



# Healthy Lifestyle Coaches Programme 2013

Final Evaluation report

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March 2014

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## Executive summary

This final report represents the findings of an independent evaluation of the Healthy Lifestyle Coaches (HLC) 2013 programme, delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST).

This report is based on data gathered from extensive research conducted on the programme that included in person interviews with stakeholders during visits to HLC clubs in schools and surveys of child participants in the clubs, coaches running the clubs, and coordinators managing the programme in local areas. Surveys and qualitative research covered the eight Health Lottery areas the programme was delivered in.

### *Purpose of Programme*

The Healthy Lifestyle Coaches programme was designed to support schools to inspire children who were less active to choose and enjoy new sporting activities and make healthy choices. A Healthy Lifestyle Coach was assigned to each participating school and delivered a club aimed at encouraging less active children to enjoy physical activity. The Healthy Lifestyle clubs were intended to inspire these children to become motivated about participating in physical activity.

### *Key Findings*

The HLC programme had success in successfully targeting less active children and encouraging them to adopt more positive attitudes towards exercise and sport. Data from the surveys suggested that coaches were creative in engaging with this target group developing effective strategies to motivate the children and sustain their interest.

Evidence indicated that children enjoyed HLC groups and in many cases were motivated to be more active beyond the sessions. There were strong indications that the enthusiasm generated by attending HLC groups led to increased physical activity outside of sessions for a significant proportion of participants. It was not possible to determine whether participation in HLC groups had led to the development of physical activity as an enduring habit. However, early signs regarding physical activity were positive with a majority of participants reporting that they were more active after attending the group.

The project achieved the following key outcomes:

#### **Targeting less active children**

- A majority of HLC groups consisted of at least 60% 'less active' children. Only 10% of groups consisted of less than 30% 'less active' children.

#### **Well-being and enthusiasm for physical activity and sport**

*High levels of well-being after attending HLC group*

- Nine out of 10 children reported feeling either 'Very happy' or 'Happy' after going to the group.
- Eight out of 10 children reported that they felt good about themselves generally.

*High retention levels of participants in HLC groups*

- A large majority of groups reported that eight out of ten children had attended for the full term.

*Improved motivation to participate in physical activity and sport*

- The proportion of children reporting that they 'tried their best in physical activity and sport' after involvement in the group increased by 14% (76% to 90%).

*Overcoming dislike of physical activity and sport among less active children*

- Eight out of 10 children who said they had hated physical activity and sport before joining the group said they either liked or loved it after involvement in the group.

*Improved self-confidence in physical activity and sport*

- The proportion of children reporting that they 'thought they were good at physical activity and sport' after involvement in the group increased by 7% (74% to 81%).

Indications were that the strong sense of enjoyment and higher levels of confidence about physical activity engendered by participation in the HLC group had a knock-on effect on participation levels beyond the sessions. Children took the positive experience of the HLC group and were motivated to increase their physical activity outside of school.

**Increased participation in physical activity and sport**

- Six out of 10 children (61%) reported that they played sport or were active *more often* than before joining the group.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

This final report presents the findings of an independent evaluation of the HLC programme, delivered by the Youth Sport Trust.

This final report provides a summative evaluation reflecting on the performance of the programme.

The areas of focus in this report are as follows:

- Assessing the experience of implementation of the programme in local areas.
- Assessing the support offered to coaches in preparing to deliver sessions in schools.
- Examining the efficacy of strategies used to target and engage less active children.
- Examining different approaches to delivering sessions and efficacy in generating enthusiasm and changing attitudes towards physical activity and healthy living.
- Assessment of outcomes for children and early signs of long term impact.
- Assessing any learning gained from the evaluation and drawing on these to make recommendations for future practice.

### 1.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation involved two phases of research. The first phase consisted of survey work that gathered feedback from many of the various stakeholders involved in the programme. Surveys were conducted for child participants in the clubs, coaches running the clubs, and coordinators managing the programme in local areas. The surveys were distributed as widely as possible and received high levels of response. Details on the distribution of the surveys and the sample size achieved are available in Table 1.

**Table 1. Survey sample sizes and distribution**

Target group	population no.	Survey type	distribution method	reach	response rate	Confidence interval (at 95% confidence level)
Coordinators	22	online	sent directly via email	22	100%	N/A
Coaches	230	online	email passed on by Coordinators	56	24%	11.42
Child participants	6,000	paper	distributed by Coordinators to Coaches;	594	10%	3.82

			Coaches asked to administer with group and send back.			
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A second phase of research, more qualitative in approach, involved visits to observe HLC session in schools, interviews with coordinators, coaches and children and focus groups with children. These research activities consisted of the following:

- 8 school visits to observe HLC groups (covering each of the Health Lottery areas)
- 8 in-depth interviews with Coordinators (in-person and phone)
- 12 in-depth in-person interviews with Coaches
- 8 focus groups with child participants (each with 6-8 children)
- 8 in-depth in-person interviews with child participants.

## 2 Outcomes and impact

### Chapter 2: Summary

- High level of well-being after attending the HL group with 9 out of 10 children reporting they felt happy afterwards.
- Increased motivation to participate in physical activity with proportion of children reporting that they 'tried their best in physical activity and sport' increasing from 76% to 90%.
- More than half of children (61%) reported that they played sport or were active more often than they did before joining the HLC club.
- Nearly all coaches reported that at least 20% of children in their HL group had become more active as a result of participation.
- Most coaches observed improvements in self-confidence and awareness of healthy living among children attending the groups.

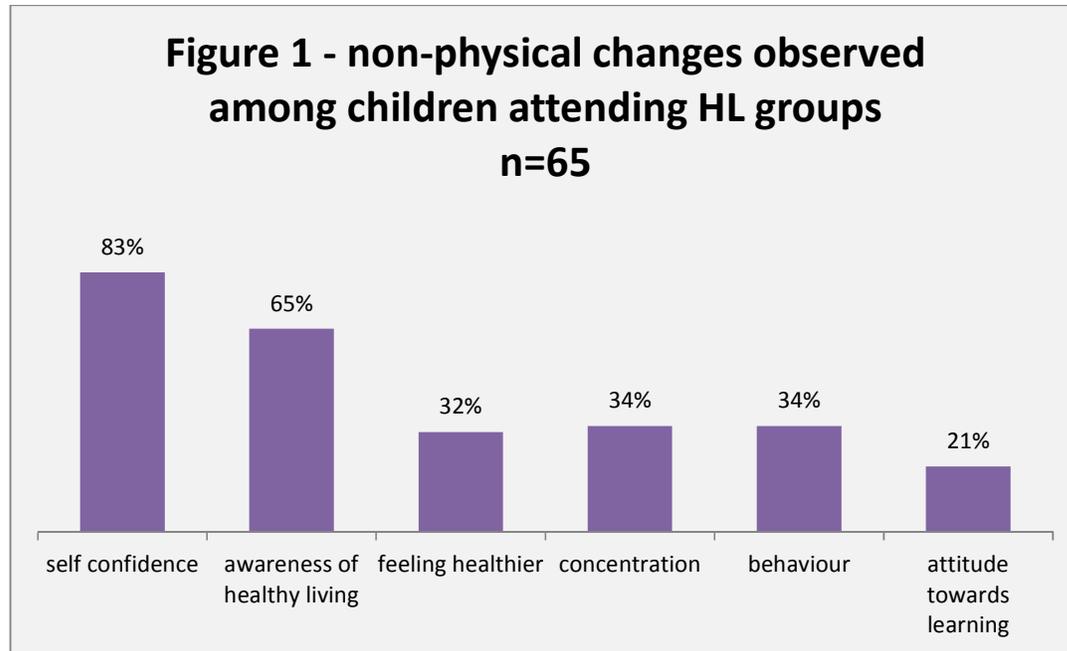
### 2.1 Outcomes and impact

#### ***Coaches' perspective***

Coaches were generally positive in assessing the impact on children participating in the groups. Most coaches (93%) felt that some or most of the children attending had become more active. Coaches commonly highlighted the following activities undertaken by children as evidence of more physical activity:

- Joining other school clubs.
- Increased involvement in PE lessons.
- More children walking to school.
- Family activities at weekends, e.g. swimming, going for a walk or bike ride.

Coaches also reported observing important non-physical changes among children (Figure 1): 83% of coaches reported improvements in self-confidence and 65% increased awareness of how to be healthy.



Coaches reported the following examples of how children showed signs of improved self confidence:

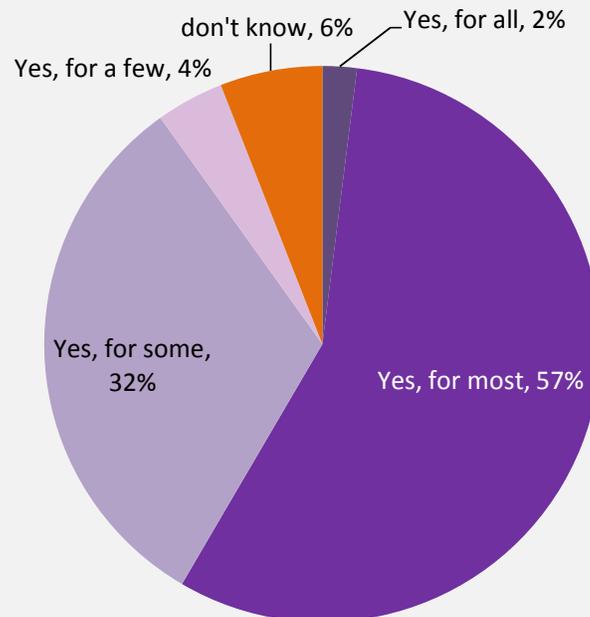
- Less hesitant towards taking part in physical activity.
- Increased confidence in working in a team.
- Confidence to try other sports activities.
- More confident within class and around school.
- Children becoming playground activity leaders.

Coaches reported the following examples of how children showed increased awareness of how to be healthy:

- Increase awareness of what constitutes a balanced diet and putting this into practice.
- Healthier lunchbox contents.
- Healthier eating habits at lunchtime and break times.

Coaches were asked to consider whether those children who had showed signs of increased physical activity were likely to sustain this change beyond involvement in the sessions. Coaches were generally positive that for most of these children the increase in physical activity would be sustained (Figure 2): 91% thought that it would be sustained for some, most or all (20 – 100%) children.

**Figure 2 - Will increased physical activity be sustained beyond HL sessions? n=65**



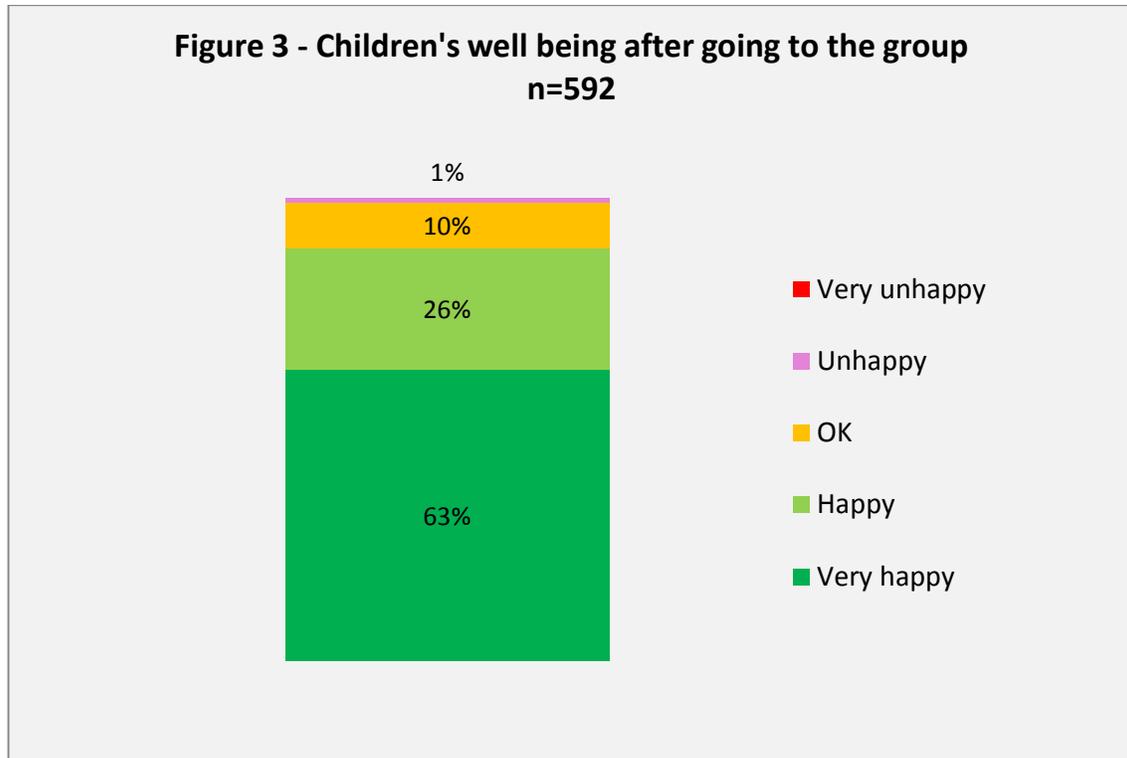
### ***Children's perspective***

Data indicating high levels of well-being after attending a group and improved motivation towards participation suggested that children were feeling more confident about getting involved. The high level of enthusiasm for physical activity generated by the group was likely to have led to increased actual activity for these children.

### ***Well-being and enthusiasm for physical activity and sport***

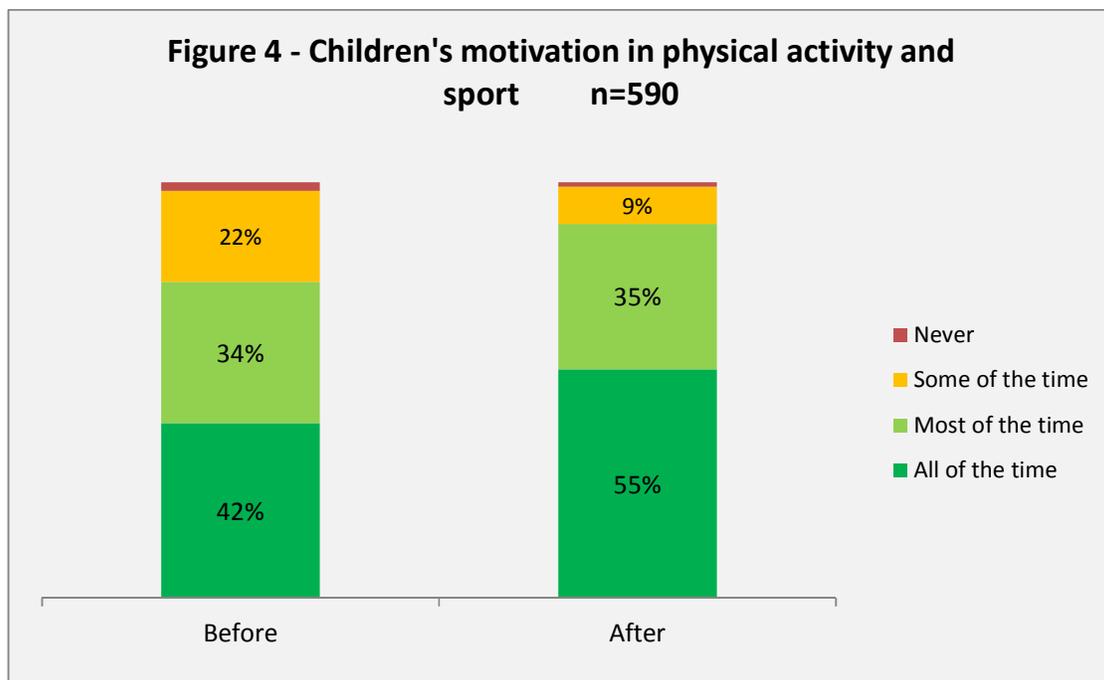
Data gathered from children indicated high levels of well-being after attending an HLC group.

- Nine out of 10 children (89%) reported feeling either 'Very happy' or 'Happy' after going to the group (Figure 3).
- Eight out of 10 children reported that they felt good about themselves generally.



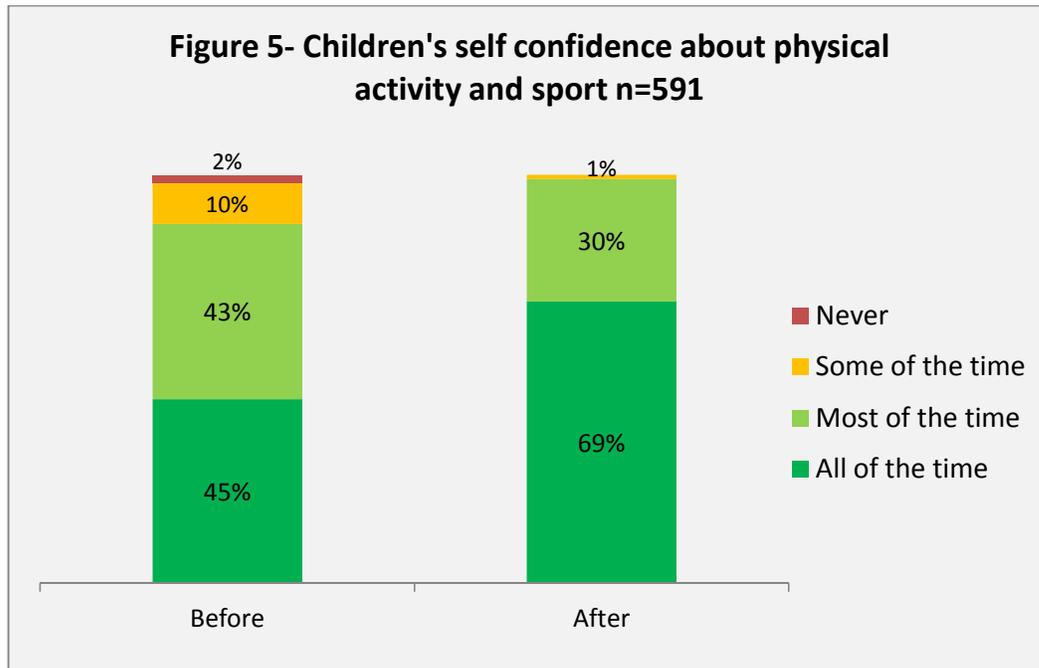
*Improved motivation to participate in physical activity and sport*

- The proportion of children reporting that they 'tried their best in physical activity and sport' after involvement in the group increased from 76% to 90% (Figure 4). Conversely, the proportion of children reporting that they 'tried their best' only 'some of the time' or 'never' decreased from 24% to 10%.



*Improved self-confidence in physical activity and sport*

- The proportion of children reporting that they 'thought they were good at physical activity and sport' after involvement in the group increased from 74% to 81% (Figure 5). Conversely, the proportion of 'non-confident' children that reported they 'thought they were good' only 'some of the time' or 'never' was diminished almost entirely with a reduction from 12% to 1%.



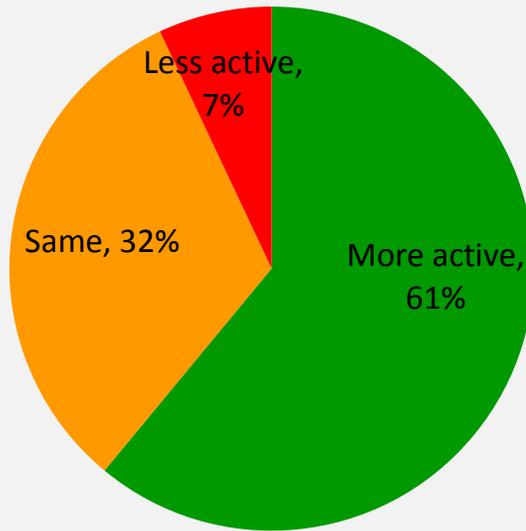
*Increased enjoyment of physical activity and sport*

- The proportion of children reporting that they 'Liked' or 'Loved' physical activity and sport after involved in the group increased from 88% to 99%.

*Increased participation in physical activity and sport*

- More than half of children (61%) reported that they played sport or were active more often than they did before joining the group (Figure 6).

**Figure 6 - Children's activity level playing sport or being active compared to before joining group n=559**



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### 3 Implementation and preparation

#### Chapter 3: Summary

- Coordinators were careful in their selection of schools using data and knowledge of local circumstances to target schools that were likely to have high numbers of less active children.
- Coordinators either recruited coaches themselves or allowed schools to identify a suitable coach among their staff.
- Coaches were often not sports or PE related professionals (56%) with significant numbers of teachers and teaching assistants taking on the role.
- Coaches widely reported that the HLC training could have been longer and more practical in focus.

#### 3.1 Selecting schools

Survey responses suggested that coordinators were careful in their selection of schools making sure that those selected matched targeted populations. In many cases, coordinators used knowledge of public health data to find appropriate evidence that could help inform the choice of schools. A number of coordinators used data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) to identify schools where children had high levels of obesity.

*"The schools were identified using the NCMP data; the data was taken over the last 3 years so we could use the trend data to identify schools."*

*"We worked with our NHS team to identify the schools with the highest NCMP data and also took into account schools which had expressed an interest in this type of programme and had a passionate PE coordinator and Head Teacher..."*

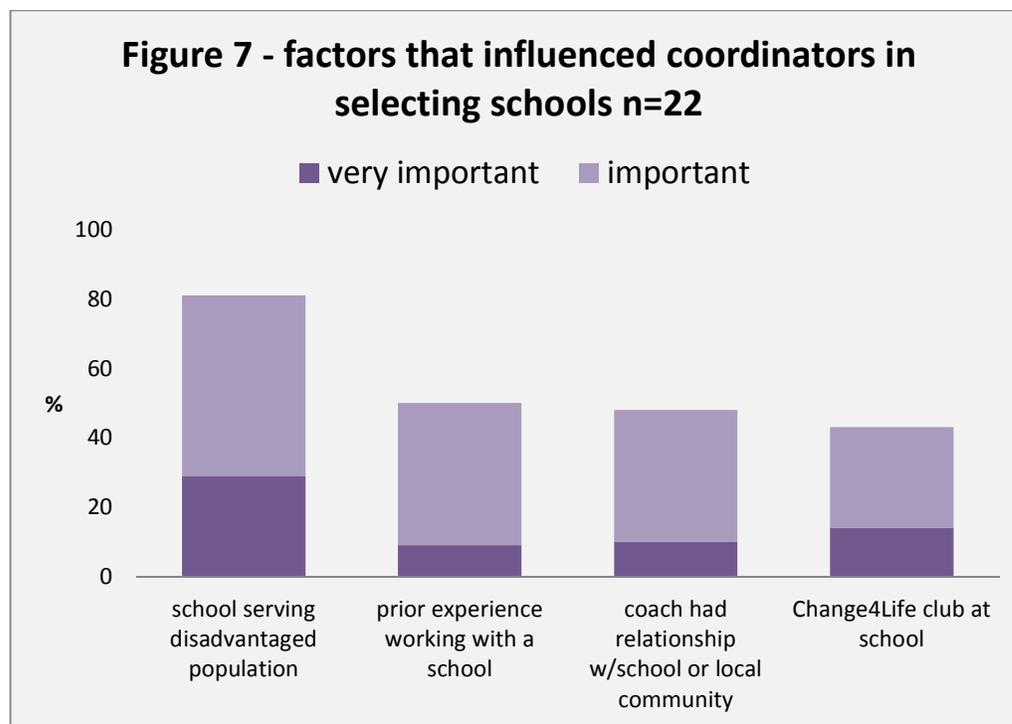
Coordinators

Coordinators also took into account the likelihood that a particular school would engage well with the programme. They were receptive therefore to schools which had previously expressed an interest in this type of programme and where there were PE staff who were keen to be involved. On this note, nearly half (48%) of coordinators said that a relationship with the school or local community were important factors in selecting schools (Figure 1).

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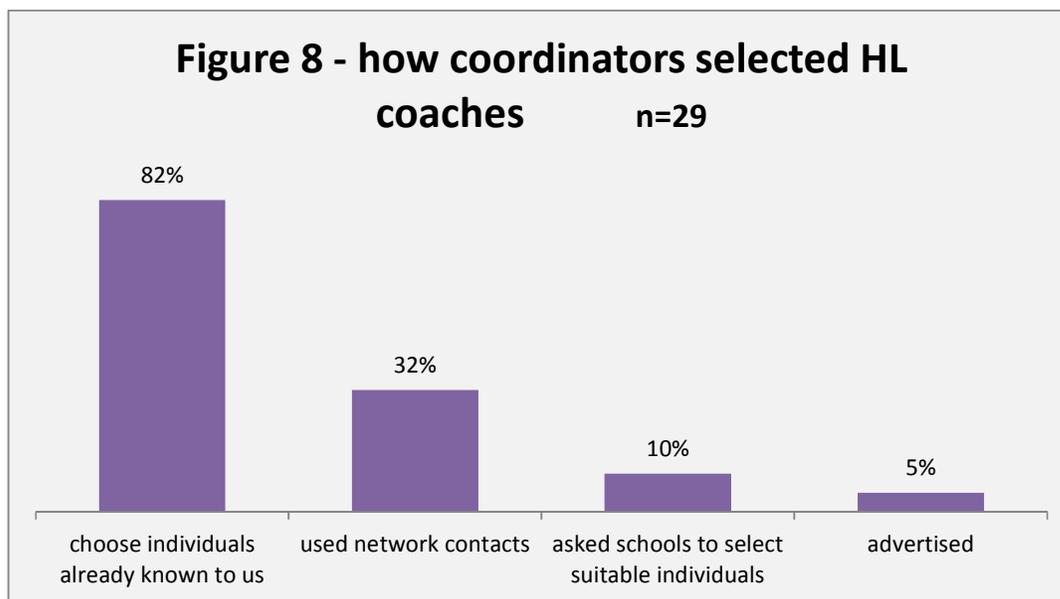
Interestingly, coordinators were not always influenced in their choice of school by whether a Change4Life club was already in operation there. For some coordinators this was an important factor, as one coordinator explained, the two clubs “married perfectly”. But for just under half of coordinators (43%) having a Change4Life club at a school was not an important factor (Figure 7). Further research was needed to investigate this issue, but this may have reflected a preference by coordinators to target new schools rather than those that had already benefitted from physical activity interventions.

Coordinators also took into account possible exit routes for children at individual schools to ensure that children participating in groups had local opportunities to continue involvement in exercise after the duration of the programme.



### 3.2 Recruiting coaches

Coordinators tended to use one of two methods for recruiting coaches to deliver sessions. They recruited via networks, usually sports-related, outside of the selected schools. Alternatively, they first selected suitable schools then asked them to identify suitable individuals from the school to lead the group (Figure 8).

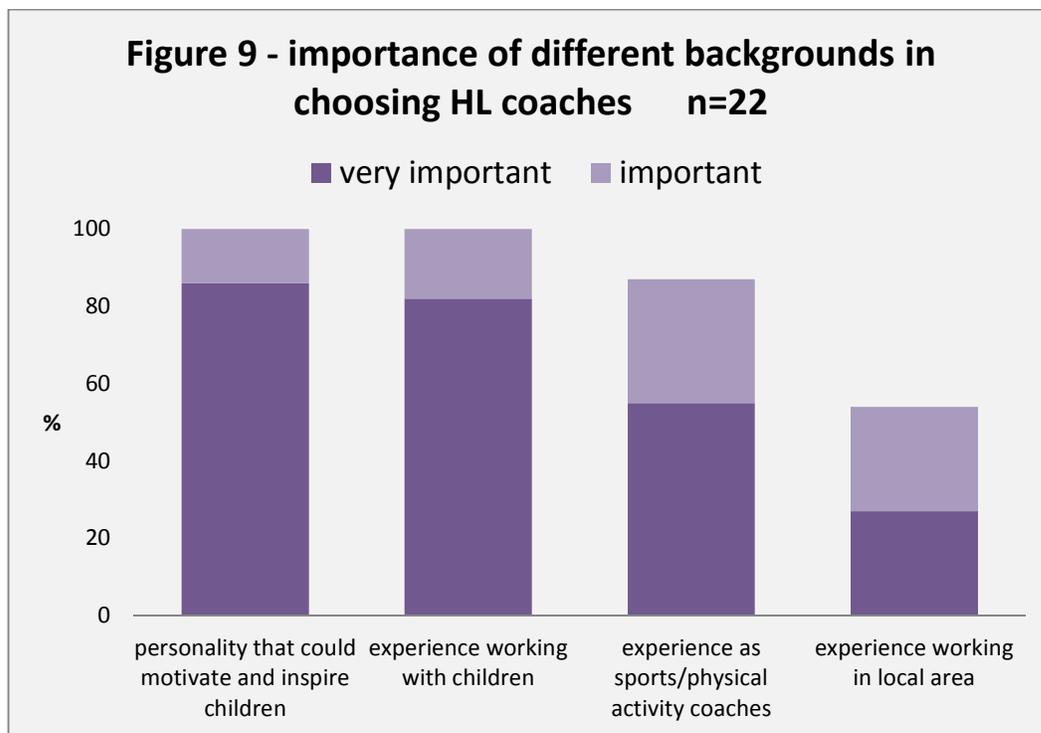


These approaches reflected two different models of organisation for the programme in schools. Some coordinators opted for a school-based model in which schools were given flexibility in recruiting coaches and running sessions with guidance and advice from them. Others preferred a more coordinated approach in which coaches were recruited centrally by the coordinator and assigned to schools. Sometimes opting for one model or another was determined by local circumstances, e.g. in rural areas where travel costs were an issue coordinators usually opted for the school-based model. But in many cases the choice of approach for coordinators was influenced by principle and the preference for either flexibility or a more structured partnership with schools.

*"The coaches are all through the Sport, Play and Arts Service as these are well qualified coaches in this area of work."*

*"We gave flexibility to schools to identify the appropriate person...but with firm guidelines."*

Coordinators



### 3.3 Profile of coaches

Reflecting the split between school-based and central-based approaches to recruitment described above, HL coaches were fairly evenly divided between normally working at the school where they delivered the sessions (47%) and working outside of the school (53%).

Among those who worked at the school a large majority were either employed in a teaching-related role (44%) which included teacher, teaching assistant or learning mentor or in a PE/sports-related role (36%), e.g. school sports coordinator.

Just over half of HL coaches (56%) were not sports-related professionals. This relatively high figure for non-sports related coaches suggested that in many schools the programme had been successful in encouraging different leaders from those who usually led PE and sports clubs at the school. The YST was keen to encourage non-sports related coaches for the clubs in the hope that this would make them more welcoming to less physically active children. Data suggested that this goal seemed to be achieved in many schools.

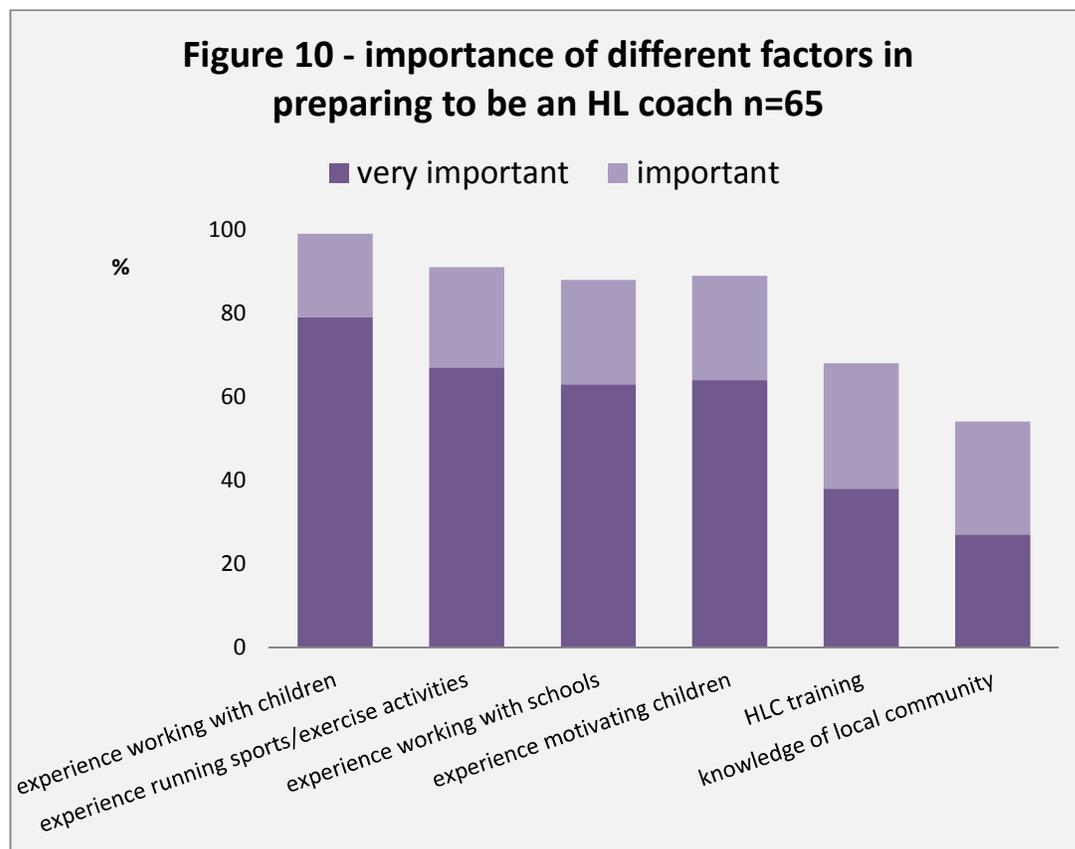
Of those HL coaches who normally worked outside the school nearly all were sports-related professionals. The majority of these were involved in directly delivering sports (65%, e.g. community coach, SGO). A third were involved in strategic sports or health development (35% e.g. local authority sports development, health improvement).

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### 3.4 Preparing for the coaching role and Training

#### *Preparation for role*

Coaches were asked to consider what type of experience and qualities they thought were important in preparing them to be an HL coach (Figure 10). Four factors were almost universally identified as important focussing on working with children and schools, experience delivering sports/exercise activities and an ability to motivate children to be more active. Other factors also identified as important included health and nutrition knowledge and previous experience with other healthy lifestyle projects e.g. Change4Life. Coaches considered the HLC training less important in preparing them to be a HL coach compared to the four factors mentioned above with two thirds (68%) of respondents considering it to be important.



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## Training

The reaction of coaches to the training was mixed. While around two thirds of coaches reported that the training had been effective in key areas (Figure 11) there was persistent dissatisfaction raised. A third of respondents, for example, reported that the training had not been effective in teaching strategies for delivering sessions or strategies for motivating children. Similarly, 28% of respondents reported that the training overall had been either 'poor' or 'satisfactory'.

*"Training was standard, didn't learn much more than I already know."*

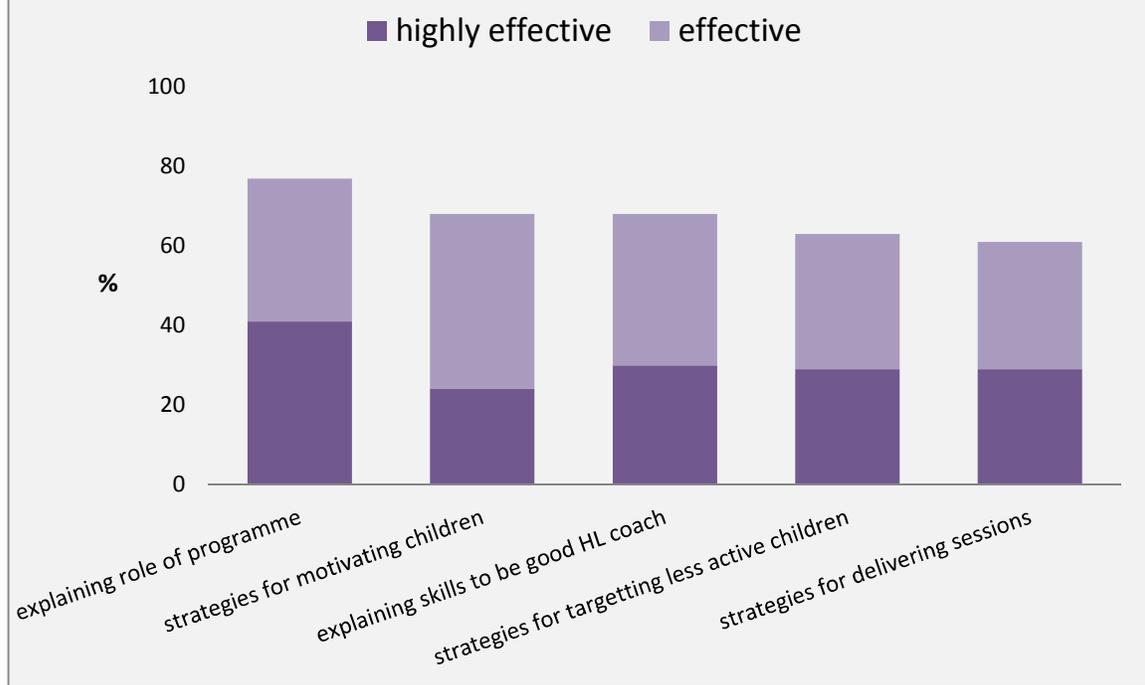
*"I came away feeling motivated and with a better understanding of what was required to deliver the programme."*

Coaches

A number of coaches suggested that the training would have been better if there had been more practical sessions focussed on planning and using resources. Overall, coaches felt that although there had been some strengths, the training could be improved with more attention to strategies for delivering sessions.

There is evidence the training was better received in areas where the national YST training was combined with a local training component. The local component was often more practically focused and applied the learning to the situation in the local area. As one coordinator reported; "We provided training linked to our own local provision in conjunction with the YST training. We enhanced the practical element of the training and also delivered additional nutrition based training."

**Figure 11 - effectiveness of training in achieving key objectives n=65 (coaches)**



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## 4 Targeting less active children

### Chapter 4: Summary

- Schools often used obesity or lack of engagement with PE to identify suitable children. Some schools also considered social disadvantage and disability.
- Risk of stigma meant that schools were often cautious about targeting less active children.
- Innovative methods were effective in targeting those less active.

#### 4.1 Identifying and inviting children to group

Coaches usually felt it was appropriate to allow schools to be involved in choosing children for the HLC sessions. This sometimes meant that coaches left it entirely to schools to decide. Alternatively coaches collaborated with schools on this task. However, in all cases it seems that the programme's objective of targeting less active children was understood. The factor that most determined practice in terms of inviting children was whether a targeted approach or a universal approach was thought to be most appropriate. A number of schools, albeit a minority, thought that the best approach was to make the HL group available to all children. Other schools used a variety of approaches to target less active or obese children.

*"Sometimes the individual that was less active or over their ideal bodyweight didn't want to attend so we asked them to bring a friend onto the programme so they felt more at ease. This worked really well."*

Coach

Targeted approaches involved some kind of analysis of which children were less active. This sometimes took place informally relying on a teachers' knowledge. In other schools this analysis took the form of a review of children who didn't attend afterschool (or outside of school) sports clubs. One school used children physical activity surveys and food diaries to identify suitable children.

A further approach was to observe participation patterns among children in a physical exercise session in school time. For example, some schools held 'taster' sessions in class time with as a way of identifying children less engaged in exercise and inspiring their interest in joining the prospective group. Explaining the approach used, one coach said, "I observed the groups performing their tasks and identified those who were either on the edge of participation or perhaps not at all involved. I then sought to engage those identified

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using ideas from the programme. Having enjoyed the activities the targeted children would often come away from the taster session with a positive attitude and subsequently accept the invitation to join the group.”

Some schools broadened the scope of targeting to include a focus on other criteria in selecting participants. Criteria used by schools included social disadvantage (children eligible for Free School Meals), SEN status, disability and gender (boys or girls only).

Schools typically introduced the HL group to children at school and then followed-up with a letter to parents. Schools would often complement a universal approach with a targeted ‘special’ invitation given to selected children. In one school, for example, a VIP card was given out to those who were identified as likely to most benefit from the group in addition to the standard letter sent out to all parents. This type of targeted ‘boost’ to universal invitations was also done informally by teachers talking to particular children and recommending that they attend.

Qualitative feedback suggested that persuading less active or obese children to attend the group was often challenging. These were children who generally were not used to engage in this type of activity. To overcome this initial resistance, two schools encouraged targeted children to bring a friend. This approach was found to be effective in making these children feel at ease in joining the group.

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## 5 Delivery of sessions

### Chapter 5: Summary

- 55% of HL groups were held after school and 40% during the school day.
- HL sessions showed heavy emphasis towards fun games rather than organised sports.
- Incentives and rewards were effective in encouraging participation.
- Groups that had a peer-led element, e.g. HLC Champions, were often particularly effective in motivating participants.

### 5.1 Design of sessions

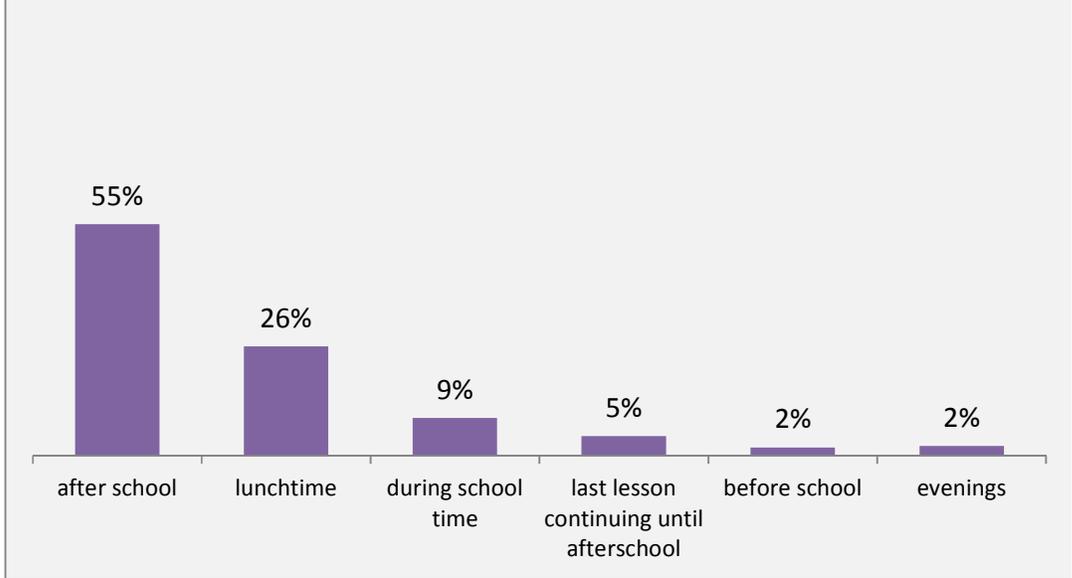
The timing during the day of HL groups was roughly balanced between during the school day and after school: 40% of groups started during the school day and 55% started afterschool (Figure 12). Some groups (5%) traversed this boundary, starting during the last lesson of the day and continuing until after school.

HL sessions held in schools varied between under an hour and more than an hour, with 51% lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour.

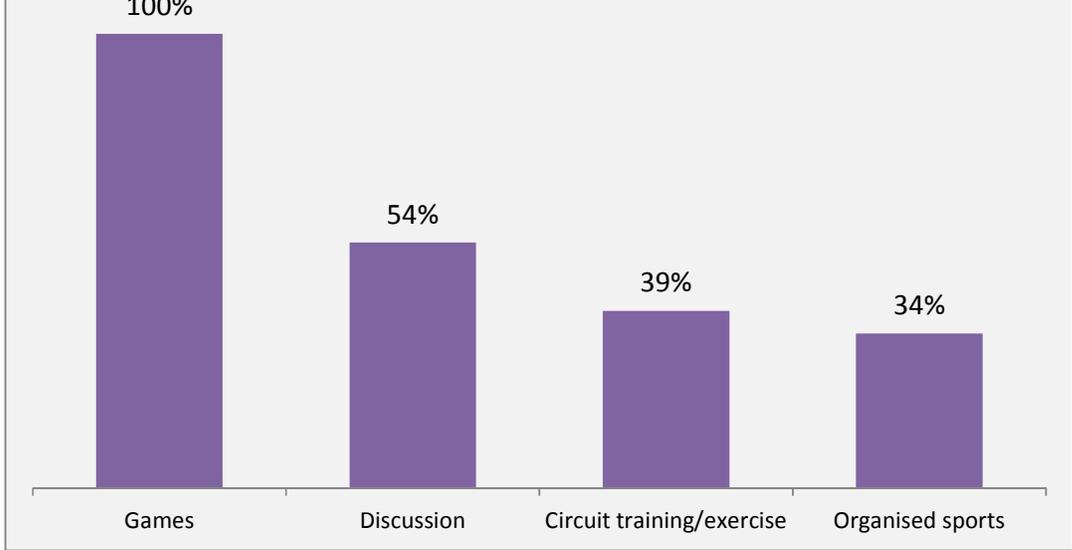
Coaches' information on the type of activities undertaken in sessions suggested a heavy emphasis on games rather than organised sports (Figure 13). All coaches reported that their sessions involved games but only a third (33%) reported they involved organised sports e.g. football, rugby, athletics or cricket.

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**Figure 12 - when were HL sessions held?**  
n=56



**Figure 13 - types of activity included in HL sessions**  
n=65



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## 5.2 Encouraging participation

Qualitative feedback suggested that coaches were creative in designing activities that would be fun and engaging for children not usually disposed to physical activity. Successful strategies included making games short in duration to avoid boredom and including a wide variety of activities to match the different needs and interests of children. Coaches seemed to favour games rather than traditional sports like football or cricket. Games included gymnastics, dance, invasion games, striking and fielding, and 'combat' games.

Coaches focused on the fun element of activities to make the sessions enjoyable. Fun did not necessarily mean competitive and many coaches felt it was important for sessions to be inclusive and not pit one child against another. As one coach explained, "In my lessons there was a one for all approach ensuring every child got a turn/opportunity to lead and participate in games". Another coach described "Playing games which are continual with no 'winners'" and how this encouraged a positive sense of achievement for all participants.

*"We have a fun talk about healthy lifestyle because it's all about enjoyment and not feeling left out of the group and about encouragement and getting them involved."*

Coach

A number of coaches commented that the programme did not provide resources to help coaches design suitable activities for HLC sessions. "The training gave me an understanding of what the programme was about but it didn't provide practical resources for delivering engaging sessions. I had to come up with my own ideas," reported one coach. In many cases coaches used the Change4Life resources to design activities and these were widely considered effective in engaging children.

Nonetheless, widespread feedback on this issue strongly indicated that more practical guidance and support would have been valuable. Resources from the national programme - ideas on activities and how to deliver sessions - would have responded to this need but also peer support would have been valuable. For example, a number of coaches expressed their frustration at hearing about best practice in other areas but not being able to benefit from it because of the lack of any network between coaches.

The proportion of children who started the term in the group and continued attending until the end of the term was fairly high: 80% of groups reported that 80% or more of children had attended for the full term. This retention level and high attendance of sessions indicated that children were enthusiastic about the group and this enthusiasm was sustained over the term.

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### 5.3 HLC Champions

The YST manual for the programme encouraged coaches to use a peer-led element for delivering sessions. For example, it was suggested that coaches could nominate an 'HLC Champion' from within the group or within the school and give that child some responsibilities for running sessions and encouraging participation.

Four out of 10 (41%) of groups used HLC Champions, most of whom (68%) were recruited from within the group. Champions were generally given medium to high responsibilities involving designing activities, running sessions and promoting the group within the school. Feedback from coaches suggested that using a peer Champion helped to motivate children and create a sense of ownership by participants for the group. This was particularly apparent in one group where Champions led sessions and children gave feedback on activities at the end of each session. As the coach commented, "I think the children get a strong sense of belonging from the group being peer-led. They feel that being organised by them and for them makes it different from other groups."

The Champions themselves seemed to have greatly benefitted from the experience. Acting as Champion was an unusual opportunity for these children to develop leadership and organisational skills. Evidence suggested that Champions had improved communication skills and self confidence. One coach commented; "Both my Champions have overcome initial shyness and really blossomed in the role. They plan the session ahead and manage the group well during the session... They both seem more confident generally."

### 5.4 Encouraging physical activity beyond HL sessions

Coaches recognised the need to encourage children to be more active beyond the sessions and did so in a range of ways. Many coaches used set homework tasks to encourage children to continue doing what they had learnt at the sessions at home. Coaches also set challenges for children to do outside of sessions. For example, as one coach described it, "This could be anything from a family walk or bike ride to tracking how much activity they complete over the space of a week in a diary".

Coaches were proactive in signposting children to sports clubs and opportunities in the local area. One coach, for example, invited local clubs to deliver their activity within an HL session and give children a free pass to go to their venue. A number of children did take up the offer, the coach reported, and joined the sports club they were interested in.

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## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

The Youth Sport Trust set itself an ambitious remit in the project plan for Healthy Lifestyle Coaches. The programme proposed to target children who were usually less inclined to be physically active or participate in sport and aimed to encourage them to enjoy physical exercise. This posed a number of obvious challenges. How would the programme engage with children who were not normally attracted to sports-related activities and attempt to change their attitudes and habits? How could a programme get these children to enjoy physical activities, become enthusiastic about exercise, better informed about healthy lifestyles and instil exercise as a habit?

The programme also posed a number of challenges from a process perspective. Implementation depended on coordination between a number of partners. Area coordinators had to be effective in working with schools. They had to facilitate a partnership between schools and coaches to ensure the programme reached the right children and delivered sessions that met its objectives. Also, the programme relied on a cascading model of delivery from the YST at the centre, via coordinators in local areas and coaches delivering sessions in schools. This was a programme that despite its clearly defined aims and objectives could have easily strayed from its plan in the process of implementation.

Despite these challenges evidence gathered from the evaluation suggested that the programme has achieved some notable successes.

Coordinators and coaches showed strong commitment to the aims and objectives of the programme and delivered high quality sessions to children. Coordinators worked effectively to recruit schools and coaches and ensured these partners were committed to the programme and suitably equipped to deliver it. Coaches took responsibility to fulfil the remit of the programme, targeting effectively less active children, including attention to healthy lifestyles in sessions, and delivering activities tailored to the target group.

Evidence suggested that these outputs had success in achieving desired outcomes. Participation in an HLC group led to an improvement in attitudes regarding physical activity and sport. For example, children's motivation to participate in physical activity and sport ('trying their best') increased by 14% and their belief that they were 'good' at these activities increased by 7%. Although modest increases these figures should be considered alongside the fact that these were children who had often had a negative attitude toward physical activity prior to involvement. Illustrating this point, nearly eight out of 10 (79%) children who said they had hated physical activity and sport before joining the group said they either liked or loved it.

Alongside this improved motivation and confidence about physical activity were high levels of well being. A number of sources of evidence indicated that children participating in HLC groups generally felt good about themselves and felt particularly good after attending a

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session. Eight out of 10 children reported 'I feel good about myself' (82%) and nearly nine out of 10 reported feeling either 'Very happy' or 'Happy' after going to the group (89%, Figure 3).

Indications were that the strong sense of enjoyment and higher levels of confidence about physical activity engendered by participation in the HLC group was likely to have a knock-on effect on participation levels beyond the sessions. Six out of 10 children (61%) reported that they played sport or were active *more often* than before joining the group (Figure 6). This figure suggested that children had taken the positive experience of the HLC group and been motivated by that enthusiasm to try on new physical activities. Longitudinal data was not available to determine whether new levels of activity for children had been sustained but this outcome seems a possibility given the high levels of confidence many of the children held regarding their ability.

## 6.2 Key points of learning

### ***Support and guidance***

The YST was generally considered effective by local partners in communicating its overall plan for the programme. Coordinators and coaches felt they understood well the programme's focus on less active children and the importance of including healthy lifestyle messaging in sessions. Local partners understood this remit and worked diligently to reflect these priorities in their HLC groups. Coordinators and coaches felt less well supported, however, in terms of practical resources and guidance to deliver this content in sessions. Many coaches felt the training was insufficiently practical in its focus and failed to prepare them to deliver stimulating sessions. Coaches also commented on the absence of dedicated resources to support the design of sessions. They felt they were left on their own to develop ideas from scratch or use resources available from other programmes, e.g. Change4Life.

Coordinators and coaches also commented on the absence of any means of sharing best practice. Some noted that they had sometimes heard about innovative ideas and practice in other areas but had no means of accessing this information. Rather than developing ideas in isolation, they said, it would be preferable to have some kind of forum, either online (e.g. a portal or hub) or in the form of a newsletter where ideas and tips could be readily disseminated and accessed.

### ***Strategies for targeting and recruiting less active children***

Schools were acutely aware that targeting less active children had to be done sensitively if it were to be successful. Recognising the importance of avoiding any stigma schools used a variety of innovative approaches to attract the interest of targeted children and encourage them to sign up to the group. For example, some schools used 'taster' sessions during school time to introduce the concept of the club and highlight its focus on fun games and participation. This technique seemed to be effective in widening the appeal of the group beyond typically 'sporty' children. Schools then used personalised techniques to target specific children who teachers felt would most benefit. For example, in addition to a

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general invitation letter sent to all children, targeted children would receive a personal approach from a teacher or a 'VIP' invitation. This combination of universal and targeted techniques seemed to work in encouraging less active children to sign up while avoiding arousing any negative stigma.

### ***Content for HLC sessions***

Coaches widely acknowledged that sessions needed to be carefully designed to ensure that targeted children would find them enjoyable. A strong consensus was apparent that inclusive games were most effective in engaging less active children. Activities had to be accessible to all children and should be focussed on having fun and achievement rather than ending with winners and losers. Many coaches felt strongly that competitive sports were counterproductive in this environment and were not appropriate for this kind of group.

Coaches took seriously the commitment to deliver healthy lifestyle messages within HLC sessions and often used innovative and creative approaches in doing so. The focus on healthy lifestyles through discussion of diets and exercise habits was a valuable component of the programme. Evidence suggested the attention to diets and physiology dovetailed well with exercise activities and resonated well with the children.

### ***Encouraging physical activities beyond sessions***

Coaches and coordinators expressed cautious optimism that increased physical activity for children would be sustained beyond the HLC group. However, many also acknowledged the barriers to changing habits in the long term. Lifestyle choices adopted by children at the primary school age would be heavily influenced by parents. If parents were resistant to change, whether in terms of family eating habits or a willingness to take their children to the park to play, much of the potential generated by HLC could be wasted. On this basis some coordinators said that a more whole-family approach, where children and parents were involved, would be more likely to generate sustainable positive habits.

### ***Sustainability of HLC groups***

Coordinators and coaches had mixed opinions on the likelihood that HLC groups would continue at schools without central funding. Some felt that the success of the group at a particular school had convinced the head that it served disadvantaged children and was worthy of support. Others felt that funding was unlikely to be found and the group would disappear without the YST support.

The following recommendations were made on the basis of evidence gathered from the evaluation:

- **Improvement of resources and guidance**

The programme should build on the best practice that has emerged from HLC groups and share learning as widely as possible. There are a variety of successful approaches to common tasks such as identifying and recruiting less active children, designing activity sessions, healthy lifestyle messaging, etc, which coaches and coordinators could benefit from. In the absence of dedicated HLC resources, the programme should offer signposting to resources from other similar programmes, e.g. Change4Life.

Coordinators and coaches are keen to learn from each other's experience working with HLC. It would be good to provide a forum that allows coaches and coordinators to share ideas and develop best practice, e.g. an online hub or newsletter.

- **Continued inclusive approach to profile of coaches**

The programme was designed to encourage non sports-related school staff, e.g. teachers and teaching assistants, to become HLC coaches. This occurred in practice and HLC coaches with this background proved effective in delivering physical activity sessions. There is some evidence, however, that these coaches were less effective in delivering healthy lifestyle messages.

- **Continued focus on healthy lifestyle component of programme**

The focus on healthy lifestyles through discussion of diets and exercise habits was a valuable component of the programme. Evidence suggested the attention to diets and physiology dovetailed well with exercise activities and resonated well with the children. This aspect of the programme should be retained as a key component.

- **Encouragement of use of Champions by coaches**

Evidence suggests that the use of peer Champions within HLC groups strengthened group dynamics and is likely to have led to improved outcomes for children.

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Champions should be defined in guidance as a standard feature of HLC groups and presented as best practice.

- **Encouragement of signposting to opportunities outside of school**

Coaches widely recognised the need to provide exit options for children who were interested in furthering their involvement in exercise and sports beyond school. Coaches should be encouraged to identify proactively options available in the area (including non-sports related such as dance and outdoor activities) and advertise them to group participants.

- **Encouragement promoting activities beyond sessions**

Coaches widely recognised the need to encourage physical activity beyond sessions and some used innovative approaches to make it happen. The YST should compile best practice in this area – homework tasks, pedometers, activity diaries, etc – and include in guidance for coaches.

All names in the following case studies have been anonymised to protect confidentiality.

- **Jamaal, boy aged 8**

Jamaal was in year 3 and enjoyed school but preferred playing computer games to being active and playing sports. He usually did not join in the football games in the playground at play time and found PE boring. When he got the letter inviting him to join the HLC afterschool club he was excited about the idea of playing games.

Jamaal liked how the club was quite different. It was about fun games rather than big team sports. He also liked how the atmosphere was very supportive. The coach would always be encouraging and friendly and Jamaal felt motivated to try new things. He had also learnt about the sugar in junk food and was encouraging his mum to not give him a chocolate bar in his lunch box.

Overall, Jamaal was very happy at the club and would recommend it to other children. "I love the games and it's great to run around!" he says. He now enjoys physical activity a lot more than before and enjoys riding his bike with his dad at the weekend. He feels more confident about joining in sports and has recently joined a basketball afterschool club.

- **David, boy aged 9**

David was in year 6 and had been going to the club since the autumn. He really enjoyed the club and particularly loved playing the running games.

David also enjoyed PE but thought the club was more fun. The teacher made everyone laugh and taught them some interesting stuff about healthy things to eat. I have made some friends in the group and we sometimes play together at break time.

David liked how the club was quite different. It was about fun games rather than big team sports. He also liked how the atmosphere was very supportive. The coach was always encouraging and friendly and David felt motivated to try new things. He had also learnt about the sugar in junk food and fizzy drinks.

Overall, David was very happy at the club and would recommend it to other children. "I love the running games and it's great to run around!" he says. He now enjoys physical activity more and plays football in the park with his dad at the weekend.

- **Rebecca, girl aged 8**

Before attending the group Rebecca participated in extra-curricular activities which included ballet running and brownies. P.E wasn't really her favourite subject but she enjoyed it. The reason she joined the group was because she thought it sounded interesting and liked the name. She was a little apprehensive about the group, "I was a bit nervous

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about joining the group, in case I had to do something I didn't really want to do". When she found out what teacher was running the group, it made her less nervous, and more excited. She didn't mind going "because she is lovely". "I would have been much more nervous if it was someone from out of the school doing it," she said.

"I enjoy everything about the Wake up and shake up group." "In particular," she added "I enjoy skipping and baking". When asked if she thought the other children enjoyed the sessions, she said she thinks everyone enjoys it as "everyone smiles when they come out".

Since joining the group Rebecca said "I practice more at home the activities we do at the wake up and shake up club as well as my ballet, running and brownies." "I really enjoy the group because we always do something different."

When asked what she would say to another child about the group she said that she would tell them that it is exciting and that you are not forced to do anything that you don't want to, you can sit out of an activity if you want to, it is FUN!"

Overall, Rebecca was very happy at the club and would recommend it to other children. "I love the games and it's great to run around!" he says. He now enjoys physical activity a lot more than before and enjoys riding his bike with his dad at the weekend. He feels more confident about joining in sports and has recently joined a basketball afterschool club.

- **Susan, girl aged 9**

Susan was in year 6 and had been going to the club since before Xmas. She enjoyed the club and particularly loved playing the story games.

Susan usually found PE a bit boring. The club was more fun – "you are always moving!" The teacher was always very friendly and taught them some interesting things about food and the body.

Susan liked how the club was quite different. Half the time was spent doing games and the rest having breakfast and talking about good eating. It was good to do things as well as learn things. The coach was always encouraging and friendly and Susan was encouraged to try new things.

Overall, Susan was very happy at the club and would recommend it to other children. "I love playing dodgeball. It's a great running game!" She says. She now enjoys physical activity a bit more and plays in the park with her dad at the weekend.

- **Rachel, girl aged 9**

Rachel was in year 5 and enjoyed school and did gymnastics and sailing outside of school.

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Rachel liked how the club was different. Susan the teacher is really fun compared to teachers. Susan asks us what we'd like to do. She'll give use a couple of options and we'll vote.

Rachel's favourite activities in the group were dodgeball, which was really fun. She also enjoyed doing Judo, football, rounders and skip for life.

She liked how the atmosphere was very supportive. The coach would always be encouraging and friendly. PE is a bit more strict in comparison.

Overall, Rachel was very happy at the club and would recommend it to other children. "I love the games and it's great to run around!" he says. She continues to enjoy physical activity in her spare time and wanted to start Judo but Mum said she couldn't do everything.

Rachel's advice to other children thinking about joining the club was to definitely join. "Always listen because it's more fun and don't mess around."

- **Brian – coordinator**

Brian was working for the local authority sports development service and had extensive experience in that role working with schools. He was enthusiastic about the programme because he thought it offered an opportunity for schools to develop sustainable clubs that could target less active children and get them more motivated about sport. He believed that schools generally found it difficult to generate enthusiasm about exercise and sport but it was crucial that children develop these habits prior to going to secondary school. This was a programme that could play an important role if delivered in the right way, he believed.

The major challenge for Brian in setting up the programme in his area was recruiting coaches. Schools that wanted to have clubs were often only able to run sessions on certain days at certain times. Brian therefore had the challenge of finding coaches who had the right skills and personality to engage with children and who could deliver sessions in the time frame required by schools.

Brian was sensitive to the need for sessions to include healthy lifestyle messages as well as involve physical activity. Coaches therefore had to be trained and experienced in teaching about healthy diets and the importance of good health to bodily functioning. Brian felt that it was unlikely that school staff would have these skills so opted for external coaches to lead HLC clubs.

Brian felt strongly that HLC clubs were very different from sports clubs and required a different approach from coaches to engage the children. The focus should be on getting the children to enjoy physical activity through fun games not sport. He encouraged coaches to use Change4Life resources for ideas on activities for the sessions. It was unfortunate, he

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said, that the HLC programme did not offer its own practical resources to help deliver sessions. It would have been useful for teaching resources to be available. It also would have been valuable, he suggested, to encourage collaboration between coaches and the sharing of ideas.

Brian was encouraged by the impact of the programme. HLC clubs seemed to be popular among children and generate enthusiasm about being active and living healthy lives. He had particularly noticed an improvement in self-confidence for many children: children who had previously felt unengaged with sport now felt more confident about their abilities and were therefore more willing to get involved. If children left the clubs motivated about exercise and sport, the development of this impulse, nonetheless, depended on the home environment and involvement by parents.

- **Mike – coordinator**

Mike was a PE teacher who was working for the local authority sports development service and had extensive experience working with schools. He responded positively to the programme because he thought it offered an opportunity for schools to target less active children and get them more motivated about sport. He believed that schools sometimes found it difficult to generate enthusiasm about exercise and sport among some children and this was a programme that could play an important role if delivered in the right way.

Mike selected 12 schools based on health statistics regarding deprivation and rates of obesity. Many of these schools were also involved in other programmes that Mike coordinated such as Sports Leadership UK.

Mike found recruitment of coaches a major challenge in setting up the programme in his area. He decided to use both external coaches and recruit staff from schools who were interested in taking on the role. External coaches were often young people who changed jobs or moved out of the area. Mike found that a number of this type of coach were trained and then subsequently left. School staff who took on the role were usually teaching assistants who had previous experience of running sports activities at the school.

Mike felt that the scheduling of HLC sessions had an important impact on who attended. Sessions delivered within curriculum time would have more chance of impacting less active children because it was difficult to recruit these children to afterschool clubs.

Mike worked with coaches to come up with creative ideas on how suitable sessions for the clubs. He felt that the resources available were limited and it would have been useful to have some kind of hub to share ideas across areas.

Mike was convinced that a fun games approach worked best for HLC clubs at the primary level. Children enjoyed short bursts of activities where everyone could recognise their achievement. Competitive sports did not work as these less active children were already turned-off these types of activities and thought they were not good at them.

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He felt it was important that HLC coaches could signpost children to opportunities in their area once they had become more engaged. Mike encouraged coaches to advertise suitable options according to the interests of children in the group.

Mike was encouraged by the impact of the programme. HLC clubs seemed to be popular among children and generate enthusiasm about being active. His coaches had reported an improvement in self-confidence for many children: children who had previously felt unengaged with sport now felt more confident about their abilities and more confident about getting involved.

- **Sally – coordinator**

Sally was an experienced PE teacher in the area who had previous experience working with the Schools Sports partnership and on a number of sports-related projects. She had worked with schools across the local authority and had a network of part time coaches she could draw on for the project.

Sally recruited schools that she knew served a disadvantaged population and she thought would properly engage with the programme. She thought it was more practical to recruit coaches herself and assign them to schools than leave this to schools. In her opinion, coaches recruited from among school staff would not have the skills to deliver the healthy lifestyle messages.

Sally selected coaches who were familiar with the school hosting the HLC group. She thought this was important to getting a good working relationship with the school and getting a good relationship between the coach and the children.

Sally worked with schools to help them identify appropriate children for the group. For her it was important to stress that the definition of 'inactive' was not just overweight; it also included children disengaged from sports. This could include girls who at primary age were sometimes becoming less engaged and children who were disengaged because of shyness.

After an initial conversation schools were left to decide how they would select children. In her experience the schools were generally effective in selecting the less active. In her urban area, the inactive children often included Muslim girls who often followed the example of their mothers and became very inactive.

Sally considered the healthy lifestyle aspect of the programme important and worked with coaches to develop ideas on how to deliver this. In her experience, food diaries had been particularly effective in encouraging children to think about what they ate and how healthy it was.

Sally was positive about the impact of the programme but felt that it was always a challenge to counter the influence of family habits. She was keen to expand this type of programme to include parents in activities. A more whole-family approach, she argued, would have more chance of leading to sustainable change.

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- **Jason - HLC coach**

Jason was already working in the school as a teaching assistant when the head teacher approached him about leading an HLC after school group. At the time Jason had recently become interested in losing weight and had started to do some regular exercise. He thought starting a group would be an opportunity for him to broaden his teaching experience while doing something fun and worthwhile. He decided to take on the challenge, setting up two after school groups and leading one himself.

Jason attended the training before starting the groups. As he had not previously taught sports or physical exercise he didn't feel knowledgeable how he should engage children and the type of activities suitable for the group. The training helped him think about how the group could be tailored to less active children and gave him ideas about suitable activities and communicating healthy lifestyle messages.

Jason already had close relations with teachers in the school and worked closely with them to invite children to join the group. Three criteria were used to identify children who could be invited to join the clubs; obesity, a lack of interest in PE, and behavioural problems. Children might have one or more of these characteristics to be invited.

Teachers sent out invitation letters to the selected children taking care not to communicate any negative messages. Invitations emphasised that the club was about enjoying exercise and having fun and was free. It was deliberately presented as something different to a standard sports-related club. The invitations attracted a good response and 16 children signed up for each club.

Jason adopted a very supportive approach to children in the groups. He realised that many of the children were not keen on organised sports but liked the idea of playing games informally. Jason used this principle to organise activities that would engage the children and sustain their interest. Above all, Jason thought, the activities should be fun and focussed on the children having a go and trying their best. In this spirit, Jason's sessions involved a variety of short games. The games involved physical tasks involving coordination and agility and fun games such as dodge ball. There was an element of competition to these games but the emphasis was on the fun of doing them not winning and losing. The games were also short, lasting about five minutes only, which meant that the children's interest was sustained throughout.

Jason had enjoyed leading the clubs and felt that the children had definitely enjoyed sessions. He had spoken to one parent who had told him it was the best afterschool club her daughter had ever done. Jason was convinced that the children had developed more positive attitudes about being physically active and were trying more activities outside of the group.

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- **Linda - HLC coach**

Linda was a teacher assistant at the school and had been approached by the head to run the HLC club. One of her key responsibilities at the school were PE and sports so she was a natural candidate to run the club. She was keen to take it on and understood that it had a different focus to afterschool sports clubs. She liked that it was specifically aimed at less active children and was focussed on healthy lifestyles as much as physical activity. Combining these two dimensions made sense to her as she felt that being healthy required both but the nutritional side of things was often neglected.

Linda was keen to use peer-leadership as much as possible in the group. She felt that this would give 'ownership' of the group to the children and be a great opportunity for the leaders to develop self-confidence and communication skills. Linda opened the group to children in Years 3 and 5 and recruited two leaders from the Young Ambassadors programme to lead the group.

Linda was careful in her selection of the leader children. They needed to be commanding without being bossy. They were given training to deliver sessions and Linda had regular supervision meetings to ensure they had planned appropriate materials for sessions. Linda had encouraged them to use the Change4Life resources for ideas and these seemed to work well with the children.

Linda thought that peer leaders added a valuable dimension to the HLC group. She believed it created a stronger sense of belonging for the children; they felt that it was truly their own group. At the end of each session all the children participants played a moving game where they gave a score that indicated how good the session had been.

The HLC group was held in the morning before school and included breakfast. After 30 minutes of exercise, the children went to a classroom to eat. After breakfast, Linda would lead a 30 minute activity with the children about diet and nutrition. At one session the group compared the amount of sugar in different drinks by measuring the difference in spoonfuls.

Linda felt sure that the children enjoyed the sessions and were beginning to use the enthusiasm to be more active outside of school. Some of the children in the group had shown more confidence in PE classes and in their willingness to be involved in games in the playground.

- **Jenny - HLC coach**

Jenny was recruited by her old manager, Sarah who is a Healthy Schools Co-ordinator. Jenny is otherwise a full time mother, taking time off work to bring up her children. She is a qualified secondary PE teacher and asked her old manager Sarah if she had any part time work so she could "keep her hand in". Sarah recruited her to be a coach at 2 schools in

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Leicester, one being Spinney Hill. She had no previous experience of working at Spinney Hill.

Jenny found the training good in all aspects and was enthusiastic about it. The only problem she had with it was that it was a long way for her to get to. Being a training course for all Leicester coaches, it was on the other side of Leicester and difficult for her to travel to which made things difficult in terms of childcare for her own children.

The school was informed about the HLC programme and they recruited the children before she started. There was another sports/activity initiative at the school called "Energy Club" and the school combined it with HLC. She felt the school had targeted the right children for the group according to the guidance. She described the school as being one that valued PE in the school culture and encouraged children to "have a go at things", and told me that it has 3 playgrounds and 2 halls that they use for PE. Jenny thinks these children are the most appropriate age for the resources provided (booklet, types of activities), the children are year 3 and 4 (age 7/8, 8/9). Jenny felt this age children were ideally suited for the programme because they had solid skills in reading (for the booklet) and writing, and were able to concentrate, listen and respond appropriately to the tasks set with enthusiasm. She found the group size good (10 – 14 children every week).

The club has been running since September. Jenny uses the Change4Life resource cards to decide what activities she will lead with the children. She said she looks at what resources the school has, what resources she has provided and asks the children what they like doing before she decides on the activity. She told me she uses the word "active" rather than "sporty" with the group and emphasises enjoyment of activity, rather than competition. Jenny described how one week they did skipping, individually and as a group and how the children had never experienced group skipping with one large rope before doing the group. She said that they enjoy doing activities in pairs as well as group activities, and she felt that not many of the children in the group do much activity outside school, although she had heard from the children about the "walk to school" initiative.

She considered that the inclusive activities were good and she mentioned blindfolds for goal ball, using tag belts and playing seated volleyball. In particular, she said "bench ball invasion" worked really well, and that games using equipment had been popular, especially the big brightly coloured ball that was provided. She had also noticed that the children had started coming up with their own ideas for activities and she responded with encouragement.

Jenny thinks that it is very hard to assess the impact of the sessions outside of them, but that the activities are very successful during the sessions and she quoted a child saying to her "Oh Mrs. Booth, I'm sweating!" and laughing together with her in mutual enjoyment. She also told me about one child telling her "my mum wanted to give me cake (as a snack to bring to have before the group after school) – I said "mum, can I have a carrot?"". Jenny felt that the girls seemed to take the healthy lifestyle message on board more than the lads

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and that she thought the lads forgot about the group and what they were supposed to be learning about healthy living between sessions. She also said the girls had tended to use the booklets and fill them in more than the boys.