are marginalised in society has been highlighted by COVID-19. These impacts are likely to translate to their feelings towards sport and physical activity, and therefore experience within the SFD sector.

SFD organisation work across outcomes and deliver valuable support targeted at certain demographics. They have built up trust over several years and are well placed to provide this support. However SFD organisations are experiencing significant financial and emotional hardship, with many unsure of their sustainability in the long run and run the risk of damaging these long standing community services.

Despite the exceptional efforts of the sector both in terms of innovation to ensure support is given to the most vulnerable and directly supporting the pandemic response through diverted activities, organisations are left feeling unsure and un-reassured of their futures. The current threat to the sector could have drastic consequences for the most vulnerable and in need in our society, it is essential that resource is available for SFD organisations so they can provide the support that is most needed at this time.

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- 47 Civil Society.
- 48 Membership of approx. 2,600.
- 49 Membership of approx. 1,000 Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs).
- 50 LTO's are place-based community organisations in StreetGames' network, which use sport as a tool to support young people.
- 51 Football Beyond Borders.
- 52 Greenhouse Sports.
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