

Review of the Essex LDP Microgrants Programme

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The Active Essex
Insight & Evaluation Team

About this report

The Essex LDP Microgrants Programme has been running since December 2019 and has not yet been reviewed. This report intends to consider what we have learned from delivering this programme and aid future decision making around it.

To do this, the Active Essex Insight & Evaluation team has conducted 14 interviews and 6 focus groups with key stakeholders including Active Essex staff, LDP partners, microgrant decision-

making groups and microgrant recipients. 4 case studies were also completed to further highlight individual microgrant-funded projects. Project and evaluation data have also been reviewed to understand the scale and impact of the programme. Themes and key learnings were developed within a 'collaborative theming session' which included all members of the Insight & Evaluation team.



About Microgrants

The Essex LDP Microgrants Programme is a small grants fund offering £50 to £2,500 to local people and organisations who have a great idea to help their communities get active. In line with the Essex LDP more widely, the funding should be particularly used to encourage activity among inactive people living in deprived areas of Basildon, Colchester and Tendring and/or families with children, older people and those with poor mental health.

The identification and shaping of ideas are often supported by the LDP Coordinators who are based within the community in each of the three LDP areas. People can apply using a simple

application form or through non-written mediums such as video or audio and applications are reviewed by a local panel or decision-making group before being signed off by Sport England.

To date, 121 microgrant applications have been approved across the Essex LDP and £247,209 funding has been agreed (full list in Appendix 2). The number of approved microgrants is fairly evenly split across Basildon (43), Colchester (33) and Tendring (42) with a small number of Essex-wide grants (3). Interestingly, the majority (68%) of applications requested £2,000-2,500 with less than 10% requesting a sum below £1,000.



The concept of a Microgrants Programme, at the time referred to as a 'community chest', was included in the plan for the LDP shared with Sport England in 2018. This was described as 'a light touch system to enable community groups to easily access small amounts of revenue funding to implement their ideas to enhance physical activity opportunities in their community... Providing grants of up to £2500 per area for small revenue / start up projects to small community groups, voluntary groups, and not for profit organisations. A light touch process will help us engage with the unusual suspects and avoid the process being prohibitive to new ideas, enable innovation and support test and learn activity. Our dynamic evaluation will allow us to quickly understand successful community chest approaches that can be rapidly replicated and scaled up.'

When asked what the intention of the Microgrants Programme is, stakeholders described it as:

- A quick and easy-to-access fund helping local groups and organisations to respond to local need, in line with asset-based community development (ABCD) principles
- An opportunity to be 'risk positive' and test new ideas, particularly around non-traditional forms of physical activity
- Part of the LDP Coordinator's 'toolkit', which can be used as a 'way in' to conversations with 'sticky people', community leaders and potential partners
- A visible output to balance the longer-term 'system' work that the Essex LDP is doing

Key Learnings

1. Microgrants have had a positive impact on recipients, their communities and (in some cases) the system
2. The Microgrants Programme has been more effective at engaging 'unusual suspects' because of the LDP Coordinators
3. The application process was designed to be easy but there are still too many hoops

4. The Essex LDP Microgrants Programme is an example of Asset-based Community Development (ABCD), although it could have gone further
5. It may be time to move on, but we will need to think carefully about how we use lessons learned to shape Find Your Active and other small grants programmes

Refined Theory

As part of the Essex LDP evaluation, an initial theory about the Microgrants Programme was developed collaboratively in May 2022 and data has been collected since then to test and refine it, which has led to the following theory statement:

Communities already possess a wealth of knowledge and assets that can help tackle physical inactivity in their local place but may lack the capacity, resources and confidence to do so. If we can embed a member of staff in the community to build trust, work with local people/groups and support, guide and fund them to realise their own ideas, this will widen the reach of the LDP and engage more with those who do not usually take part in conventional physical activity, as providing support to individuals/groups will increase their access to resources, giving them the capacity and confidence required to test their own ideas. Therefore, communities will feel empowered to take risks, resulting in more non-traditional physical activity opportunities.

Recommendations

Given that there are other small grants programmes which are able to fund physical activity projects, The Essex LDP should carefully consider if there is a need to continue funding the LDP Microgrants programme.

Learnings from the LDP Microgrants Programme, particularly around the application process and the need to work proactively to engage 'unusual suspects', should be embedded within Find Your Active and shared with other small grants programmes across Essex.

Similarly, Sport England should use learnings from this Microgrants Programme, particularly around distributing decision making to those with local knowledge, when creating other small grant funds.

Community groups and organisations have highlighted a desire to have a space to network and share & learn and Active Essex should consider how they could facilitate and/or support this.





Key Learning 1:

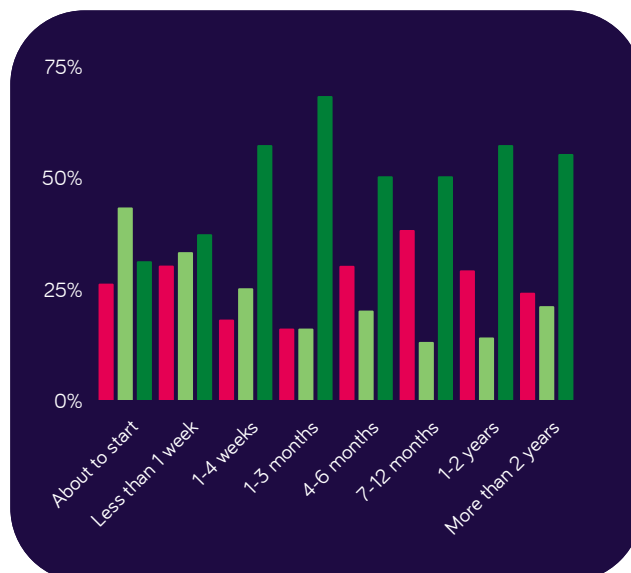
Microgrants have had a positive impact on recipients, their communities and (in some cases) the system

Stakeholders involved with Microgrant funded projects on a day-to-day basis spoke about their ability to engage the LDP target population; inactive people living in areas of deprivation. Further to this, evaluation data shows that Microgrant funded projects did manage to reach LDP target communities, although this could have been greater. 45% of participants live in areas of high deprivation (IMD 1-4) and, of the adults who completed an evaluation survey when they were about to start their microgrant funded activity or had been involved for less than a week, 67% were not meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines for physical activity and 28% were doing less than 30 minutes physical activity per week.

These people are not the kind of people you would normally find at the leisure centre! It was accessible to people with disabilities too. It brought out all kinds of people who wouldn't otherwise be physically active." (Participant 5)

Participant data also shows that there seems to be an increase in activity levels for those involved in microgrant funded projects compared to before they started or in the first week of starting. This increase is greatest in the first 3 months but is sustained to more than 2 years.

There are many stories of impact that have been shared within interviews and focus groups as well as the evaluation data collected, with many commenting that despite the small amounts of funding given to these projects, they can have a big impact on the



lives of the people they work with. Interestingly, the impacts that stakeholders tended to speak about were not related to increasing physical activity, rather they were outcomes such as reducing social isolation and loneliness. This suggests that Microgrants can be used both to reduce physical inactivity as well as increasing community cohesion and the wellbeing of those involved.

"In a small way Microgrants are helping to get the community active... because they are being used by small groups working with small numbers of people. But even if you get 8 people moving it's better than 8 people not moving! And it's what it then leads on to." (Participant 7)

"For us, we sometimes overlook those small amounts of money... if you compare that to Essex Pedal Power which is millions. But actually, to these people it is life changing." (Participant 2)

Despite the observed success of many of the Microgrants projects, some stakeholders questioned how often these had led to further investment from the LDP in line with our intention to scale and replicate examples of good practice. There are examples of this happening, such as Trust Links who received a Microgrant of £1,200 for a 'takeaway gardening project' before going on to be receive two considerably larger investments for the development of a community garden and 'Greening Basildon' which is working to transform outdoor spaces in Basildon. However, these kinds of examples are few and it was observed that we could have made more of the 'test and learn' opportunity within the Microgrants Programme if there had been a system in place to identify projects with the potential to scale and/or replicate and proactively encourage them to do this.

This was highlighted in an earlier report on Microgrants in 2020 which looked at recipients' intentions to scale, replicate and/or share their project. Recommendations included:

- We need to be clear about our intention to invest in projects to scale
- We need to decide whose responsibility it is to identify projects with potential to scale
- We need to identify projects with appetite to replicate and support them in this - the LDP could play a role in supporting the building of networks and trust in new areas
- We need to identify projects and good practice worth sharing with other community organisations

Aside from LDP investment, Microgrant funding has led to organisations gaining longer-term funding from elsewhere after showing proof of concept or evidence of

impact. For example, Together We Grow CIC received microgrant funding in 2020 which was a 'springboard' to them receiving CCG and ECC funding. One of the things that decision-making groups mentioned was that they reviewed projects with sustainability in mind and so these kinds of examples were seen by them as having an extremely positive impact.

It was also noted by stakeholders that receiving Microgrant funding had positive impacts on the recipients themselves in terms of 'unlocking' their potential, boosting their confidence and encouraging them to stand as leaders within their communities. It was generally thought that the Microgrants Programme has demonstrated that there are 'assets' in the community (i.e. people) and that such a programme can be used to nurture and grow them.

"Quite a few Microgrants have been given to members of the community who needed to be 'released' because they had the passion but didn't necessarily have the opportunity before." (Participant 5)

"I suppose because she's not your usual suspect. She would never apply for funding in her life and she didn't even know that she could really. And she has now set up her CIC. She's just. Ohh, she's just amazing. She does so much in her community. And she says without that initial microgrant she would not be where she is now." (Participant 1)

The Essex LDP intends to 'hardwire' physical activity and LDP ways of working into the system, meaning that they are integrated into the work of other sectors. Stakeholders suggested that the Microgrants Programme is a good example of this within the community sector. Primarily, this is through embedding

physical activity into the delivery of 'unusual suspects' such as a parenting group, a fishing programme, a carers group and a church community outreach project. However there have also been examples of using the LDP Microgrants programme to demonstrate the positive impact that physical activity can have, leading to it becoming a priority for other funders.

Furthermore, work on developing Microgrants with and for the Gypsy and Traveller community in Basildon has led to positive changes in the ways that Basildon Borough Council works with this group.

"Where there's funding, they're trying to see where that aligns with physical activity, making physical activity a priority for these other funding funders." (Participant 2)

Parents 4 Parents' Story



Basildon "Parents4Parents" aim to improve the outcomes of children and families facing everyday challenges in the Basildon area. Jackie is a supporting coordinator at the organisation.

She found out about the microgrant opportunity through a member of Active Essex staff who encouraged them to incorporate movement into their existing programs. Mental health and wellbeing support had always been key to the work Jackie was part of; often using creative methods such as arts and craft sessions to work with parents. Although they had never considered physical activity before, they thought it was a great opportunity to introduce

something different and expand how they engaged with and supported parents.

The process of applying for the grant was really simple and straightforward;

"Just be able to speak to someone really easily for them to get what we're kind of doing, to get the challenges that we kind of face... obviously we're Basildon... we've got a vulnerable cohort of people that access our services. I think it's the people factor... the time, the application was very simple and just the fact that people were open to what we were planning on doing."

Upon receiving the grant, Jackie felt excited and grateful for the opportunity. She also felt a strong sense of responsibility to ensure the money was used as best as possible. As the grant was now taking the organisation in a new direction, it was also a new challenge for Jackie and her team to conquer!

Parents engaged with Parents4Parents can often face several barriers which the organisation tries to break down.

These include financial, geographical, mental health and confidence barriers. The organisation provides a tailored approach to dealing with these issues by offering all their services for free and basing themselves in central Basildon, so that the location is not difficult to access.

They often work with parents who cannot afford to put food on the table for their children. They are also having to work with more people with mental health issues than they have had to before. Unsurprisingly, exercise and eating healthily can end up being less of a priority for these families. Parents4Parents have been able to provide holistic support (including giving out food parcels and vouchers) and engaged up to 40 people at different times, who have benefitted in their own personal way by getting them out and focusing on something else.

"It is challenging to get people to stop and think about their own health and well-being because, you know, they are very challenged at the moment. But when they do, when we can get them out, they are absolutely enjoying these sessions."

Jackie noted that it's difficult to measure how the far knock-on effect will go, however, she felt that if a parent comes to a session and this changes their mindset then it was going to help the family, even if it's just for a day.

Parents4Parents later decided to introduce yoga into their women's ESOL group. Many of the women who attend the group were described by Jackie as vulnerable, isolated and lacking in confidence and consequently would not access an exercise class by themselves.

"We were able to bring somebody to them rather than them going out. They would not access it in the community. They just wouldn't do it. But by actually bringing it into their ESOL session, the trust was already there, the safe environment was already there and they've really connected with it. We chose very carefully the instructor that we took into them, that was a key factor for us we made sure that we felt that she would run the class and support them in the way that they need it to be supported and it's just worked really well. We started out with a gentle exercise yoga and they've now had three sessions of yoga. We've put that in over the last few months. And actually, I've just booked them to have Zumba going in January and they're really excited to do that. So obviously that's a much more intense kind of movement, but that's, that's going to be quite exciting"

Without the funding this impact would not have been achieved. Knowing the focus had to be on movement helped to channel the energy and concentrated effort, towards this goal.

In addition to introducing Zumba to the women's ESOL group, Parents4Parents is also looking into self-defence and increasing a chakra dance program they started recently. They aim to have a variety of options available. This is something they have actively been working, by requesting feedback from recipients. This ensures they offer what is wanted and what helps, for the people who attend.



Key Learning 2:

The Microgrants Programme has been more effective at engaging 'unusual suspects' because of the LDP Coordinators

Across all stakeholders from Microgrant recipients to area leads, the LDP Coordinators were spoken of incredibly highly and were highlighted as being key to the success of the Microgrants Programme. In our conversations with the Coordinators, they described themselves as being 'integral' to the Microgrants Programme and saw themselves as the managers of this, particularly taking a lead in the administration. Other stakeholders spoke about the Coordinators being crucial for the LDP's connection to the community and identifying opportunities within it. And all of the recipients we spoke to said that they had been introduced to the Microgrants Programme through an LDP Coordinator, with many of them saying that they had been instrumental in them applying for this funding.

The Coordinators who were involved from the beginning of the LDP spoke about the first year of their role being spent discovering what was currently happening within the community. This time was important for building trust and relationships with groups and individuals who were subsequently given Microgrant funding, as well as some who were not, either because it was not needed or the opportunity had passed.

The Coordinators reflected that this time was really beneficial as it allowed them to better understand the areas they were working in and the existing assets. However, once the Microgrants funding was made available, the Coordinators felt that they were able to capitalise on the relationships built during the 'discovery' work that they had done in the

previous year and also had more of a purpose for their ongoing conversations.

As much as the Coordinators needed the Microgrants Programme as an 'outlet' for their work, their role is seen by stakeholders as key to the identification, development and support of Microgrant projects, particularly those that are delivered by 'unusual suspects' who are either not used to applying for funding or have not previously delivered physical activity projects.

*"So it's the approachability, the compassion, the flexibility and just them really collaborating with you really supporting you."
(Participant 18)*

The Coordinators in all areas were described by Microgrant recipients as approachable, passionate and 'not like other council workers' and it was noted that having a person who is actively supporting applications also makes the Microgrants Programme very different to other funds. Coordinators were seen by recipients as being trusted and 'on their side', predominantly because they were having transformational conversations; coming without an obvious agenda and starting with what people were already doing or what they wanted to do, whether or not this related to physical activity, before moving on to developing a funding application collaboratively.

However, this building of trust and developing a collaborative funding applications takes time and the Coordinators noted that they could

meet with an individual or organisation, building confidence and developing an idea, several times before an application was submitted; and sometimes it never got to this point. Yet this time was thought to be particularly important as it enabled Coordinators to 'move at the speed of trust' and it is felt that some applicants wouldn't have got to the point of application if there had been more time pressure.

"Prior to COVID, I could meet with an unusual suspect half a dozen or more times before they actually put anything on paper for a number of reasons. And they may not feel they're eligible or worthy of an investment or why would you fund an organization like mine and may not have done anything like this before, didn't know what to expect. And it's about moving at the speed of trust."
(Participant 2)

Alexandria's Story



Alexandria grew up in Harwich, in a single parent household, to an area she describes as deprived. Finance was a frequent barrier to her and her family. She also described being in and out of hospital growing up and how this continued into adulthood, having to juggle multiple neurological conditions.

Since she was a child, Alexandria has always wanted to dance. She recalls taking part in classes and talent shows, having found early on that this was something she was good at and thoroughly enjoyed. As she grew older, Alexandria began to assist her dance teacher in the running of classes for children. It was at this point that she realised that teaching dance was her true passion in life and a dream she was keen to pursue.

However, in addition to these barriers, Alexandria also had to deal with lack of support from those around her, particularly following her ADHD diagnosis. The consistent lack of support was demoralising, impacting her confidence and self-esteem to the point where she felt there was a "brick wall" between her and her goals.

Alexandria attended a local initiative that helped support young people in Harwich, it was here that she shared her goals with a staff member who put her in contact with a member of the Active Essex team. They offered her the opportunity to have microgrant funded dance teacher training that would be inclusive to her needs. Alexandria had done considerable research for a dance school that would be patient and flexible for her and provide one-to-one support. Having her application for funding approved was a defining moment for Alexandria and central to her journey.

Not only was her financial barrier "knocked down", but her health needs were being catered to and worked around, as opposed to being seen as an issue. She finally come

across someone who believed in her and wanted to help and support her to achieve her goals.

Since receiving funding for the training, Alexandria has done incredibly well, going on to pass her first exam with a Distinction! Achieving this has really changed her outlook on things, now focusing more on the positives and appreciating where she is, as well as what she has done. This achievement has allowed her to prove her skill and ability and move her one step closer to her goal of becoming a dance teacher! Additionally, this has helped to improve her confidence, self-esteem, and overall mental wellbeing. Having always being told she “can’t do it”, Alexandria could not initially believe how and why she had been chosen for this opportunity.

“I was thinking, yes why me but at the same time yay me, you know?... [It has] helped with my mental health, I’d gone downhill emotionally, given me the boost I need, I feel more human now, it’s given me the last shot and I’m going to grab it with both hands.”

Alexandria also shared that with her renewed confidence she has tried to be more social by joining other social groups, something she has

always struggled with due to her autism. She has been teaching herself to regulate her emotions and maintain friendships in a healthy way, with those who share similar interests.

When speaking about the future, it was evident that Alexandria was able to see a range of options for herself and an optimistic view on everything she is now able to achieve, having been provided the financial and moral support to do what she wants.

She plans to complete her training by April 2023 before opening a dance school. On top of her Level 3 Dance diploma, she will also be completing a Teaching Assistant course, with a view to working with children and adults at her own dance school in addition to teaching at other schools. Having faced several barriers in her journey, Alexandria expressed a keen desire to create a safe space for children and adults with disabilities to learn to dance and offer scholarship opportunities for those with financial barriers. She was passionate about using her experience, position, and the opportunities she has gained to give back to the community, particularly to those with neurological conditions.



Key Learning 3:

The application process was designed to be easy but there are still too many hoops

The application process for the Microgrants Programme was carefully considered to make it easy for ‘unusual suspects’ who might not have experience of funding applications and inclusive to those who find communicating in writing hard. Therefore, it was decided to allow applications

through a simple application form as well as through video or audio. It was felt that this was a positive approach and there have been some good examples of this working well in practice. Many stakeholders mentioned a video application from Feel Good Drumming

who were applying for funding to run a drumming circle. This form of application suited the applicant due to her dyslexia but also had the advantage of bringing to life what the project is and showing the 'line of sight' to physical activity and how much people are moving when taking part.

"I've worked in Jaywick a lot in my in my life and what I know about that area is a lot of people can't read or write. So if we give somebody who cannot read or write an application form to fill in or if they're just not, if they're just not that good at writing, but actually they can really express themselves and show their idea on a video. And so I was really keen to make sure that we had different forms of applying in our process."
(Participant 1)

In saying this, while a few video and audio applications were received at the start of the microgrants programme, the majority of the applications have been via the application form. The microgrant recipients we spoke to felt that this was easy, particularly compared to other funding applications which can be very time-consuming. It was also noted that the application process was made easier with the support of the LDP Coordinator who was able to guide applicants through the process, answer questions and offer advice as opposed to a responding to guidelines set by funders and not being sure exactly what they're asking for.

"[the application process was] very straightforward, really straightforward, really easy. One of the easiest things I've ever done."
(Participant 34)

"I felt it was quite a simple process anyway, like applying for the for the money... I just remember there was a couple of little tweaks that we had to do and we were just guided through it basically. So it wasn't a big or complex process, it was just nice and easy. And I think that is actually one of the benefits for this particular grant is the smoothness of the application." (Participant 18)

One of the criticisms of the application process that stakeholders raised was the level of scrutiny that applications received, particularly given the small amounts of money being awarded. In general, applications are developed collaboratively between the LDP Coordinators and applicants which has the benefits of enabling the Coordinators to 'shape' the applications and ensure that there is adequate 'line of sight' to physical activity, but this takes time and is reliant on the Coordinator's capacity. Once an application is submitted, it is reviewed by the local decision-making group who will approve, decline or defer it. If it's deferred, an application can be amended and resubmitted. Once approved, an application is then reviewed by Sport England for final sign off. In the early days of the Microgrants Programme, the applications were also reviewed by the LDP investment group, however this step was quickly removed as it was felt to be unnecessary governance and slowed the process.

"We could bounce through three different drafts, just me and them to start with. Then it goes to panel. They might have comments to then incorporate, so we could be on draft 4, maybe even draft 5, and then it goes to Sport England. They might want to make some changes on top of that. So from [the provider's] perspective, it's not a simple 'in it goes and yes or no'." (Participant 3)

"The process is still too in-depth for £2,500... either the funding limit should be raised or the process should be made easier. Some people don't apply because it's too much hassle and there are other pots that are easier to access." (Participant 7)

While Sport England feel that the level of governance around the Microgrants Programme is 'about right', many other stakeholders suggested that the process could be simplified by removing the need for Sport England sign off, therefore removing a step in the process and also giving more power to the local decision-making groups who are more aware of local contexts.

"I don't think they are easy to access, could be stripped back like Find Your Active. Currently it has to go to Sport England and with due respect we know and understand our community better. It could be easier." (Participant 21)

Another criticism of the application process is that it has not been possible to fund non-constituted groups. At the start of the LDP, it had been the vision for the Microgrants Programme to be a way of both enabling asset-based community development and engaging unusual suspects. However, Sport England did not allow for this funding to go to non-constituted groups. We did get round this by either funding via another organisation, supporting groups to become constituted or aligning themselves to a constituted group, such as the CVS. It was reported that this was

felt to be too much for some groups and individuals and they chose not to apply for Microgrant funding.

"I wish that we could have taken a bit more of a risk with some of them as well. And as I say, funded, Dave... Dave down the pub to do something because those people that we're funding are so connected with their communities, and they're connected in a way that we cannot get to. We cannot get to these people not because they don't want to talk to us, but they, you know, I'm thinking of places like Jaywick. Outsiders going in and you know, again it's that trust thing. You're not trusted at all. Whereas if somebody from within does something, then absolutely, it's all systems go really." (Participant 1)

"And if you've got a little group picking up litter off the beach. And they need whatever they need. Then it costs money and you say, but you've gotta have a constitution. You've gotta have a bank account. You've gotta have a management committee. They just laugh... No, we're just a group of like-minded people picking up litter off the beach." (Participant 12)

Sport England have maintained that it is a Lottery position that it is only possible to fund constituted groups. However, there is frustration that we have not been able to lobby Sport England for a change in this and also that there is potential for us to learn from other Lottery distributors such as the National Lottery Community Fund who have found a way to fund individuals and informal groups.

Feel Good Drumming's Story



Lisa is a senior occupational therapist working in the NHS within the community rehab team. She lives in Walton-on-the-Naze, a seaside town in Essex, where a high proportion of the population are elderly residents with complex medical conditions. In addition, there are high rates of unemployment and mental health conditions in the local area. Lisa runs a community choir and a drumming group and enjoys using her occupational therapy skills in an alternative way to benefit the surrounding community.

Lisa found out about the microgrant opportunity when she bumped into a member of Active Essex and they began talking about her ideas around drumming. She was encouraged to apply for funding to turn her idea into a reality. Although she didn't expect anything to come to fruition, the process worked out brilliantly for Lisa because she was able to apply for the grant using a video format. Due to her dyslexia and ADHD, she struggles with communicating her ideas on paper, so the application process was perfect and inclusive to her needs.

When her microgrant application was granted, Lisa felt a whole range of emotions, from excitement to fear and being overwhelmed. At this point, she felt she would have appreciated more business support, to help with the

numbers side of receiving the grant. This experience also gave her a confidence boost and caused her not to be dissuaded from applying for further grants. This led to her applying for a subsequent grant from Active Essex, through the Find Your Active funding, for her community choir with yoga.

Lisa started her "Feel Good Drumming C.I.C" group to get people active, help them learn about cognition and physical movement coordination, increase their energy and regulate heart, stress and anxiety levels. However, the main goal was to bring people together through a unique medium. This was particularly important for the area because transport links are lacking and accessing services is a challenge for those who live here.

"It's active in a way that you wouldn't normally think of being active and I think that's really important because for example, none of my patients I see in the Community would ever even think about coming to a yoga class or getting a track suit or even attending a walking group, that would just be too much. But to come and sit and drum, they would come for that. So, it was kind of reaching people, kind of covertly, to get them active."

The group has enhanced Lisa's platform in the community which she was beginning to build through her involvement in her choir. The Walton Feel Good Choir has been running for five years, providing an inclusive community choir for all. The drumming provided another opportunity to bring people together and helped her to use her skills in different ways, further enhancing her confidence. It also allowed her access to training to develop her skills further and pushed her to study for her masters,

culminating in a project around community health, further investing in herself to help the community.

"I've got a gentleman that's got Parkinson's, who's nearly 75-80 years old, and he's met this builder bloke that comes up to the drumming. Just a really lovely gift of the gab type 'alright mate' type bloke and two men who don't know each other, never would have met, have come together for drumming. And this guy with Parkinson's is getting such a lot out of that because that was him only 20 years ago and now he can't really communicate very well. But this other guy is just chatting away to him. He's retired now as well, but he's not got any kind of impairments, but just seeing them together. Two men together interacting and now he gives him a lift to drumming. They've become friends, they go out together."

The connections made in the group are very important to Lisa because she feels that mental health and the health of the community is ingrained in social connectivity.

Moving forward, Lisa wants to get her own business going at the heart of the community. She's working on this goal by pursuing business training which is being run by the Council. Lisa is also keen to share her knowledge and experience by lecturing on the topic of community health and wellbeing and linking this with her practice of occupational therapy.



Key Learning 4:

The Essex LDP Microgrants Programme is an example of Asset-based Community Development (ABCD), although it could have gone further

The Essex LDP aims to use an ABCD approach to build healthier, safer, prosperous and more inclusive communities from the ground up, with citizens in the lead. This approach proposes that people, their families and communities have unique competencies that cannot be replaced by professional intervention and the only people who can build a community are the people who live and work there. Many stakeholders believe that the Microgrants Programme is a good example of ABCD working, given that ideas come from the community, funding decisions are made by groups including community

representatives and projects make use of local assets (both people and places). It was recognised that this is a good approach to take as local people are best placed to create and deliver locally appropriate solutions.

"More local has got to be good. Every locality is different and needs different solutions. There is a benefit in using local people to deliver local interventions, they might need help doing it, they might not have the experience, the knowledge, the infrastructure, the right words to write in funding bids. But local people know their area" (Participant 7)

Decision making around the Microgrants Programme involves the LDP Coordinator, a locally agreed decision-making group and Sport England. Decision-making groups include those from District, Borough or City Councils, CVSs, housing associations, local charities and Essex Fire & Rescue Service as well as Active Essex Relationship Managers. Members of the decision-making groups who engaged in focus groups said that they are very happy to be part of the group and felt that their local community knowledge qualified them to be part of the decision-making process. However, there are examples of non-engagement by decision-making group members but it is not known why this is the case.

"I know that the coordinators are often pulling their hair out trying to get some feedback from the panel, so this is a weakness in terms of the resource and capacity – you almost need a bigger pool of people." (Participant 10)

Despite the time it takes for Coordinators to work with some individuals and organisations to develop their idea into a funding proposal (as discussed above), many stakeholders mentioned the importance of speed of getting funding to applicants. Primarily, this was to be seen to be a positive way of enabling organisations to respond to issues in their communities quickly; something that was particularly valued during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Delivery by local people was also thought to be one of the reasons that Microgrant funded projects have been able to engage members of the community, as these people are already known and trusted by the community. It was noted that this is particularly important in Tendring.

"It's fundamentally important to use local people to deliver local projects... these people are connected to their community in a way that we can't be." (Participant 5)

"Harwich is very cliquey... If there's someone from out of town coming in, it's, you know they are 'out of towners' so sometimes it doesn't get supported... But yeah, I'd say that people support people that they know or recognize at least." (Participant 31)

However, as noted above, Sport England governance means that all applications must be signed off by a Sport England representative and funding can only go to constituted groups. It was suggested by some stakeholders that this gives that impression of not fully trusting the community. Furthermore, while recipients felt that the Microgrants Programme was a good opportunity to take risks and test new and non-traditional ways to get people active, again Sport England and local councils were not always prepared to embrace this level of risk.

"Microgrants puts trust in the local community... in theory. I would still like to be in a position where I could knock on someone's door and say 'I've heard about your great idea, here's £500, let us know how you get on'. I'd love to do that but I could never do that in this council... We have managed to find workarounds but how does that sound to a community? We still don't quite trust you enough. The system should be throwing it's weight behind communities rather than finding a workaround." (Participant 6)

"They wanted to do goat walking for people with poor mental health... And Sport England wouldn't fund it through the LDP..., they said, 'I can see the headline in the Daily Mail.'" (Participant 1)

Another concern mentioned by the Coordinators particularly, is that because the Microgrants Programme has never been widely advertised and promoted, they have acted as gatekeepers for the funding and so opportunities have not been open to the whole community – only the individuals and organisations that they have come across. It was reported that the justification for this approach was that it prevented ‘usual suspects’ from applying for funding, but stakeholders questioned whether such applications would get through the robust screening process in place.

“If I was prejudiced... not even just prejudiced but ignorant or not knowing, you could be missing out a whole key population group and therefore not serving the community as you should. Ever since I've had the role, I've had to really challenge myself on that because the order in which I made those relationships was also very important. Who you prioritise to contact based on areas or key population groups will affect what comes to LDP and therefore what support is received by which communities.” (Participant 3)

Divine Assembly Ministries' Story



Elizabeth is co-Pastor at Divine Assembly Ministries (Boaz Project), a registered charity and local church in Greenstead in Colchester. Greenstead is an area of high deprivation, ranking in the 10 percent most deprived places in the country. This is a role she never saw herself doing, however she knew she wanted to be different and provide a welcoming place with a community focus that looks after people, irrespective of their faith.

The church had started doing a food project for vulnerable people in the community. They found that the children accompanying parents often weren't interested in eating much and

preferred to play. Something was needed to keep the children busy. It was around this time that Elizabeth attended a local meeting about the community and met a member of Active Essex who told her about the microgrants programme. Although initially unsure because most funders don't fund churches, she explained the need and was encouraged to apply.

The application was easy and allowed Elizabeth to share the story of need. When her application was granted, she was surprised and excited, she felt like she mattered! The success of the grant also motivated Elizabeth to contact Active Essex again to apply for a subsequent microgrant, to enable her to start a women's running group. This came from a place of self-interest for Elizabeth, following lockdown she felt unfit and having spoken to other women in the community, found this was common feeling. In addition, the women lacked social connection and felt isolated, so a running group would also provide this! She was also successful in receiving a microgrant for the running group.

The grant enabled the church to buy play equipment and different activity stations, such as mini table tennis, for the children. This provided somewhere for the children to go and keep active during the lunch sessions. Additionally, the funding meant the church were also able to pay for someone to supervise the children.

The impact from being able to run the women's running group has been remarkable!

"There is a lady, she was in a coma for a long time and she came round, she had lost a lot of her abilities, so she couldn't walk, she couldn't talk properly. She has to be going through this rehabilitation program. And the first time she came to the group she had two walking sticks, and now she only uses one. She speaks a lot better. She's one of those who, if you say you're cancelling and she says no, you're not cancelling. One day she said 'I probably would have been dead if this was not there' because she was deteriorating fast."

"I've seen some of these women improve so much in self-confidence. I've seen them put on clothes and then tell me 'I haven't been in these clothes for years, I feel so great!' and. An example is on Tuesday, because we normally meet on Tuesday morning and it was so cold and me feeling lazy, sent a message to the WhatsApp group and said 'please can we cancel today, can we just have this at home?' Then two people responded immediately 'I am coming, it's not just the fitness, I like being with people.' So that was it, I said OK, if you don't want to cancel, I have to be there. So meeting other people, being encouraged me to keep fit because most of them have said, even those that can afford gym membership, they have not been to these gyms for months because when you're doing it alone, it just doesn't work the same way as having people encourage you push you."

Elizabeth's dream is to keep the projects going for as long as possible. With the ongoing needs in the local community, she wishes she knew how to address them all.



Key Learning 5:

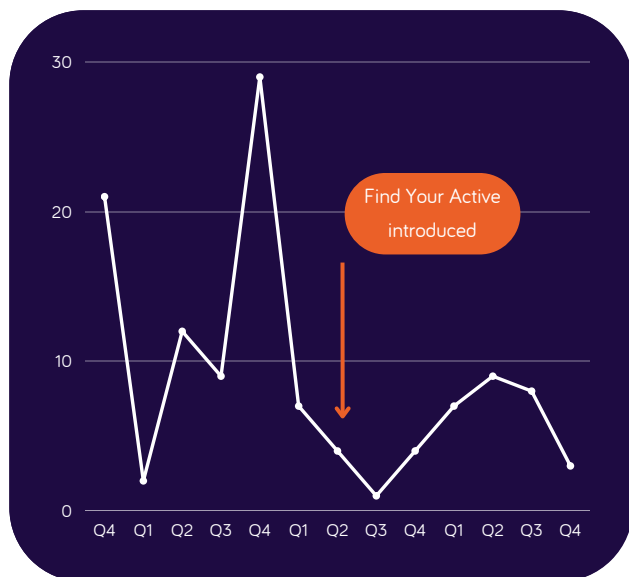
It may be time to move on, but we will need to think carefully about how we use lessons learned to shape Find Your Active and other small grants programmes

Many stakeholders were not surprised to hear that the Microgrants Programme was being reviewed and felt that while this programme had been highly useful at the start of the LDP, this was less the case now.

Many stakeholders spoke about other small grants programmes currently available including Find Your Active, Together Fund,

Levelling Up and ICB funding. Find Your Active was particularly mentioned as a funding pot with similar intended outcomes but less strict application criteria and an easier application process. Indeed, the LDP Microgrants programme received less applications following the launch of Find Your Active and there are also some examples where funding applications were rejected by

the Microgrants Programme but went on to be funded by Find Your Active.



"Find Your Active has changed my life. I'm in love with Find Your Active. It's just such a more accessible process." (Participant 3)

However, some stakeholders were wary about the suggestion that Find Your Active could act as a direct replacement for the Microgrants Programme given that there is no 'Coordinator type' role attached to it to empower applicants and support the development of applications, there is no option to submit applications in voice or video format and also local leaders are less involved in decision making. The concern highlighted by stakeholders is that Find Your Active is less accessible to unusual suspects and there is still lots of untapped potential in the community. These are important considerations for Find Your Active and indeed other small grants programmes being delivered in Essex.

"I think we haven't scratched the surface in Colchester with regard to the unusual suspects, as it were. I think there's still a hell of a lot out there." (Participant 2)

"She's said to me that had I forced her or had I said to her 'right, we need to get this funding spent within a month and you need to put your application in', she would have gone and wouldn't have applied. But because she had time, because I'd been talking to her, maybe not for a whole year, but I don't know, maybe four to six months prior to her applying, she was able to get her head around it." (Participant 1)

Another learning highlighted particularly by Microgrant recipients was the usefulness of having a network of community providers to share the work they are doing and understand what else is happening in their local communities. Basildon recipients cited the Community Involvement Network and recipients from other areas questioned why the individuals and organisations involved in the Microgrants Programme had not been brought together or suggested that this would be a useful thing to do.

"I think going forward, if we're all microgrants with the same aim, we can join up and work more collaboratively." (Participant 29)

In saying all this, if the LDP Microgrants Programme was to continue, the future will look different in the three LDP places. The role of the LDP Coordinator will no longer be funded by the core costs of the LDP from April 2023. This inevitably leaves a gap in relation to the delivery of the Microgrants Programme however the extent and nature of the gaps left differs.

In Colchester, the work of the LDP has been integrated into the Colchester City Council Community Enabling Team, meaning that any work relating to the Microgrants Programme can be picked up by this team. In Basildon, a new delivery model has been designed to

increase capacity for LDP work but this is in its infancy and not fully up and running yet. In Tending, capacity for LDP work has been built within the community sector, particularly within the local CVS.

These differences should be an important reminder to the LDP more widely that a place-based approach to our work is needed as the systems, structures and capacity vary widely.



What does this mean for our ideas about how and why the Microgrants Programme works?

The evaluation of the Essex LDP utilises 'realist' methodology which looks not just at 'what works', but 'what works, in which circumstances, for who'. In practice, this involves the development, testing and refinement of theories or ideas about how and why things work as they do.

An initial theory about the Microgrants Programme was developed collaboratively in May 2022 and data has been collected since then to test and refine it. Analysis of the data collected has led to a refined theory being produced. (See also Appendix 2)

Communities already possess a wealth of knowledge and assets that can help tackle PA in their local place but may lack the capacity, resources and confidence to do so. If we can embed a member of staff in the community to build trust, work with local people/groups and support, guide and fund realising their own ideas, this will widen the reach of the LDP and engage more with those who do not usually take part in conventional PA, as providing support to individuals/groups will increase their access to resources, giving them the capacity and confidence required to test their own ideas. Therefore, communities will feel empowered to take risks, resulting in more non-traditional PA opportunities.



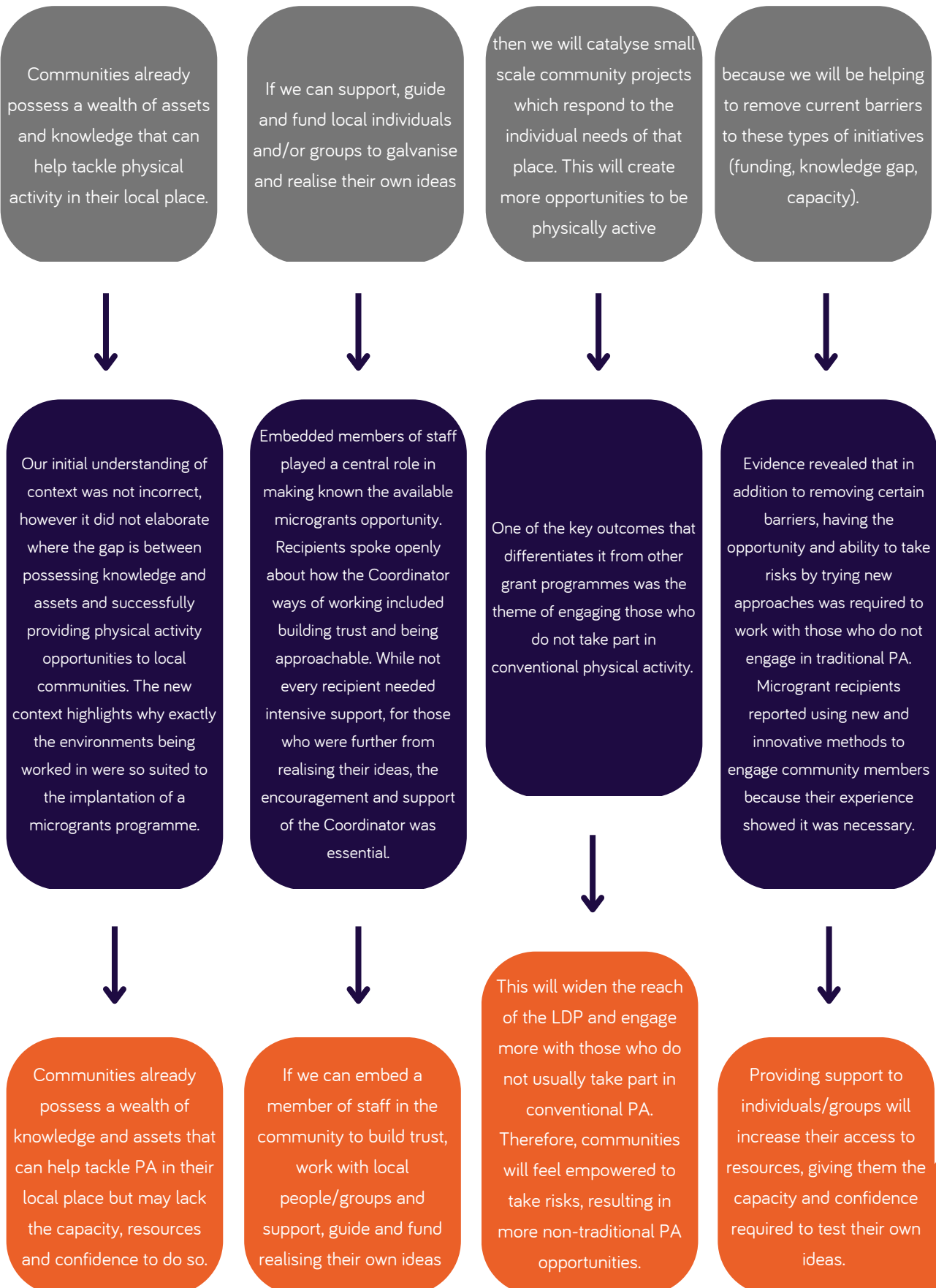
Based on the findings included in this report, it is recommended that:

Given that there are other small grants programmes which are able to fund physical activity projects, The Essex LDP should carefully consider if there is a need to continue funding the LDP Microgrants programme.

Learnings from the LDP Microgrants Programme, particularly around the application process and the need to work proactively to engage 'unusual suspects', should be embedded within Find Your Active and shared with other small grants programmes across Essex.

Similarly, Sport England should use learnings from this Microgrants Programme, particularly around distributing decision making to those with local knowledge, when creating other small grant funds.

Community groups and organisations have highlighted a desire to have a space to network and share & learn and Active Essex should consider how they could facilitate and/or support this.



Appendix 2 - List of Approved Microgrant Projects

Area	Date of Application	Project	Approved Amount
Basildon	12/10/2019	Sociability Online- Marathon Miles	£1,380.00
Basildon	12/10/2019	Kool Carers	£2,085.20
Basildon	12/10/2019	Beechwood Boxercise	£2,150.00
Basildon	12/10/2019	BOSP Peer Support Walk & Talk	£2,298.00
Basildon	12/10/2019	Ndi Igbo	£2,448.20
Basildon	12/10/2019	Shaddow group	£2,477.00
Basildon	12/10/2019	ATF Southend	£2,500.00
Basildon	12/10/2019	Play and Learn in Action	£2,500.00
Basildon	12/10/2019	Purple Genie Life Coaching	£2,500.00
Basildon	12/10/2019	Sense and Me	£2,500.00
Basildon	05/05/2020	KECC Community Cuppa	£437.00
Basildon	22/05/2020	Trust Links- Take Away Gardening	£1,200.00
Basildon	22/05/2020	Southend YMCA- Get Active	£2,500.00
Basildon	22/05/2020	T.I.M.E Together In Musical Expression	£2,500.00
Basildon	30/06/2020	Changing Pathways	£1,960.00
Basildon	31/07/2020	ProSports Active Families	£2,100.00
Basildon	31/07/2020	Zedgeneration.uk	£2,500.00
Basildon	14/09/2020	Basildon Mind	£2,500.00
Basildon	03/10/2020	Basis Essex/Blind and sight Impaired Society	£1,636.00
Basildon	03/10/2020	Basildon Sheltered Housing	£2,500.00
Basildon	26/10/2020	Keeping active on the Air!	£1,500.00
Basildon	24/02/2021	Essex Indians	£2,445.00
Basildon	04/01/2022	A Wellbeing Welcome (Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers)	£2,499.00
Basildon	17/02/2022	Yoga4All	£2,202.50
Basildon	29/04/2022	Gateway to Health and Wellbeing	£1,209.00

Area	Date of Application	Project	Approved Amount
Basildon	29/04/2022	Skatepark Outreach Project	£1,445.05
Basildon	29/04/2022	Rosemary Club - Dementia	£2,370.00
Basildon	25/05/2022	Summer Positive Activities	£2,530.00
Basildon	29/06/2022	Nexus Shares Yoga	£2,107.87
Basildon	29/06/2022	Elf for Fitness (Discovery Days and Boxing)	£2,259.41
Basildon	29/06/2022	The Heart of Pitsea Community Mile	£2,400.00
Basildon	01/07/2022	Summer of Physical Fun in the Workforce	£2,463.10
Basildon	16/08/2022	20 sports sessions to a new cohort of participants in collaboration with local community partners.	£2,500.00
Basildon	24/08/2022	Dis for you	£2,500.00
Basildon	31/08/2022	New karate fitness and self-defence class	£2,469.98
Basildon	16/09/2022	Engagement and outreach sessions at Hovefield Avenue and Oak Lane, Basildon.	£2,480.00
Basildon	16/09/2022	Intensive eight-week conditioning programme for of 20 young carers	£2,524.45
Basildon	08/11/2022	Tea dance	£2,274.00
Basildon	08/11/2022	Community Cuppa	£2,359.98
Basildon		Basildon Parents 4 Parents	£1,435.00
Basildon		Kids Inspire	£1,650.00
Basildon		Changing Lives	£2,458.80
		Basildon Total	£90,754.54
Colchester	12/10/2019	St Helena Hospice	£507.99
Colchester	12/10/2019	Unity primary	£1,270.00
Colchester	12/10/2019	Dementia - Walking football	£2,475.00
Colchester	12/10/2019	CDEM 'Lifting land'	£2,500.00
Colchester	05/05/2020	Treetops	£654.99
Colchester	05/05/2020	All in the Making CIC	£2,000.00
Colchester	05/05/2020	Together We Grow At Home	£2,500.00

Area	Date of Application	Project	Approved Amount
Colchester	30/06/2020	Dance 4 Health	£2,419.95
Colchester	17/07/2020	Colchester Borough Council- Activity packs	£1,329.98
Colchester	28/09/2020	Carers First-Care2Relax	£2,399.00
Colchester	29/09/2020	Together We Grow At Home - Right Start	£2,500.00
Colchester	03/10/2020	Dream The Change, CIC	£1,880.00
Colchester	03/10/2020	Community Allotment	£2,261.00
Colchester	02/11/2020	Beacon House Ministries	£499.81
Colchester	02/11/2020	AFiUK - Insects and Birds	£1,439.90
Colchester	02/11/2020	Muddy Boots Colchester	£1,640.00
Colchester	02/11/2020	Ability Using Sport	£2,000.00
Colchester	02/11/2020	Fansnetwork	£2,495.00
Colchester	02/11/2020	Eldery Exercises (Yoga)	£2,499.80
Colchester	02/11/2020	Zumba and Tai Chi	£2,500.00
Colchester	02/11/2020	MS-UK 3	£2,500.00
Colchester	02/11/2020	Together We Grow CIC - Health Starts	£2,500.00
Colchester	10/11/2020	Sport for Confidence- Care Home Boccia Tournament	£2,500.00
Colchester	10/11/2020	Together We Grow CIC - Connected Communities	£2,500.00
Colchester	30/12/2020	Lets Go!	£2,448.90
Colchester	29/01/2021	Outhouse East -Movement for Health	£2,160.00
Colchester	03/04/2021	Flourish	£17.58
Colchester	03/04/2021	Sport for Confidence & EPUT Community Physical Activity Programme	£2,500.00
Colchester	24/05/2021	Stanway Parish Council	£2,500.00
Colchester	02/01/2022	Woodland and Coastland Therapy	£2,455.00
Colchester	07/05/2022	Fit and Fab Women	£2,500.00
Colchester	16/08/2022	Work well, Live well, Be well	£2,500.00

Area	Date of Application	Project	Approved Amount
Colchester	25/10/2022	The Student PT Start Up	£2,500.00
		Colchester Total	£67,353.90
Tendring	12/10/2019	Coastal Kidz	£1,000.00
Tendring	12/10/2019	iCARP	£2,000.00
Tendring	12/10/2019	Get Cycling	£2,400.00
Tendring	12/10/2019	Stragglers Orienteering	£2,499.00
Tendring	12/10/2019	Feel Good Rhythm	£2,500.00
Tendring	12/10/2019	Swimming Inclusion Ventures	£2,500.00
Tendring	07/03/2020	Aerial Antics	£2,230.00
Tendring	25/03/2020	Octopus Ahoy, Schools	£2,360.00
Tendring	05/05/2020	Sarah Bockhart PT and Sports Massage-myHealthHub	£250.00
Tendring	30/06/2020	Bert's Belly Busters – Beat it with Bounce	£2,285.00
Tendring	04/07/2020	Home Instead Senior Care	£1,306.00
Tendring	31/07/2020	Feel Good Drumming	£1,472.65
Tendring	14/08/2020	Jaywick Sands Revival CIC	£2,417.86
Tendring	03/10/2020	Colchester United & Inclusion Ventures	£2,000.00
Tendring	05/10/2020	ECFWS Beach Hut	£2,082.00
Tendring	20/10/2020	Clacton Rhinos Walking Football Club=Walking Football website	£1,002.88
Tendring	02/11/2020	Walk and Talk 4 Men	£1,368.00
Tendring	02/11/2020	Inclusion Ventures- Bike Kitchen	£2,000.00
Tendring	02/11/2020	Bodymove	£2,100.00
Tendring	02/11/2020	Muddy Boots Tendring	£2,140.00
Tendring	02/11/2020	Kids Run Free-Clacton	£2,165.00
Tendring	02/11/2020	Kids Run Free-Harwich	£2,165.00
Tendring	02/11/2020	Brightlingsea Lido	£2,264.00

Area	Date of Application	Project	Approved Amount
Tendring	18/12/2020	Seaside Explorers Family Activity Sessions at the Beach	£900.00
Tendring	06/01/2021	Sheltered Housing- Ben Clyne Fitness	£1,296.00
Tendring	06/01/2021	Market Fields yoga	£2,395.00
Tendring	06/01/2021	Skate Fit	£2,500.00
Tendring	07/01/2021	Jodie Milne - Inclusive Dance	£2,321.87
Tendring	14/02/2021	Frinton Free Church	£860.00
Tendring	07/04/2021	Family Fitness	£1,320.72
Tendring	04/09/2021	Beach school collaborating with Walton Primary school	£650.00
Tendring	03/11/2021	Harwich and Dovercourt Rugby	£1,815.00
Tendring	11/12/2021	Women's Drum Circle	£2,499.00
Tendring	22/12/2021	Teen Talk Fitness (Harwich)	£2,017.00
Tendring	22/12/2021	ASD Discovery	£2,277.00
Tendring	04/01/2022	Generation Geology	£2,407.20
Tendring	21/02/2022	Yoga and Mindfulness for Children	£2,435.00
Tendring	24/03/2022	Grounds to Gro	£2,435.00
Tendring	24/03/2022	Archery Tag	£2,477.30
Tendring	06/06/2022	Sunrise Swims	£2,486.00
Tendring	14/07/2022	'Forest at the Fort'	£2,321.28
Tendring		Tendring District Youth Football Club	£2,240.00
		Tendring Total	£82,160.76
Essex-Wide	12/10/2019	Team Kinetix	£2,328.00
Essex-Wide	06/04/2020	Sandra-Lets Keep Moving	£2,112.00
Essex-Wide	05/11/2020	Walk & Talk from Colchester to Wanguani New Zealand	£2,500.00
		Essex-wide Total	£6,940.00