



Hartpury Active Essex Systems Evaluation: Find Your Active Findings Report - January 2023

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Phase 2 Programme theory testing

- Having carried out the comprehensive collaborative process from phase 1, this phase consisted of the evaluation testing the wide range of explanatory assumptions and beliefs underpinning the areas of focus.
- Here, we utilised a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods to test these assumptions and beliefs, and then offer insights and reflections for refinement to inform overall learning to action.
- These methods were tested with a wide range of stakeholders in the active Essex system ranging from beneficiaries to senior decision makers and influencers.
- This phase was also supported by the embedded SROI approach.
- It is important to state that during this testing phase we were conscious of existing evaluation work and data collection taking place across Active Essex. As a result, we made every effort to collaborate and avoid duplication (for example supporting and working with the LDP realist evaluation framework in progress).

Over the course of the evaluation, we implemented a range of qualitative and quantitative methods to facilitate the deep dive process. These are outlined below.

20 -Interviews

Semi-structured interviews captured the impact and illustrated which changes were observable across the four areas of focus. We explored how and why engagement across the four areas of focus contributed to change in individuals, communities, and the system.

41 -Surveys

Surveys were co produced as a mixed method to gather quantitative and qualitative data across the four areas of focus from participants and strategic stakeholders. These informed the programme theory testing, deep dives and the social return on investment forecast. The four ONS Wellby questions were built into each survey.

A close-up photograph of two hands shaking in a firm grip. The hand on the left is wearing a silver metal link watch. The hand on the right is wearing a gold metal link watch with a dark blue square face featuring a white circle. A large, semi-transparent red rectangle is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the text "Find Your Active Findings" in white. The background is a clear, light blue sky.

Find Your Active
Findings

Initial assumption

Community connectors are active members of the community who commence conversations with other residents to make them aware of opportunities to be physically active.

For individuals suffering or at risk of social isolation and loneliness, FYA gives these people the opportunity to connect and develop relationships.

People struggling to find activities and know where to look are able to access information about physical activity in informative place.

How is this playing out?

Community connectors work in innovative ways to access hard to reach groups. This is because of the connections they already have going into the role.

FYA gives people the opportunity to socialise with others whilst being physically active which is leading to socialising and volunteering outside of FYA activities. These people are a combination of isolated and non isolated.

The promotion of FYA website and opportunities via community Facebook groups is a good platform to promote physical activity and to connect people into physical activity. This gives connectors more reach to promote what is out there.

Community connectors sign post individuals to activities that include other activities outside of physical activity going wider than physical activity itself.

Find Your Active Impact headlines

Going Deeper into findings - Find Your Active

What we Explored:

If community connectors are there to encourage people to participate, then by interacting and making themselves part of the community, people will be more likely to participate because they will begin to gain a positive reputation and build relationships with community members.

What we found:

Community Connectors utilise non-physical activity spaces and activities (supermarkets, coffee mornings and arts and crafts activities) to provide opportunities to build relationships with community members. Jill (Community Connector) tries to promote FYA in her daily activities.

"I wear my FYA kit around so when I'm in [the supermarket] people ask me what FYA and I can spark a conversation from there" whereas some, like Anna (Community Connector) utilise their other job role that is community based to promote FYA through those avenues.

"I went out with the Fire Service to speak with socially isolated individuals. Where I could promote FYA, I had the leaflets ready to share with individuals that otherwise might have been missed" (Anna).

Anna also works with the local Women's Institute to promote opportunities to socialise at local coffee mornings where *"women are able to come along and be part of this wider social group. I lead from behind so when they are ready to take part in physical activity, it is their decision to take part and not mine"*.

Community connectors embody an approach of meeting individuals where they are on their physical activity journey. There is an understanding that some residents will need more support than others to attend physical activity opportunities. Jill (Community Connector) said *"I would go along to some of the activities with some women that didn't want to go alone. Once we got there and she was introduced to the instructor, I wasn't needed anymore!"*. Other examples has seen Jill signposting opportunities to residents with Hayley (activity instructor) *"losing tracking of the number of referrals from Jill"* with many that come through FYA *"being brand new to exercise"*.

Going Deeper into findings - Find Your Active

What we Explored:

If an individual is suffering from social isolation and loneliness, then by finding and joining a club through the Find Your Active they are more likely to develop relationships with other members, having a positive impact on isolation and feelings of loneliness, because they have chosen a club that interests them, meaning they will be in the company of likeminded people.

What we found:

93% of survey respondents feel they are included in the activity they were taking part in, with 85% saying that FYA helps them to socialise with others. There is lots of provision that focuses on physical activity as secondary outcome, with an emphasis on socialising with others or completing a non-traditional physical activity task such as gardening or litter picking. Low intensity activities are common where the intensity allows opportunities to converse throughout the activity, although community connectors also recommend more intense activities that suit the needs and wants of participants.

For those that do suffer from social isolation or loneliness, they are introduced to FYA and physical activity opportunities via another opportunity or organisation that was trying to help individuals overcome personal challenges in their life. For Kara (participant), attending the coffee morning put on by Anna (Community Connector) was important in eventually accessing physical activity. ***"I came along to the coffee mornings to meet other people, make friends and chat. It took some time to join the walks, but I felt more confident with Anna and others at the coffee morning and finally joined the walks which are fun. I'm outside and I'm with friends!"***

Going Deeper into findings - Find Your Active

What we Explored:

As Find Your Active was set up post Covid, the emphasis is on getting people back outside and active by highlighting group activities that people may enjoy or want to try as new experiences because for many people, Covid was a period of social isolation and physical inactivity during lockdown periods which caused many mental health issues which can begin to be resolved through social interaction and outdoor activities.

What we found:

Many FYA participants experience mental health issues as 46% reported a mental health issue, and 31% reporting that a benefit of participation in FYA was feeling mentally healthier. Being physically active and being outdoors was highlighted as a key way for participants to maintain their mental wellbeing. Donna, (FYA activity organiser) experienced mental health issues, and had stopped working as a result. Donna felt she was ***"stuck in the house with no confidence to go out. I saw people were litter picking through Facebook and decided it was a reason to get out the house"***. Being involved in the litter picking allows Donna to feel productive in making her local area look better and to be physically active without becoming overwhelmed and negatively impacting their mental health.

Being involved in FYA has seen different benefits for participants where there is an increase in physical activity levels post covid (51%) and strengthening of mental health (27%).

FYA focuses on physical activity and promotes the benefits of being more active for an individual's wellbeing, including their mental health. Many of the activities are low intensity with walking very popular as the intensity allows for conversation, and it is accessible in terms of clothing and equipment requirements. This also builds on green and blue spaces within the community where residents can exercise for free, locally, although where an indoor venue was required, some FYA activity organisers found difficult as ***"every community space around here is booked up"*** (Hayley, activity instructor).

Going Deeper into findings - Find Your Active

What we Explored:

If people are struggling to find activities that they enjoy or that suit their lifestyle then by interacting with the Find Your Active website, they will be exposed to a wider range of activities that they may enjoy because the website provides information about a vast array of local activities and clubs as well as home-based activities that people can utilise to increase their physical and mental wellbeing.

What we found:

Promotion of activity is popular via family and friends (27%) and social media (44%). Facebook most common in conversation with participants who were members of community Facebook groups and their local FYA Facebook page was promoted via the community Facebook page. Grace (Community Connector) said how some FYA participants that meet her at activities **"go on Facebook [and] put a little comment on my [FYA] Facebook page"** This means Grace feels like she is making a connection with these people online.

Community Connectors utilise Facebook for participants to discuss authentic experiences of FYA so that others can resonate and trust the activity is true and enjoyable because the experience is shared by a real person. Anna (Community Connector) would encourage participants in her activities to post their experiences to **"make the activities seem genuinely enjoyed and not just promoted by myself"**. The website is often shared via social media via the FYA community connector as well, however no one on the FYA activity visits (led by the evaluation team) had accessed the website. There was some concern as to how up to date the activity finder on the website was where Mike (FYA Ambassador) said **"the criticism some people give is that the information goes out of date very quickly"**.

Further supporting evidence for Find Your Active

- **Community residents who engaged with Find Your Active said key benefits that they experienced related to increased physical activity, increased feelings of positive mental health and wellbeing and increased engagement with social interactions.**
- **Community residents agreed that they felt:**
 - 98% physically healthier
 - 95% more active
 - 85% more confident in general
 - 85% more focused
 - 71% more independent
 - 78% more able to tackle any health conditions
 - 83% more included (socially)



What do these findings mean and where do we take them for refinement?

Participants that engage in FYA activities feel healthier and increase their physical activity levels through participating.

Social media is a key avenue for participants to find out about FYA activities whilst word-of-mouth is another common way individuals are introduced to FYA.

Community Connectors are important in supporting inactive individuals into physical activity. Their approaches are innovative to meet potentially inactive individuals in non-physically active environments with the intention of meeting the community members where they are on their physical activity journey. This links with the importance of ABCD provision.

Where FYA participants are socially isolated, being introduced to cultural intermediaries, that are trusted by Active Essex and LTOs, within non-physically active environments is important to relationship building. This is a longer-term view for introducing socially isolated individuals to physical activity where they trust the cultural intermediary to participate in FYA.



Initial
assumption

As FYA activities are taken up by community members, then system partners will recognise the benefits and further promote the programme.

How is this
playing out?

AE's emphasis on place based working and meeting people where they are on their physical activity journey is embedded within FYA activities. LTO's recognise how being physically active is different for different people leading to supporting of innovative activities to suit a wider range of residents.

If healthcare providers recognise the benefits of FYA then they will refer patients into FYA activities.

Where Stakeholders in the health sector, that hold a belief that physical activity has potential for better health outcomes, have actively engaged with FYA, they have actively referred patients into suitable FYA activities.

Find Your Active System headlines

Going Deeper into findings - Find Your Active

What we Explored:

If stakeholders across the community and programme partners collaborate in the provision of these activities, then this will help to develop the local community because there may be an increase in the utilisation of neglected space within the community. By utilising this neglected space, it increases the value of the area, as it is likely that it will be more taken care of and become an asset to the programme. Increasing the net value of the area may lead to greater attraction to the programmes available and spread awareness and support.

What we found:

Where Active Essex positions ABCD at the centre of their approach to place based physical activity provision, there is a broad range of physical activity opportunities that are promoted as part of FYA. Basildon and Colchester (who work closely with Active Essex through the Local Delivery Pilot) have embraced FYA within their PA focus. Lisa (system stakeholder), states how FYA funding **"[does] not just go to the same people who we know have had funding before"**. It is opening new community groups and members to work with to fund new ideas that can reach different members of the community.

Participants spoken to feel a greater connection to their local space as they were able to experience it through taking part in the FYA activity where sessions were hosted in community blue and green spaces. Dianne (FYA Participant) enjoyed **"being in a beautiful place that's so close to where I live"** encouraging her to use the space more often for leisure opportunities. Innovative approaches to PA are embraced by Active Essex and LTO's, where there is potentially added value to local community spaces. Examples of this are litter picking and gardening which have been funded through FYA. For LA's, they understand how these types of activities can offer benefits to the community wider than increased physical activities, and where **"there is less funding available [for LAs]"** (Roger, Senior System Stakeholder), Active Essex's approach to ABCD is considered a potential opportunity to achieve community based strategic goals.

An ABCD approach has meant Active Essex relationships with LTO's goes beyond a transactional relationship, where support is provided to focus on a community led approach to physical activity. This a change in structural approach to traditional physical activity, working towards an inside out approach where the community that understands its needs is supported to utilise its assets, to provide opportunities to be physically active.

Going Deeper into findings - Find Your Active

What we Explored:

If healthcare providers and other system stakeholders begin to notice the benefits of Find Your Active within the community, then they will begin to refer patients to the service because of the wide array of activities that accommodate for all abilities and preferences, this is because it will begin to be built into their practices.

What we found:

With an embedded ABCD and Place-based working approach, there is a consistent understanding amongst stakeholders that Find Your Active is about providing opportunities for people to participate in physical activity. **"We are still having problems in some health arenas"** (Francine, Senior System Stakeholder). There is a structural influence where a LA is embedding staff across the Local Delivery Pilot with Active Essex, and the health team. Francine does acknowledge that **"the health arena is one of the hardest areas to break through"** but Mike (FYA Ambassador), who works within the healthcare system, believes **"by harnessing the power of communities to promote physical activity, we can keep people fitter and healthier and happier and give them better health outcomes for longer"**. This belief was influenced by his experience of utilising FYA as interventions for physical activity for individuals that were waiting for surgery with the intention of them returning quickly to activity post-surgery.

There is commitment from LTO's and LAs to promote FYA as a referral opportunity for system stakeholders. Francine acknowledges that **"getting people who are making the clinical decisions into to the process of routine referrals is really challenging"** and this is also seen by Hayley (fitness instructor) who said **"I know loads of fitness instructors that have done the whole GP referral schemes. They're always complaining they don't get the referrals"** although she did argue that **"GPs are not going to recommend an exercise class they haven't attended"**. Where a trainee GP had attended some of Hayleys PA sessions and saw Hayley was a qualified instructor delivering PA suitable for older adults, the trainee GP began referring patients into the programme.

What do these findings mean and where do we take them for refinement?

LTOs and LAs that work with Active Essex and seek to embody an ABCD approach see FYA as an opportunity to sustain and grow community led physical activity.

There is a shared belief in utilising community assets as spaces for physical activity provision.

Positioning health professionals who share the belief of community led physical activity leading to better health outcomes within Active Essex has been able to help connect FYA within the health sector. To move beyond connection and for FYA to be promoted and embedded into healthcare provision, shared beliefs amongst stakeholders is vital.

Where FYA embodies an ABCD approach, many of the findings and recommendations from the ABCD section are applicable to FYA.



Further Reading

These findings are part of an overall evaluation report. If you would like to see the overall report, please email kev.harris@hartpury.ac.uk for the Active Essex Systems Evaluation Report