



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT SPORT CARDIFF FAMILY FUN PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

The StreetGames' Family Engagement Project (FEP) aims to engage with families who are inactive, isolated or who have challenging circumstances which may impact on their health and wellbeing. Funded by the Healthy and Active Fund (HAF), FEP operates in 7 Local Authorities in South Wales. FEP in Cardiff began in February 2020. 'Family Fun' is about families taking part in activities together, with an emphasis on the 'fun' element rather than promoting a physical activity message.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Sport Cardiff's original plan was to provide face to face sessions in various locations across the city, offering tailored support for families, with specific sessions catering for disabilities. There would be continued consultation with families on what works well to shape the offer. As the pandemic has continued into a second year, live virtual sessions have been taking place since January 2021.

The team connect with local organisations and family liaison officers as a link to engaging with families who might want to access FEP, as well as the usual means of promotion via the Sport Cardiff website and social media channels. Delivery partners are commissioned to run the sessions. Two sessions a week have been offered: one for families with older children, and one for those with younger children. Specific disability sessions were re-started at the end of February and a face to face offer based in Grangetown.

The aim is for people to attend a series of sessions and after 4 weeks, equipment will be delivered to people's homes. Many of the FEP projects have identified that a lack of equipment is a barrier to families getting physically active. The Cardiff project has adapted their activity ideas to use household items and equipment that is readily available to everyone. The project staff also designed a questionnaire to use with families once a rapport had been developed with the feedback to be used to design the next block of sessions.



ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

The move to virtual provision was difficult for the target audience and participation levels were sporadic. Around 7 families engaged initially, which worked for the session, but numbers have slowly dropped over the weeks, especially in the run up to Christmas and attendance was usually two or three families a week. One family, however, has attended consistently. For the staff providing the sessions, it was challenging to try to build a rapport with families in a virtual group setting, where one to one discussion was not applicable and the medium had its own barriers. For some families, the experience can be limited: some families accessed the sessions via a phone, which made it difficult for all participants to be involved and to be able to see the whole group.

Digital poverty and literacy has also been an issue preventing some families being able to access the offer and a learning point for the project is that a face to face physical offer, with a personal touch, is a far preferable way of working for the families they are targeting. **"We have to deliver it physically next time; it's got to be done."**

The pandemic has raised the importance of this area of work and the challenges that some families are facing: many services available to families previously had not returned to face to face working in early 2022, and FEP can add value and support to families who are anxious about returning to 'normality' or have a new or greater need of support due to changing circumstances.

Questionnaire: Family feedback

“With it being a free session it was more enticing. It was good to feel like we were having a bit of normality after the pandemic...We have been loving the sessions and everyone is so friendly. The sessions have helped us as a family to take that step to come out of our anxiety controlled bubble. We have started to play games together that we haven’t played before or even heard of before. It also helps that we have learnt how to play games with low cost or no equipment.

***Have the sessions increased your confidence to create/play games at home?**
Yes, it has definitely helped. Not only for the children but it has helped me as a parent to interact with them. This programme has really helped with motivation so I think having a reason to get dressed and get out of the house with my children and attending a weekly session would be really helpful. I prefer coming to these sessions over the other playgroups we attend during the week as we are getting involved and encouraged to play together. The support in these sessions make me want to continue attending.”*



ENABLERS/SUCCESS FACTORS

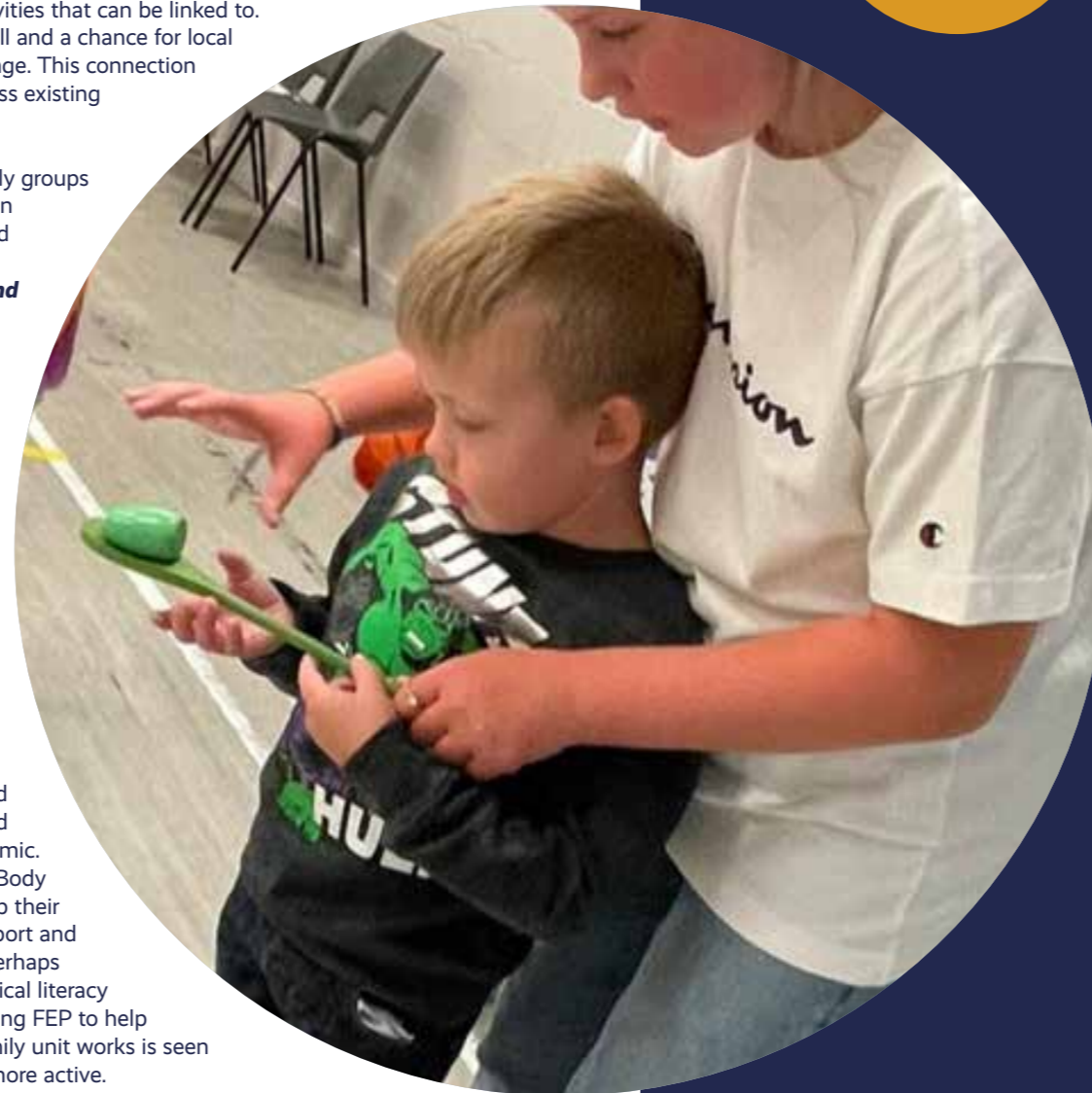
Partnership working has been a key element of the offer. The FEP team are currently engaging with ACE: Action in Caerau and Ely¹ and Oasis Cardiff² which supports refugees and asylum seekers.

These community organisations have close ties to the local population and are ideally placed to help the FEP engage with families and to make use of community buildings, helping to raise the visibility of the project and the level of trust in it. Working with partners can also broaden the range of activities that can be linked to. For example, ACE operates a food pantry and that means there is regular footfall and a chance for local families to see the FEP sessions promoted on posters and via their Facebook page. This connection works well. A possible future use of funding might be to pay for parents to access existing training offered through ACE such as food hygiene qualifications.

The right people: Having coaches that can adapt and deliver activities for family groups is a key part of the project design. Project staff make sure they meet deliverers in advance and observe a session to ensure that those leading sessions understand what the project is trying to achieve – it’s not just turning up to deliver a sport: **“It’s so much more than a sports session, it’s about letting parents understand the bond and work with their kids, not just sit on the bench and watch, they take part”**. Staff are aware that it is sometimes very hard to get parents to take part when the habit of going to ‘sports’ sessions is for someone else to be delivering and for parents to be on the side lines. This kind of whole family participation is a different kind of skill that providers need to have or develop – adults can sometimes be embarrassed about taking part or struggle to see how they can take over from the coach.

Plugging gaps in provision: Sport Cardiff’s remit has changed in recent years. The focus has previously been on young people aged 7 to 16 but is now broader and includes the 60+ offer. One of Cardiff’s FEP project team’s remit has changed to focus on ages 0 to 6, city-wide, which is a new cohort of the population to work with.

“It has been needed for a while... I’ve done presentations and in speaking to people about it, is this is amazing, how is there not more of this everywhere because this is exactly what’s needed, our parents are loving it.”
The FEP adds value to the overall sports offer across the city as there are limited physical activity opportunities available for the under 7s other than soft play and Flying Start, which hasn’t been able to deliver physical sessions since the pandemic. The 7+ age group is better catered for via sports clubs and National Governing Body provision. Therefore, the FEP can intervene at a time where children can develop their physical literacy from a very young age to give them the tools to take part on sport and join clubs when they are older. Similarly, it can give parents the confidence to perhaps get involved in other clubs as participants or volunteers. It can be part of a physical literacy pathway and journey as well as helping families bond. Families bonding and using FEP to help develop respect among family members, improving behaviour and how the family unit works is seen as an important outcome that the project can achieve, beyond getting people more active.



SUSTAINABILITY

Ongoing cost requirements: The problem with bringing a coach in is the cost: around £25 an hour – it is not a project that will have high numbers of participants that can all pay a small contribution. The quality of the work with a small number of families is where the impact and value will be gained rather than creating sessions for large numbers of participants. This approach will require some ongoing funding for delivery costs, but there are minimal equipment costs to deal with. The project team are considering different models according to the groups worked with. A small charge and delivery support might be more appropriate for some groups of families for example where family members have a learning disability and will benefit from additional capacity. An alternative is to look at seed-funding groups and then helping group members take ownership and run the activities themselves.

Supporting independent participation: Project staff spoke about how they are learning a lot from ACE in relation to setting up groups so that they can establish themselves and then take ownership of the sessions. The initial costs are met by the organisation and over time, the community organisation can take a step back, but support is still available if needed. Group members have use of the venue and can use the organisation to advertise their sessions: but community members take on the running of the session themselves on a voluntary basis. This way of working is seen as a means to longer term sustainability of FEP provision through partnership working.

With the disruption caused by the pandemic, FEP has not yet had the chance to achieve its goals and work with families for a sustained amount of time. Without a project extension, staff considered that withdrawing support could have negative effects on participating families. Having long term input is likely to be necessary in order to work towards intended outcomes and to engage with families who have been ‘left behind’. The offer does not have to be costly: coaching costs and venue are the main expenses. Household equipment can be used rather than specific equipment purchases and FEP projects are sharing learning about making use of sports libraries.

Longer term support: The additional year of HAF funding is necessary in order to have a chance of sustaining any behaviour change: it takes a long time to develop confidence and to change behaviour. The project has not yet been able to maintain a long period of face to face provision to instil habitual participation and to develop stronger relationships with family members. Some consistency of funding is important to allow enough time for project staff to get groups set up and to have sufficient time to establish the right partnerships with local organisations and families.

¹<https://www.aceplace.org/>

²<https://www.oasiscardiff.org/>

NEXT STEPS

Project staff have felt “frustrated” that they have not made as much progress as hoped due to the pandemic, but are aware that with sustained support, the work they are doing with families has the potential to have a very positive impact. There is a great deal of enthusiasm for the project and will to make it work. The pandemic has meant that there are now many more families who are in vulnerable positions and have been left behind. FEP is one opportunity to make a difference and address a need. FEP in Cardiff restarted it’s face to face sessions in February 2022 to complement the virtual offer that was developed during the pandemic.

