



Process Learning Report

September 2022 - April 2023

The Essex Local Delivery Pilot (LDP) is an eight-year system change programme, led by Active Essex, to test how to tackle population levels of physical inactivity in our most deprived communities. The Essex LDP is the only one in the East region and the latest Active Lives figures indicate that almost 30% of adults in Greater Essex are inactive (less than 30 minutes physical activity per week).

The purpose of this report is to showcase some of the work that has been undertaken within the Essex LDP and consider how and why some of the changes we have observed in the last 6 months might have come about. The report includes:

- 1. *What's been happening in Essex?*** - This section shines a spotlight on different activities that have been progressing over the past 6 months.
- 2. *Our journey into realist evaluation so far*** – We have identified the need to create an explanatory framework. A workshop held with our academic partner (a consortium including Hartpury University, Sheffield Hallam University and Durham University) helped us to identify three key theories relating to Active Essex's work (not just the work of the LDP).
- 3. *LDP Microgrants Programme*** – 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. The programme has been running since December 2019 and review was requested in late 2022.
- 4. *Essex Pedal Power*** – Essex Pedal Power (EPP) is one of the flagship programmes of the Active Essex LDP. The scheme provides free bikes to residents in the county's most disadvantaged communities, to increase cycling, active travel and physical activity levels. In January 2022, the Sports Business Hub at Hartpury University was commissioned by Active Essex to carry out a 'deep dive' realist evaluation of four areas of central focus to the work of Active Essex, one of which was Essex Pedal Power

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1. What's been happening in Essex?

It has been another busy 6 months for Active Essex and the LDP as we continue striving to hardwire physical activity into the system. Here are some of the highlights:



Prevention and Enablement Model (PEM)

Following a two-year pilot, the Prevention and Enablement Model (PEM) has demonstrated the impact of embedding physical activity in health and adult social care, using a whole system approach, to improve the lives of people living with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions.

Driven by a strategic partnership between Adult Social Care at Essex County Council, Active Essex, and Sport for Confidence CIC, the initiative also involved a diverse range of wider partners across Adult Social Care, the NHS, and the third sector (e.g., local authorities, Essex County Council teams, Provider Quality Innovation Team, and care homes).

The evaluation of the two-year pilot, which ended in August 2022, and compiled and verified independently by the University of Essex, has provided fundamental findings and key recommendations around system-led opportunities, the hardwiring of physical activity, workforce and impact.

The independent evaluation report by the University of Essex concludes that the positive impact of embedding physical activity into a whole system approach to adult health & social care could deliver £58.72 of social value per £1 invested.

More information and the full report can be found [here](#).

Sport and Youth Crime Prevention Project

The Essex Youth Sport and Crime Prevention project is a three-year project led by the Active Essex Foundation (AEF) and funded through the National Lottery Community Fund Reaching Communities programme and the Active Essex Local Delivery Pilot. The project intends to bring together the systems of criminal justice and community sport to prevent youth crime and violence.

One year in, the network of locally trusted organisations (LTOS) delivering intervention to young people at risk of offending has increased considerably and now includes over 50 organisations. Some of the original organisations have become less interactive, however, others have been encouraged to join through word of mouth, through presentations delivered by AEF to meetings and partnerships, and through direct contact by the AEF team to the community sports providers where we suspected there would be an excellent fit.

Strong links are developing with the Violence and Vulnerability Unit and we are embedded in their structure, a member of the AEF S&YCP Project is managing the Secondary Workstream programme of work gives a real ability to influence 'the system'. Multiple funding opportunities have resulted for our LTO network through these connections. Statutory agencies such as YOS, Police, Probation, Youth Service, Secure Establishments and the Community Safety Partnerships are actively engaging with AEF with collaborative projects and providing referral pathways. Third sector organisations such as ECVYS, Community 360 and Essex Library Service work in partnership with us.

More information can be found [here](#).

ActiveAte (HAF)

ActivAte clubs have been delivered in October, December and February with many children attending for food and physical activity.

	Number of Clubs	Number of Attendances	Number of Children
October	80	5,352	2,506
December	236	19,518	6,698
February	85	4,810	2,292

More information can be found [here](#).

Capacity Building of Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs)

Capacity Building of LTOs a key part of our LDP work. It is crucial we support locally trusted organisations who want to scale up and replicate their successful LDP testing. This is done by making organisations stronger in terms of governance, business planning, finance, staffing, and sustainability. This work is led by our expert adviser Mark Gerbaldi, who provided us with this rag rating of LTOs that he now views as having robust business plans to enable scaling up and replication.

Organisation	Status of Business Plan	RAG Rating
1) Motivated Minds	Strong progress but needs updating for 2023: well-funded as a result of our intervention	Green
2) ATF	Strong progress but needs updating for 2023: well-funded as a result of our intervention	Green
3) Project ME	Strong progress and plan attracting new funds: early stability to be refreshed in early 2023	Green
4) Together We Grow	Work in progress: NLCF at Stage 2 and NHS funds secured	Yellow
5) Lads Need Dads	Some progress (needs refreshing in early 2023)	Yellow
6) Inclusion Ventures	No progress to date: programme yet to be initiated	Red
7) Park Play	Strong progress made re: development of Essex model: funds secured and NLCF bid pending.	Green
8) Active Life	Business Plan draft available and being updated: work in progress	Yellow
9) Street Tag	No progress to date: considering start date	Red
10) Changing Lives	Strong progress: NLCF and statutory funds secured and upscaled into Colchester (from Harlow)	Green
11) Dance On Prescription	Work in progress re: legal structures and development / funding strategies	Yellow
12) The Listening Post	Some progress: NLCF bid made, but legal issues to be addressed along with new strategies	Yellow
13) Backside to Trackside	Progress Made: new CIC being created, and Business Plan being developed to upscale a successfully tested model.	Yellow
14) Kinetix Academy CIC	Progress Made: CIC created, Business Plan draft available and being developed plus early funds raised: work in progress.	Yellow
15) Feelgood Fitness	Healthcheck prepared and programme outlined: ready to start	Red

Asset-Based Community Development

Our LDP is boosting ABCD for 2023 with a wide range of plans to provide comprehensive training and then application of ABCD principles and practices:

- Over 50 of the Active Essex team and wider LDP core team participated in recent in-person two-day ABCD introduction course tutored by our ABCD partner Nurture Development
“I am so grateful that I got to attend the training. I found it made me reflect and re-evaluate ways of working, certainly came away with lots of tools and shared stories.”
- In May, we will train a cohort of 15 experienced people from Essex who understand and use ABCD to become the future tutors, mentors and advisers for ABCD in Essex in a new ABCD social enterprise to be launched out of the Active Essex Foundation in 2024
- Colchester and Basildon are implementing their comprehensive ABCD plans

Basildon Active Environment Strategy

On Thursday 16th March the Active Environments Strategy was considered by Cabinet. This strategy has now been approved and adopted by the Council. The strategy works across a range of council themes such as leisure and culture, climate change and planning and outlines how we will work across six key commitments:

Commitment
We want to support local communities to offer a diverse range of accessible opportunities for people to walk, wheel, scoot, and cycle in their local area.
We want to use gamification and digitisation to support and encourage residents to be more active through walking, wheeling, scooting, and cycling.
We want to work to tackle the high start-up costs of cycling (bike, lock, helmet) which has been identified as a barrier for many people from cycling.
Transport accounts for 26% of carbon emissions within the borough. We want to increase levels of active travel to achieve our net-zero by 2050 aim.
We commit to working collaboratively across the organisation to incorporate active environments work across corporate plan ambitions of people, place and prosperity.
We want to ensure our residents feel safe and are safe. We want to develop the infrastructure to increase safety and accessibility of the network.

Hartpury University Deep Dives

Over the past year Hartpury University have been conducting deep dives into four key areas of work across Active Essex to explore:

1. How and why do these programmes / areas of focus contribute to system change?
2. How and why do these programmes / areas of focus bring about behaviour change outcomes for those involved?

3. How and why do these programmes / areas of focus create a social return on investment for Active Essex?

Aligning with our LDP evaluation methods, the deep dives used mixed methods and took a realist evaluation approach. As part of this work, the following data collection methods were used:

Asset Based Community Development	Essex Pedal Power	Find Your Active	ActivAte/Holiday Activity and Food
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 Interviews with community member and locally trusted organisation stakeholders • 5 Interviews with system influencing stakeholders • 25 Surveys with Nurture Development training recipients • 28 Surveys with community member stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 Stories of change with EPP cyclists – community member stakeholders • 5 How and why conversations with staff and volunteers – organisation stakeholders • 7 Interviews with system influencing stakeholders • 719 Surveys with EPP bike applicants and recipients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 Interviews with community connectors and ambassadors • 7 How and why conversations with community member stakeholders • 4 Interviews with system influencing stakeholders • 41 Surveys with community member stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 Focus groups with observations with children and young people • 5 Reflective logs with observations with children and young people • 4 How and why conversations with parents and carers – community member stakeholders • 5 How and why conversations with operational staff and locally trusted organisation stakeholders • 2 Interviews with system influencing stakeholders • 105 Surveys with families

Key findings for Essex Pedal Power (EPP):

- EPP connects residents, provides employment opportunities, provides active transport, improves perceptions of neighbouring areas and improves their health and wellbeing.
- For many the provision of a bike is seen as a lifeline because it gives them access to work, shops, healthcare and other important aspects of their lives
- EPP has brought together stakeholders with mutual interests, strategic goals and beliefs have been aligned.
- There is evidence of distributed leadership of partners to deliver on their 'expert' areas.
- EPP's supports system stakeholders to see community assets.

Key findings for Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) work:

- ABCD is at the centre of increasing physical activity amongst Essex residents. There is a clear understanding and joint thinking amongst LTO's working with AE to deliver PA.
- Place based working is the core of transformational change being led by AE. AE are able to facilitate place based awareness.
- Bringing wider stakeholders who traditionally are not always involved is facilitated through AE leadership.
- Community members are supported via an ABCD approach to access funding and support to deliver physical activity.

Key findings for Find Your Active:

- Participants that engage in FYA activities feel healthier and increase their physical activity levels through participating.
- Community Connectors are important in supporting inactive individuals into physical activity
- Social media is a key avenue for participants to find out about FYA activities
- 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.
- 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.

Key findings for ActiveAte (HAF):

- The inclusive nature of activities and staff is important to encouraging children to connect with others during the activities.
- ActivAte/HAF provides opportunities for Parents/Carers to spend time caring for family, working or education/training, or moments of respite without the costs of childcare.
- Within a constrained education sector and cost of living crisis there is significant value for wider sector integration to take shape in considering how such an approach can become sustainable.

The full report can be found [here](#).

Sharing Learning

We have taken opportunities to share our learnings including at a major sport and physical activity conference in Surrey, a regional mental health conference and a national webinar with Intelligent Health.

Active Essex also hosted a networking event on Wednesday 2nd November at the Colchester FC community stadium. Reflecting on the systems strategy 'Fit for the Future', which launched last year, the event allowed attendees to share and learn experiences of creating healthier active families, groups, and communities. The Share – Connect – Collaborate networking event was introduced by Cllr Louise McKinlay Deputy Leader of Essex County Council and Dr William Bird MBE, GP and Chair of Active Essex. This was followed by a number of workshops on the key issues that impact the delivery of Fit for the Future.

Levelling Up Parliament Visit

Members of the LDP team were in Parliament last week to help promote the Essex work in Levelling Up. Rosie-Roella Kevlin was representing Essex Pedal Power, and she was joined by LDP members John Fox, Louise Voyce, and Jason Fergus.

LDP Core Team Refresh

At a recent monthly LDP core team meeting, it was agreed to give the core team a 'spring clean' and refresh the working and activities. A small working group came up with recommendations that were all agreed:

1. Discontinue the monthly online meeting and focus information sharing on the weekly update
2. Increase the membership of the core team to include organisations who have received LDP investment

3. Create more in-person networking and sharing – specifically a minimum of three in-person meetings a year
4. Create a programme of bitesize online learning sessions each between 20 minutes and 60 minutes on a wide variety of subjects relevant to the work of the LDP

The new arrangements will come into operation from April 2023.

LDP Budget Reprofileing

Discussions are currently underway with Sport England to reprofile the Essex LDP budget to make it fit for purpose for future years. We have proposed the following:

1. Out of a global budget of £11,847,651, there is a business case to reprofile a total of £2,500,925 into different budget headings. The purpose of the budget reprofile is to ensure it properly reflects the current priorities for the LDP based on ongoing evaluation and management information. It is clear that some of the priorities have changed from when the original budget was set in 2018.
2. There are sixteen main budget headings for the LDP. Five of these are on track to achieve the set net spend by 2025. They are: 1. Community Capacity, 2. Communications, 3. Data and Insight, 4. Evaluation, 5. Share and Learn. We are not proposing to make changes to these five budget headings.
3. Two budget lines not involving spend in the three test areas are overspent. They are Staffing and Active Design. The total overspend is £439,820 for these two budget lines. We want to reprofile money into these two budget lines from budget lines that are heading for an underspend, namely Strategic Infrastructure and Active Workplace.
4. We want to protect the original budget allocations for our three test areas of Basildon, Colchester, and Tendring. However, we would like to reprofile how the money is spent in each of the three areas by moving money from the budget lines of Community Hubs, Micro Grants, and Community Infrastructure into the budget lines of Test and Learn, and Scale and Replicate.
5. We want to increase the budget that enables us to start scale and replication outside of the three test areas. This fits with our original plans to shift from test and learn to scale and replicate for the period 2023 to 2025. We will only have a small amount of LDP funds to begin to achieve our aspirations for scale and replicate, and we hope to secure significant additional funds to help achieve our plans from the new Sport England place-based expansion programme.
6. Since the inception of the LDP, an overriding principle has been to ensure Sport England funds are used to lever in significant other funding from system partners. The latest figures (accurate to December 2022) show direct leverage total of £15,562,166 and indirect leverage total of £14,297,270.

Supporting Sport England with Place-Based Expansion

Over 20 Sport England colleagues visited Essex this week, to find out about the work of our LDP and Active Essex. The Sport England Place team, led by Lisa Dodd-Mayne, was created in the Sport England strategic restructure last year, and incorporates LDPs, place-based expansion, local and community-based approaches, and facilities. The team includes Warren, Marie and Naomi who are part of our LDP team, as well as Adam Rigarlsford who contributed significantly to the early years of our LDP.

The Sport England team heard about our LDP journey since 2018 and heard from five of our key system leaders: Lucy Wightman, Essex Director of Public Health; Cllr John Spence, Chair of LDP Strategic Sponsors;

Pam Green, ICA Alliance Director; Scott Logan, Chief Executive of Basildon Council; Julian Sanchez, ECC Sustainable Transport.

The feedback from Sport England colleagues was that our LDP is doing fantastic work on so many fronts, that our LDP can help significantly with their place-based expansion plans, and that they will use examples of our work in their national work.

For more information on the recent work of the Essex LDP, please see our Q3 and Q4 reports:

Q3 Reports	Q4 Reports
<u>Overview</u>	<u>Overview</u>
<u>Essex-wide</u>	<u>Essex-wide</u>
<u>Basildon</u>	<u>Basildon</u>
<u>Colchester</u>	<u>Colchester</u>
<u>Tendring</u>	<u>Tendring</u>

2. Our journey into realist evaluation so far

The evaluation of the Essex LDP is delivered by a partnership between the Active Essex Insight & Evaluation team and a consortium of academics (Hartpury University, Sheffield Hallam University and Durham University), and utilises a realist approach. The aim of this approach is not just to determine if an intervention or programme works but also to identify how and why it works, for who, where and under what circumstances. Typically, the 'realist cycle' has 3 phases; develop theories (our assumptions and beliefs), test our ideas, and refine theories.

At the time of our last Process Learning Report submission (Oct 2022), we had developed assumptions and beliefs about six focus areas and were beginning to test some of these. In the last six months, we have:

- Gathered data to test our gamification theories and have refined two out of three of these
- Made use of data collected for a review of the LDP Microgrants Programme to test and refine one of our Place Based Working theories (findings in the 'LDP Microgrants Programme' section below)
- Gathered data to test our Youth Justice System theories with a plan to refine these soon

We have identified the need to create an explanatory framework (which we often describe locally as a washing line) to help us 'zoom out', pin our findings to and identify themes from these. A workshop held with our academic partner in March helped us to identify three key theories relating to the work of the LDP and the wider work of Active Essex; 'physical activity despite inequalities' which relates to the provision of physical activity opportunities without mitigating for inequalities, 'physical activity and mitigating inequalities' which relates to the provision of physical activity opportunities AND enables access to these or uses physical activity to reduce inequalities, and 'reducing inequalities' which relates to reducing wider structural inequalities without it involving physical activity.

a) Physical activity despite inequalities:

Inequalities in physical activity exist; these include living in an area of deprivation, age, ethnicity, disability, etc. IF we increase physical activity opportunities for people facing inequalities in physical activity BY direct delivery and 'hardwiring' physical activity into the system THEN people will become more active BECAUSE they have more opportunities available to them.

Examples of this include:

- Gamification interventions such as Beat the Street and Street Tag, which are open to all but are particularly promoted to families living in areas of deprivation through schools
- Find Your Active activity finder, which increases awareness of local physical activity opportunities available
- Investments such as funding new flooring for Age Well East's hub so that physical activity sessions can be delivered safely for the older people attending
- Disseminating funding from Sport England's Together Fund to groups providing physical activity opportunities for lower socio-economic groups, ethnically diverse communities, disabled people, and individuals living with long-term health conditions

b) Physical activity and mitigating inequalities:

Providing physical activity opportunities alone is not enough to get some people experiencing inequalities in physical activity active. IF we increase physical activity opportunities for people

experiencing inequalities in physical activity AND provide something to mitigate the inequalities they are experiencing BY direct delivery and 'hardwiring' physical activity into parts of the system that have access to people experiencing inequalities in physical activity THEN people will become more active BECAUSE they have been enabled to take up the opportunities provided.

Examples of this include:

- The Prevention and Enablement Model (PEM) which uses physical activity as a prevention tool within Adult Social Care, particularly making use of Occupational Therapists to make physical activity sessions more inclusive for people with disabilities
- Essex Activate (HAF) which provides both food and activities to children who are eligible for free school meals in the school holidays
- Sport and life skills projects which deliver physical activity sessions and life skills courses to young people identified as being at risk of offending
- Essex Pedal Power which gives people living in areas of deprivation a free bike and wrap around support with the intension of this increasing their access to active travel and leisure cycling as well as education and employment opportunities

c) Reducing inequalities:

Some people experience wider structural inequalities which considerably reduce their capacity to be physically active; these include education, housing, income, etc. IF we tackle underlying issues that cause inequalities in physical activity BY utilising our position within system and encouraging and supporting the systems efforts to tackle inequalities THEN people will become more active BECAUSE they have been given the capacity and enabled to take up the opportunities provided.

Examples of this include:

- Delivery of ABCD training to stakeholders across the system to encourage using this approach to strengthen communities
- Engagement with food banks to support the work that they do
- Supporting the Essex County Council Levelling Up agenda
- Supporting and influencing the Essex County Council Strengthening Communities team

We are in the process of developing a model to visualise these theories and hope to share this within our next Process Learning Report along with reflections on how this is helping with the evaluation work and sharing our learnings.

3. The Essex LDP Microgrants Programme

About the LDP Microgrants Programme

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, including families with children, older people and those with poor mental health.

The identification and shaping of ideas are often supported by the three 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. All applications have to come from a constituted organisation to meet the conditions of 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). 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. The LDP wanted to test a light touch process to engage with 'unusual suspects' to fund new ideas and enable innovation, using the LDP evaluation process to quickly understand successful community chest approaches that can be rapidly replicated and scaled up.

When stakeholders were asked what the intention of the Microgrants Programme is, they 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

Review of the Microgrants Programme

The Essex LDP Microgrants Programme has been running since December 2019 and a review was requested in late 2022. 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.

The report identified the following 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 small grants and other small grants programmes

Since the review, a decision has been taken to end the LDP Microgrants Programme and the team are working to consider how learnings can be used to further shape Active Essex's Find Your Active small grants programme.

More information and the full report are available [here](#).

Changes Observed

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 (150 minutes physical activity per week) and 28% were doing less than 30 minutes physical activity per week.

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."

"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."

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, learn, scale, replicate' opportunity within the Microgrants Programme.

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."

Explanatory Account of How & Why a Microgrants Programme Worked in Essex

An initial theory about the Microgrants Programme was developed collaboratively with stakeholders in May 2022 and data has been collected since then to test and refine it.

The initial theory was:

Communities already possess a wealth of assets and knowledge that can help tackle physical inactivity in their local place. IF we can support, guide and fund local individuals and/or groups to galvanise and realise their own ideas, THEN we will catalyse small scale community projects which respond to the individual needs of that place, and this will create more opportunities to be physically active BECAUSE we will be helping to remove current barriers to these types of initiatives (funding, knowledge, capacity).

The refined theory is:

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, THEN we will widen the reach of the LDP and engage more with those who do not usually take part in conventional physical activity, BECAUSE providing support to individuals/groups will increase their access to resources, giving them the capacity and confidence required to test their own ideas leading to communities feeling empowered to take risks, resulting in more non-traditional physical activity opportunities.

Context

FROM: *Communities already possess a wealth of assets and knowledge that can help tackle physical inactivity in their local place*

TO: *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*

Our initial theory was correct in saying that are assets and knowledge in local places. The LDP Microgrants Programme has funded over 100 small groups and organisations to deliver projects with a line of site to physical activity, which is evidence of this in itself. Stakeholders also recognised that people within communities have assets that are useful for tackling physical inactivity that we do not, such as relationships and trust.

“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.”

“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.”

However, we have identified a gap between simply possessing knowledge and assets and successfully providing physical activity opportunities to local communities. Many stakeholders spoke about there being ‘untapped potential’ within communities and individuals who needed considerable support to develop their ideas and apply for Microgrant funding. This support included advice and guidance on project planning and what to write in the application form, as well as encouraging and building confidence.

“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”

“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. Oh, 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.”

It is worth noting that stakeholders recognised there are assets and knowledge that can help tackle physical activity beyond constituted groups, however for governance reasons it was not possible to fund non-constituted groups, informal groups or individuals through the LDP Microgrants Programme.

“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.”

Mechanism - Resource

FROM: *IF we can support, guide and fund local individuals and/or groups to galvanise and realise their own ideas*

TO: *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*

Our initial theory did not detail what support was needed by local individual and groups and the ways of working required to do this. Stakeholders identified that the LDP Coordinators were key to the success of the Microgrants Programme, particularly their role in the identification, development and support of Microgrant projects, especially those that are delivered by ‘unusual suspects’ who are either not used to applying for funding or have not previously delivered physical activity projects.

The Coordinators in all three 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.

“So it's the approachability, the compassion, the flexibility and just them really collaborating with you really supporting you.”

“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.”

“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.”

Outcome

FROM: THEN we will catalyse small scale community projects which respond to the individual needs of that place, and this will create more opportunities to be physically active

TO: THEN we will widen the reach of the LDP and engage more with those who do not usually take part in conventional physical activity

A key finding from speaking with stakeholders involved with the Microgrants Programme was that one of the key outcomes that differentiates it from other small grants programmes was the concept of engaging those who do not take part in conventional physical activity.

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 voluntary and 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. Through this, the LDP can widen its reach and have access to individuals who we would not normally have access to.

“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.”

“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 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.”

Mechanism – Reasoning

FROM: BECAUSE we will be helping to remove current barriers to these types of initiatives (funding, knowledge, capacity)

TO: BECAUSE providing support to individuals/groups will increase their access to resources, giving them the capacity and confidence required to test their own ideas leading to communities feeling empowered to take risks, resulting in more non-traditional physical activity opportunities

As mentioned above (context) there is a gap between having assets and knowledge in a community and creating physical activity opportunities. Our initial theory suggested that this gap could be bridged by removing certain barriers (funding, knowledge, capacity), however it has been identified that alongside this, support is needed by many groups and individuals to build confidence.

“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.”

Microgrant recipients reported using new and innovative methods to engage community members because their experience showed it was necessary. This approach requires feeling empowered and confident to take risks, which through the support of the LDP Coordinators they did.

“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.”

Some stakeholders noted the importance of this ‘risk taking’ mindset and would like to have taken more risks and given more power to the community with the suggestion that this would lead to greater innovation and therefore greater reach into communities where people do not engage in traditional physical activity.

“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.”

4. Essex Pedal Power

About Essex Pedal Power

Essex Pedal Power (EPP) is one of the flagship programmes of the Active Essex LDP. The scheme provides free bikes to residents in the county's most disadvantaged communities, to increase cycling, active travel, community cohesion and physical activity levels. Active Essex and the LDP are working together with Essex County Council Sustainable Transport and Localities Teams, The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWs) and other key partners.

The programme launched in Clacton and Jaywick in June 2021 and due to its success, Essex Pedal Power will be launching in Colchester, Basildon and Harwich and Dovercourt in Spring 2023, with the aspiration of working in additional disadvantaged areas across Essex in the future. 3,725 new bikes and 2,550 GPS trackers have been ordered for all four operations and an additional £300k has been secured for 600 new bikes in Tendring including adapted bikes, e-bikes and e-cargo bikes.

Deep Dive Evaluation of Essex Pedal Power

In January 2022, the Sports Business Hub at Hartpury University was commissioned by Active Essex to carry out a 'deep dive' realist evaluation of four areas of central focus to the work of Active Essex, one of which was Essex Pedal Power.

Three questions were central to the evaluation:

- How and why do these areas of focus contribute to system change?
- How and why do these areas of focus bring about individual behaviour change outcomes for those involved?
- How and why do these areas of focus create a social return on investment for Active Essex?

Hartpury University worked collaboratively with Active Essex, following specific principles called 'collaborative approaches to evaluation or CAE' to get to the bottom of how people involved in the design and leadership of systems and communities respond to the resources provided in a programme to establish 'what works for whom, in what circumstances and why'.

An initial programme theory development phase involved a comprehensive process which included collaborating with key Active Essex stakeholders and co-producing explanatory assumptions and beliefs (programme theories). A literature review and three theory gleaning workshops led to 20 'how and why' statements being produced and shared with the team. Of these, 10 were selected for investigation.

During the theory testing phase, the team conducted 11 stories of change with Essex Pedal Power bike recipients, 5 how & why conversations with staff and volunteers and 7 interviews with system influencing stakeholders.

Changes Observed

'Impact' Changes (how EPP contributes to physical activity and other social and behavioural outcomes for people in Essex):

- The bike gives recipients in communities the opportunity to connect, link and develop relationships because they use the bike in a way that suits their needs. Utility cycling, family and friends cycling and mental and physical wellbeing are key drivers of this.
- For many the provision of a bike is seen as a lifeline because it gives them access to work, shops, healthcare and other important aspects of their lives (without incurring the cost and maintenance of a quality bike).
- Recipients, that engage in led rides and EPP, in Clacton and Jaywick are able to socialise together, bridge and build relationships through the medium of cycling.
- Recipients of bikes in EPP, who have engaged in led rides have gone on to develop employability skills through volunteering and gaining new qualifications because of the support they have received from EPP staff.
- Sport England decided to fund £150,000 to undertake a 'gold standard' study on social and economic return on investment of free bikes schemes to influence future national funding.

'System' Changes (how EPP contributes to and influences the formation of new structures, beliefs and goals of decision makers):

- EPP contributes to bringing strategic stakeholders together for a common purpose of active travel and physical activity, because it helps to align the values, goals and beliefs that stakeholders have. This helps with leveraging funding. Having something 'concrete' like EPP is a conduit and mediator for getting people around the table for a shared vision.
- Partners are at the heart of a shared approach moving beyond pure transactional and siloed approaches to increasing active travel and physical activity. This shared approach embodies place based ways of working through distributing leadership to wider stakeholders who can take control.
- The use of GPS trackers is providing greater insight around the number of people cycling and where they are cycling. This insight is helping EPP to inform and improve cycling infrastructure which may boost cycling participation.
- The mixture of behaviour change and infrastructure as a focus through EPP opens up greater funding opportunities which is supported by the shared goals and beliefs amongst partners. A shared vision created through EPP helps to bring to the fore important opportunities about new funding and key challenges surrounding sustainability
- EPP is giving opportunities for stakeholders across the system to access and develop better relationships with communities. This is driven by a place based approach that acknowledges and respects the wide diversity of stakeholders and people in local communities.

Explanatory Accounts of How & Why Essex Pedal Power Work in Essex

Theory 1 (Impact)

FROM: *Less than 50% of residents in a locality do not own or have access to a vehicle This means their ability to travel for work and other opportunities may be challenged by not having access to a vehicle. IF Essex Pedal Power provides bikes and necessary resources for residents in deprived wards who are less likely to own or have access to a vehicle THEN residents may have the ability to travel for work and access cheaper shops BECAUSE residents will not be reliant on the bus network which is perceived as inaccessible and difficult by some respondents.*

TO: *Less than 50% of residents in a locality do not own or have access to a vehicle This means their ability to travel for work and other opportunities may be challenged by not having access to a vehicle. IF Essex Pedal Power provides bikes and necessary resources for residents in deprived wards who are less likely to own or have access to a vehicle and do not feel they are within close distance to necessary shops and healthcare THEN providing residents with a free bike and necessary resources will improve access to shops, healthcare, and potentially work BECAUSE Essex Pedal Power helps recipients who do not own or have access to a car use their bike to access shops, healthcare, and potentially work without the financial cost of public transport, or the time spent walking.*

The context from the initial theory is still appropriate as evidence available to the Local Authority continues to support that less than 50% of residents have access to or own a vehicle. Bike recipients spoken to in this research included both those who did not have access to or own a vehicle as well as those who did.

For recipients who did not have access to a vehicle, this meant they could not make the frequent journeys into town that they wished to so they could access shops or healthcare. Before receiving a bike, such journeys would have taken up more time due to not having access to a car or travelling on foot. These recipients also felt confident they could cycle further to access shops and return home to care for their family within a reasonable timeframe compared to walking.

"The bike means I can get into Clacton quickly and get home to my family, especially where my [partner] looks after the little ones."

"I'm using the bike to cycle to work instead of driving so I can save money and still get around to clients."

"I know I can go out for miles and still get back to my family quickly."

For recipients who did own or have access to a car, they wanted to use the bike to cycle on shorter journeys instead of driving.

"Cycling to a friend's house is easier than having to sit in traffic and try to find a parking space."

"Where the journey isn't too long [3 miles or less] I will try to cycle... I rarely use the car now."

For many recipients, they did not use public transport because they had access to a vehicle that they would use for journeys not suitable by bike. For recipients without access to a vehicle, one did not use the bus because of anxiety in social situations and another would rather be physically active and access work or shops via cycling or walking, rarely using the bus system.

Theory 2 (System)

FROM: *There are multiple organisations and sectors that value cycling and how it can help them to achieve their respective goals. IF there is a coordinated approach across various sectors (e.g. AE, Travel, Education etc) who value cycling programmes like Essex Pedal Power THEN this has the potential for collaborative policy-driven resourcing that creates a holistic approach to supporting active travel BECAUSE this approach involves resources being pooled in an appropriate way that serves the best interests for cycling in Essex*

TO: *There are multiple organisations and sectors that value cycling and how it can help them to achieve their respective goals. IF Essex Pedal Power is a conduit that can integrate and bring together stakeholders across sectors that hold mutual interest in increasing participation in cycling THEN Essex Pedal Power supports distributed leadership amongst partners to deliver on their "expert area" that helps to provide a holistic approach to supporting cycling BECAUSE strategic goals and beliefs have been aligned through the opportunity to leverage funding and pool funding that can help stakeholders to achieve their outcomes and potential for sustainable approaches to physical activity with funding wider than the physical activity sector.*

Essex Pedal Power operates in a context where there are shared beliefs among a wide range of stakeholders that cycling, active travel and health are important things to invest resources into.

Where sectors have a mutual interest in cycling and an understanding of how it can contribute to their strategic goals, there is a coordinated approach towards delivering Essex Pedal Power. There is not one sector in control with leadership distributed amongst stakeholders where partners share beliefs and goals that partnership working will help work to achieve common goals.

"Partners are at the heart of Essex Pedal Power, moving away from a transactional relationship"

An environment of 'opportunity' exists where we see 'action' in the structures and goals of stakeholders, which are then seen in local policy. However, this is only the starting point, and more work is required to branch out to other areas of the system. This includes additional third sector organisations and community level stakeholders.

Essex Pedal Power stakeholders are committed to pooling resources into that will help the programme grow.

"This cross section of partnerships working under one roof was real evidence and an excellent example of partnership working. Each individual believing in the vision".

This has also seen a change in structure in Essex Pedal Power stakeholder organisations where staff were assigned to be EPP-focused and involved further than just on a transactional basis. For example, a full time Evaluation Researcher has been appointed for Essex Pedal Power to oversee data collection, analysis and reporting.

"[there are] two dedicated business development managers and a coordinator and a part time marketing coordinator... it's a dedicated team now, which two years ago didn't exist."

Operational staff also seen support and resource provided to them when needed.

“On the ground, there was part time support from a Tendring District Council Health admin support officer, CVS Tendring activity activator officer and occasional support from Active Essex LDP worker”.

Where Essex Pedal Power did not have its own premises to begin with, a partner had allowed operational staff to base themselves in one of their spaces.

Theory 3 (System)

FROM: *Within an environment where EPP has grabbed the attention and started to influence goals and beliefs of certain stakeholders (e.g. healthcare, transport, workplaces, third sector orgs, education), IF a collaborative approach is taken to working across all stakeholders interested/involved in Essex Pedal Power THEN we will see changes in the way cycling infrastructure is resourced and acknowledged through real actions (e.g. workplaces providing cycling facilities for workers, and wider stakeholders building cycling priorities into their operational plans that put the community first) BECAUSE Essex Pedal Power provides an opportunity for involved/invested stakeholders to attract funding together to help them work towards newly shared goals and beliefs within increasing physical activity and accessible opportunities for cycling.*

TO: *Within an environment where EPP has brought together sectors and organisations with mutual interests in cycling/active travel and started to influence goals and beliefs of certain stakeholders, IF a collaborative approach is taken to working across sectors and organisations who may hold an interest in being involved with Essex Pedal Power THEN we will see changes in the way cycling infrastructure is resourced and acknowledged through real actions as organisations and sectors with mutual interest in cycling see that infrastructure planning is informed by local residents’ data such as the GPS trackers BECAUSE Essex Pedal Power provides an opportunity for funding and resourcing both behaviour change (increased cycling participation) and infrastructure change (new cycle lanes) simultaneously where Essex Pedal Power is a conduit for organisations that would not traditionally work together closely to align goals and beliefs and leverage funding.*

Essex Pedal Power has aligned stakeholders with mutual interests to work together towards their respective strategic goals through increasing cycling participation where there is potential to leverage funding, hit strategic goals and distribute leadership to respective experts. Active Essex has been a key driver in bringing together and aligning these stakeholders.

"Prior to this project we wouldn't have been able to link or synergise with other areas... Essex Pedal Power has helped us leverage new funding."

We see an influence of Essex Pedal Power on how cycling infrastructure is being planned for because of the GPS tracking data being used to inform stakeholders of the cycle routes recipients are taking. Where there is trust that recipients will cycle the bikes, it has meant their journeys are helping to inform future network planning and cycle parking.

"One of the benefits that we are seeing is that GPS data is starting to help us inform our network planning."

Essex Pedal Power’s approach to behaviour change of cycling – providing free bikes, free cycle training, free bike maintenance and access to free led rides – alongside upgrading cycling infrastructure – cycle routes and parking – open opportunities that leverage greater funding.

“From the years I've spent in active travel projects, if you don't open the gates to leisure cycling first, you're never going to get someone on the road [such as travelling to work], so it's a really important step. But always funders have said from the transport side... if they're not getting out of a car and getting on a bike... We can't ...justify giving you the money for you to give away a free bike.”

This joint approach happens because of shared goals and beliefs amongst partners in Essex Pedal Power, where they have a mutual interest in increasing cycling participation.