

# Sport, Culture and Wellbeing

## *A Wellbeing Public Dialogue*



**Anita van Mil and Henrietta Hopkins**

Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd

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**What Works  
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# Executive summary

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## The public dialogue

This report is one of a series of four reports resultant from a public wellbeing dialogue commissioned by the [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) (the Centre) from [Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd](#) (HVM) supported by Sciencewise, Public Health England, the Cabinet Office and the founding stakeholders of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing. This document reports on the findings of the sport, culture and wellbeing strand. The other two strands focused on community wellbeing and work, learning and wellbeing. In addition HVM has written a fourth report in which the emerging cross-cutting themes from the three dialogue strands are drawn out. Each dialogue followed a similar pattern of a 2 round process with round 2 held four weeks after round 1 to allow time for reflection by participants and stakeholders. This report can be read independently or in conjunction with the other 3 reports. Each of the wellbeing dialogue reports are supported by a separate Technical Appendix in which all the materials, resources and presentations used for each dialogue are set out. These are key tools for those who wish to understand how the dialogue was planned and executed.

The aims of the wellbeing public dialogue were to:

- Increase the effectiveness of the Centre by ensuring its design and policy priorities are informed by members of the public.
- Ensure that the knowledge mobilisation strategy for the Centre is informed by how public decision-makers want to receive and use evidence.
- Significantly increase the likelihood of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's success in using effective evidence formats and channels that will be used by the public and thus increasing the percentage of people accessing the Centre's advice and guidance.

## The sport, culture and wellbeing dialogue strand

The sport, culture and wellbeing dialogue strand aimed to answer the question:

*How can cultural activities and sport contribute to mental and physical wellbeing? Can they be used as a way of increasing wellbeing generally as well as for those with physical and mental health challenges?*

Participants were recruited using a detailed specification to ensure that they were in line with a broad demographic and had a range of interest and experience in sport and culture. 18 participants were recruited in South Tyneside and surrounding rural areas, all of whom were retained for both sessions. 20 people were recruited from Greater London for sessions in Lambeth, 15 of whom were retained for both rounds. An expert team of facilitators guided participants in each location, using a range of reflective dialogic methodologies (see Technical Appendix pp. 11-25 and pp. 31-45) to draw out rich findings.

The following main points were made during the dialogue:

## How people define sport, culture and wellbeing in the context of their own lives

Participants were asked to consider sport and culture as broadly as possible. It was established early on in the dialogue that for participants, physical activity included everything that required exertion: from traditional team sports, to walking, household chores and dancing to live music. Culture, in their view, should be considered as a way of life rather than an exclusively artistic and creative endeavour. In considering how sport and culture could help people to live their lives well participants reflected that having time for themselves, being able to connect with others and develop skills were all significant. In discussing the wellbeing barriers they faced participants in London particularly focused on having insufficient time in busy lives. In both locations a lack of money was perceived as a significant barrier to

improving wellbeing through sport and culture. Cultural and social difference was raised by many as an issue which was of benefit to community wellbeing but had the potential to affect individual wellbeing adversely if they perceived themselves to be on the outside of a group, or not 'good enough' in some way to join in with others enjoying cultural or sporting activities.

### Promoting wellbeing as a way of improving quality of life

When asked to consider to what extent physical and cultural activities should be promoted as a way of improving people's lives the majority of participants responded positively. For some wellbeing should be considered the main element of the message whether this means using the word wellbeing or not. A minority are concerned that it is patronising or too controlling to tell people how they might live their lives well. Terminology is important to participants. They felt that phrases such as *feeling better and happier* resonate more with people than the term *wellbeing*. For participants important concepts to communicate in any messaging around sport, culture and wellbeing are *fun, enjoyment, friendship and belonging*.

### Participating and spectating

Participants in round 1 of the dialogue discussed the relative experience of participating in or watching physical or cultural activities or events. The discussion revealed that for a minority participation has a greater positive impact on wellbeing than being involved as a spectator. However, this is not a view shared by everyone. Rather more participants felt that both activities are equally valid in terms of wellbeing with some saying that dividing a consideration between spectating and participating was not helpful to them when thinking about their wellbeing. Participants discussed powerful experiences when both participating and watching. They talked about gaining skills, being inspired and arriving in a state of flow by being totally absorbed in activities which took on a special significance for them, providing experiences they would cherish and remember for a long time to come.

### The impact of a lifetime of experiences on wellbeing

In round 2, case studies on sport, culture and wellbeing specific to the dialogue locations were used as a launch pad for participants to consider their own life time of physical and cultural experiences and the impact these have had on their lives over time. Experiences in childhood came to the fore in both locations as an incentive or disincentive for their ongoing desire to participate or watch sporting or cultural activities. It was clear that a fear in childhood can have a long-lasting negative impact on people's motivations going forward. Swimming was particularly highlighted in both locations as an activity that has created in many long-lasting negative emotions. People spoke of many of the barriers to enjoying sport and culture they had encountered over time and how, in some cases, these had been overcome.

### Who can do what to ensure people can take advantage of the wellbeing benefits of sport and culture?

There was recognition amongst participants that many wellbeing benefits derive from participants taking control of their own wellbeing. However, as the discussion unfolded people who felt that it was entirely their responsibility began also to consider the benefit in others providing support and services to improve the quality of people's lives through sport and culture.

### Concluding remarks

The four sport, culture and wellbeing dialogue sessions in two locations demonstrated clearly that at a fundamental level, from our earliest childhood, sport and culture can have an extremely significant impact on wellbeing. The report concludes that physical and cultural activities are effective as a route to improving

wellbeing. They provide joy, inspiration and a state away from everyday life which can be all absorbing and put you in a different and often improved state of mind.

Participants were more comfortable reflecting on physical activity in its broadest sense rather than sport in its purest form. They spoke about a range of elite sports and physical activity including everyday household chores which require an expenditure of energy. Culture was defined as a way of life, with participants referring to group activities which encourage an understanding of different cultures as well as the performing and visual arts.

For most participants making a division between the wellbeing impact of spectating and participating in sport and culture is a false dichotomy.

Participants in the dialogue were clear that there is an opportunity for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing to be a passionate advocate for the value of sport and culture to wellbeing; to identify local field specialists to support people in an area to identify the opportunities available to them; and to provide a bridge between the national and local picture.

All participants were encouraged by the dialogic approach and many hoped there would be further opportunities for individuals to share their views using this methodology. They hope that the Centre will take the findings resultant from their fruitful discussions further.

# 1. Sport, culture and wellbeing: introduction

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This report is one of four written by Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd as a result of being commissioned by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing in March 2015 to design, deliver and report on a public dialogue on three policy areas in relation to wellbeing:

- Community
- Sport and culture
- Work and learning.

The focus of this report is the sport, culture and wellbeing strand of the public dialogue.

## 1.1 Scope of the overarching wellbeing dialogue

The overarching dialogue builds on the work of the [2014 public dialogue](#) on wellbeing commissioned from the New Economics Foundation by the Cabinet Office, supported by Sciencewise<sup>1</sup>, designed and delivered by HVM. This subsequent dialogue was also co-funded by Sciencewise with support from Public Health England and the Cabinet Office.

The aim of the dialogue commissioned by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing was to:

- Increase the effectiveness of the Centre by ensuring its design and policy priorities are informed by members of the public who:
  - Will be affected by decision making resulting from guidance issued by the Centre;
  - Are potential users of guidance from the Centre.
- Ensure that the knowledge mobilisation strategy for the Centre is informed by how public decision-makers want to receive and use evidence.
- Significantly increase the likelihood of the What Works centre for Wellbeing's success in terms of:
  - Producing evidence in formats and through channels that are most likely to be accepted and used by the public;
  - Increase the % of people accessing and acting upon advice and guidance issued by the Centre.

This, and each of the other dialogue reports, can be read independently from each other or as a suite of information on all the dialogue findings. A cross-cutting themes report has also been written to highlight recurring points made across the three policy areas. Each report is intended to support the work of the academic teams commissioned by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing to inform their *voice of the user* reports ensuring that the views of the public are taken into account as the What Works Centre for Wellbeing develops its work programmes.

## 1.2 Public dialogue partners

The following organisations worked together on the overarching public dialogue.

The [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) aims to improve the wellbeing of the people in the UK by

bringing together the best evidence, making it easy to use and easier to make. A new organisation, launched by the Government in October 2014, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing is dedicated to understanding what national and local governments, along with voluntary and business partners, can do to

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<sup>1</sup> [Sciencewise](#) is the UK's national centre for public dialogue in policy making involving science and technology issues  
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increase wellbeing. The Centre is supported by 16 founding partners<sup>2</sup>, which are, in aggregate, funding a research programme of £3.5m over the next three years beginning from June 2015.

The [Sciencewise](#) programme is funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).



Sciencewise aims to improve policy-making involving science and emerging technology across government by increasing the effectiveness with which public dialogue is used, and encouraging its wider use where appropriate to ensure public views are considered as part of the evidence base.

[The Cabinet Office](#) supports the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and ensures the effective running of government. It is also the corporate headquarters for government, in partnership with HM Treasury, and takes the lead in certain critical policy areas such as national security and government efficiency, transparency and accountability.

[Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd](#) is about engagement to gain insight. As expert dialogue facilitators the team creates safe, neutral and productive spaces in which to access people's views on the content that matters to them. HVM bridges the gap between policy and decision-making and the views of communities and members of the public for whom policies and decisions are made.



The wellbeing public dialogue was supported by an [Oversight Group](#)

comprising the following members:

- Robin Clarke\*, Dialogue and Engagement Specialist, Sciencewise
- Alison Comley, Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods, Bristol City Council
- Professor Kevin Daniels, Evidence Programme Lead (Work and Learning), Professor Organisational Behaviour, University of East Anglia
- Balgit Gill, Department for Communities and Local Government
- Nancy Hey, Director, What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- Dr. Susan Hodgett, Senior Lecturer in the School of Sociology and Applied Social Studies and Deputy Chair of the Research Excellence Framework, University of Ulster, NI
- Alison Humberstone, Mental Health Strategy, Department for Work and Pensions
- Nina James\*, Policy Adviser, Wellbeing Programme, Analysis & Insight, The Cabinet Office
- Professor Peter Kinderman, Evidence Programme Lead (Community), Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Liverpool
- Dr. Paul Litchfield (Chair), Chief Medical Officer and Director of Wellbeing, Inclusion, Safety & Health for BT Group
- Anna Macgillivray\* (Evaluator), Ursus Consulting
- Simon McKee, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Catherine Mottram, Principal Research Officer, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Andrew Mowlah, Senior Manager, Policy and Research, Arts Council England
- Catherine Parker, Health & Wellbeing Programme Lead, North East Public Health England Centre, Public Health England
- Lucy Smith, Public Health Manager, Mental Wellbeing, Lambeth and Southwark Council

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<sup>2</sup> The founding partners are: Economic and Social Research Council, Public Health England, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Health, Cabinet Office, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Food Standards Agency, Local Government Association, Office for National Statistics, Big Lottery Fund, DCMS, Arts Council England, English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund.

- Dr. Dawn Snape\*, Head of Evidence and Analysis, What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- Andrew Spiers, Strategic Lead Research, Evaluation and Analysis, Sport England
- Jude Stansfield, National Adviser, Public Mental Health, Public Health England
- Francis Stuart, Research and Policy Adviser, Oxfam Scotland
- Andrew Taylor, Knowledge Manager, BIG Lottery Fund
- Dr. Richard Thurston, Deputy Chief Social Research Officer Welsh Government
- Dave Wall, Director, Department of Social Development, Northern Ireland Executive
- Jennifer Wallace, Head of Policy, Carnegie UK Trust
- Professor Christine Victor, Evidence Programme Lead (Culture and Sport), Professor of Public Health / Vice-Dean Research, Brunel University London

\*Wellbeing Public Dialogue Project Team

The **sub-committee supporting the work of sport, culture and wellbeing strand** of the public dialogue comprised the following members:

- Robin Clarke, Dialogue and Engagement Specialist, Sciencewise
- Nina James, Policy Adviser, Wellbeing Programme, Analysis & Insight, The Cabinet Office
- Dr. Louise Mansfield, Deputy Director of the Brunel Centre for Sport, Health and Wellbeing
- Simon McKee, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Catherine Mottram, Principal Research Officer, Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Andrew Mowlah, Senior Manager, Policy and Research, Arts Council England
- Catherine Parker, Health & Wellbeing Programme Lead, North East Public Health England Centre, Public Health England
- Lucy Smith, Public Health Manager, Mental Wellbeing, Lambeth and Southwark Council
- Dr. Dawn Snape, Head of Evidence and Analysis, What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- Andrew Spiers, Strategic Lead Research, Evaluation and Analysis, Sport England
- Jude Stansfield, National Adviser, Public Mental Health, Public Health England

The **HVM delivery team** for the programme was as follows:

- Anita Van Mil, Project Director and Lead Facilitator
- Henrietta Hopkins, Lead Designer and Lead Facilitator
- Hally Ingram, Facilitator
- Mike King, Facilitator
- Jemima Foxtrot, Data Analyst and Event Administrator
- Mamun Madaser, Data Analyst and Event Administrator
- Tisna Westerhof, Event Administrator and Photographer

The following is an introduction to the dialogue on sport, culture and wellbeing.

### 1.3 Scope of the sport, culture and wellbeing dialogue

This part of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing's dialogue project aimed to answer the question:

*How can cultural activities and sport contribute to mental and physical wellbeing? Can they be used as a way of increasing wellbeing generally as well as for those with physical and mental health challenges?*

The team used a two round dialogue held over a four week period as described in figure 1.

Using the round 1 process plan (see Technical Appendix p. 12), facilitators took participants through a range of exercises and discussions to begin to test the question. These explored issues such as:

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[3]



- Participants' understanding of what culture and sport encompasses
- In what ways, if at all, physical and cultural activities can help people to live their lives well
- How physical and cultural activity make people feel
- The extent to which there is a difference in feeling between participating in sport and culture and watching it, and how long do those relative feelings last.



**Figure 1:** Elements for consideration in relation to wellbeing

The context for the discussion in round 1 was provided in a presentation delivered by the Lead Facilitator in each of the locations explaining the role of the sport, culture and wellbeing dialogue within the overarching dialogue (see Technical Appendix p. 26). Two films were also shown. One in which a range of stakeholders explained their policy interest in sport, culture and wellbeing and a second in which Nancy Hey, the Director of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing introduced the work of the Centre (see Technical Appendix p.27 for links to the films). In addition a presentation, *Why do we want to talk about sport and culture in relation to wellbeing?* was given in London by Catherine Mottram, Principal Research Officer at Department of Culture, Media and Sport and in South Tyneside by Dr. Louise Mansfield, Deputy Director of the Brunel Centre for Sport, Health and

Wellbeing (BC.SHaW). The purpose of the presentation was to give participants contextual information to help them reflect meaningfully on sport, culture and wellbeing during the course of the dialogue. This included an explanation of a wellbeing framework which uses autonomy, relatedness (shared values and social connections through shared activities) and competence as measures of what is meant by wellbeing and the impact all aspects of our lives have on quality of life. Participants considered these as they moved into the dialogue exercises.

In round 2 the discussions focussed on:

- Capabilities, individual responsibilities and wider and governmental responsibility
- The elements of sport and culture that are particularly impactful on wellbeing as individual incidents and over time
- The barriers and benefits of participation in and watching sport and culture
- Key sport, culture and wellbeing messages and who and how they should be delivered.

Case studies<sup>3</sup> were presented to give examples of local and national programmes which are intended to improve people's wellbeing through sporting and cultural activities. In London these were:

- A presentation and video from Cardboard Citizens highlighting their work using Forum Theatre to improve the wellbeing of young people at risk
- A presentation and film from Silverfit on their work to give more opportunities to the over 50s to engage in appropriate physical activity

<sup>3</sup> The two films mentioned can be accessed on page 4 of the Technical Appendix [Facilitating engagement to gain insight www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk](http://www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk)

- A presentation by Andrew Honeyman of DCMS on a number of initiatives by Sport England<sup>4</sup> aiming to improve the health and wellbeing of people through sport.

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In South Tyneside participants heard case studies<sup>5</sup> delivered by Tom Hall and Richard Barber from South Tyneside Council on initiatives, events and activities in the area to support participation in sport and culture for wellbeing.

At the end of each dialogue round a selection of policymakers and experts in the room reflected on what they had heard and what they had learned from the participants.

#### 1.4 Dialogue methodology

The wellbeing public dialogues were devised using a tailored process based on that initially tested by HVM as the dialogue contractor for the *Embedding Wellbeing Science in Policy Making*<sup>6</sup>; a public dialogue commissioned by the New Economics Foundation (NEF)/ the Cabinet Office and supported by Sciencewise in 2014. The 2014 dialogues demonstrated that a two round process was effective in considering policies through a wellbeing lens. HVM dialogues follow the best practice set out in the Sciencewise Guiding Principles<sup>7</sup> and as such consider a two round process to be important. It gives time for all those involved on the dialogue to have a space for reflection enabling richer findings from discussions. It enables trust to be built so that an effective interaction can take place between dialogue participants, policy makers and stakeholders around the wellbeing policy context. In addition this structure allows for:

- Momentum to build in the discussions from the first round focused on context to the second focused on in-depth consideration of wellbeing in response to participants' lived experience
- Time for the Centre and other stakeholders to reflect on participant views in between each round
- Flexibility in workshop design to allow new thinking to emerge in between rounds and for the round 2 process plan to be amended in the light of this period of reflection.

For each of the dialogue workshops participants were allocated to one of two small discussion groups with up to 10 people in each. They stayed with the same group, and the same dedicated HVM facilitator, for rounds 1 and 2. This meant that in each round participants were able to reflect on the issues as individuals, within a smaller group or as a whole group. Sometimes participants discussed the issues with policy or topic specialists where they needed more clarification on a particular aspect of the dialogue, but for the most part the latter were present as observers. The same lead facilitator managed the process for all the dialogue sessions in each location. Consistency in small and whole group facilitation is important to the process. It enables a sense of trust to build up between participants and the facilitation team so that the discussions can tap the rich experience of those taking part. It also means that retention of participants between rounds 1 and 2 is higher than it otherwise might be. The discussions were guided by facilitators using a detailed process plan devised by HVM in collaboration with the Oversight Group and Sub-Committees for each policy area. The dialogue process plans can be found on page 11 and page 31 of the Technical Appendix which supports this report. The following flowchart describes the four week dialogue

<sup>4</sup> The presentation is available on page 51 of the Technical Appendix

<sup>5</sup> These presentations are available on pages 53 and 54 of the Technical Appendix

<sup>6</sup> Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd – Dialogue Findings report (November 2014)

[http://bit.ly/HVM\\_NEF\\_WellbeingFindings](http://bit.ly/HVM_NEF_WellbeingFindings) and Technical Appendices (November 2014)

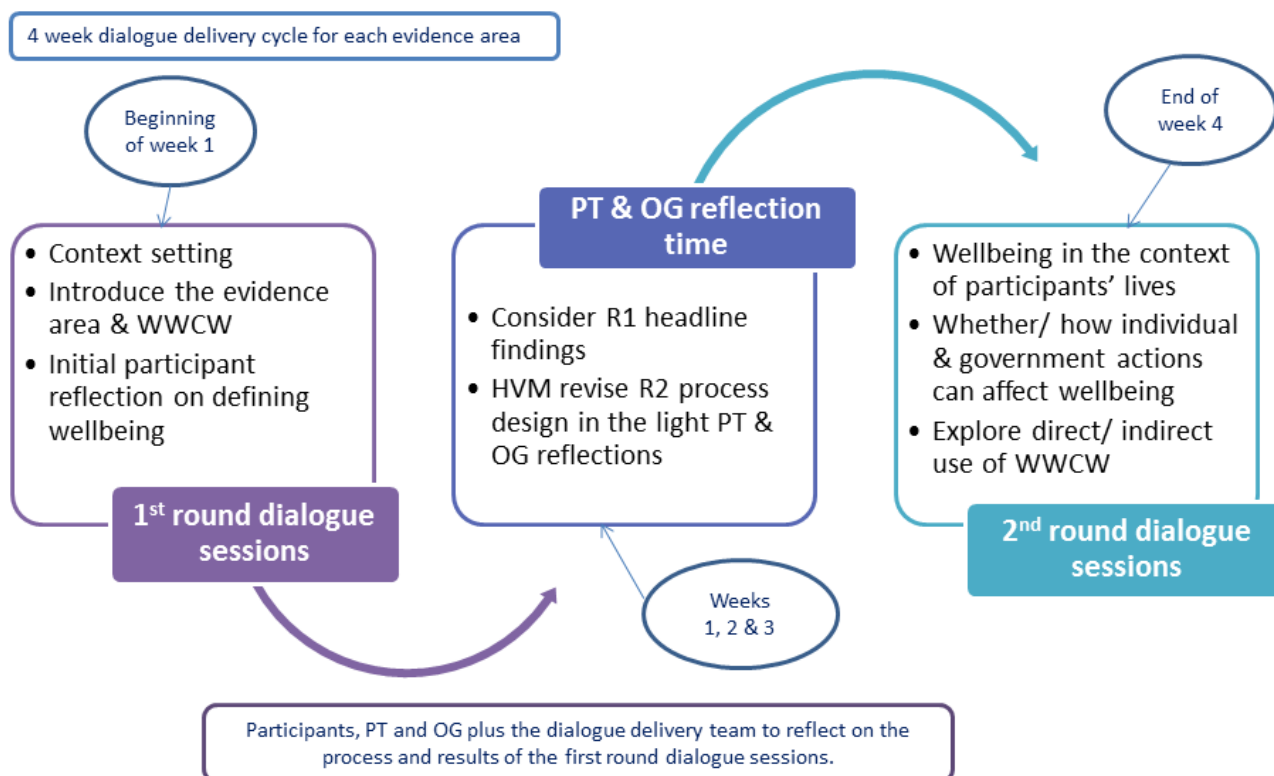
[http://bit.ly/HVM\\_NEFTechnicalAppendix](http://bit.ly/HVM_NEFTechnicalAppendix)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/cms/guiding-principles/>

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delivery cycle and explains how the process plans evolved during the design development with input from the sub-committee throughout:



At the sessions HVM facilitators, based on their experience and training, knew when to probe further; when to prompt with additional questions; when to challenge the first response given by participants and when to allow the conversation to take its natural course if this was likely to make a richer contribution to the dialogue. The Lead Facilitator managed the session overall, kept everyone to time and dealt with any specific challenges that arose.

The design for the sport and culture dialogue was intended to draw out the lived experience of participants. As such it was agreed by the sub-committee that it was unnecessary to provide any wellbeing science pre-materials in advance of the session. Participants were simply emailed a ground rules document, called *Points to help the discussion* and a programme. These documents gave those involved an understanding of what would happen at the session and how it would be run. The *Points to help the discussion* are included on page 7 of the Technical Appendix. The programme for round 1 are on page 9 and for round 2 on page 30.

At the sessions exercises to prompt rich discussion included listing everything that participants considered either sport, physical activity or culture. They discussed the impact on their wellbeing of a lifetime of physical and cultural activities and created posters to convey the positive wellbeing impacts they considered could be derived from sport and culture. Throughout the sessions participants were encouraged to reflect individually and in small groups on their lived experiences of both watching and participating in sport and culture.

### 1.5 Recruitment

Acumen Fieldwork recruited 18 participants in South Tyneside and surrounding rural areas, all of whom were retained for both sessions. 20 people were recruited from Greater London for sessions in Lambeth, 15 of whom were retained for both rounds. More information on the recruitment process is included on page 1 of the Technical Appendix. A full recruitment specification, as agreed by the sport, culture and wellbeing

sub-committee is included on page 5 of the Technical Appendix. In summary those who took part in the dialogue met all recruitment criteria, although the number of participants in London was 3 below the target set of 18 participants per location. The criteria, set with advice from the sport, culture and wellbeing sub-committee of the Oversight Group, specified that the group should be 50% male and female with a good age distribution from 18 year olds to 66 plus. In both locations the fieldwork team recruited an appropriate proportion of black and minority ethnic participants and were required to recruit on the basis that 10% of the sample will have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity that limits their activity.

Both locations included participants from each adult life stage and from both deprived and affluent areas. Participants were asked two test questions and for both questions a spread of respondents were recruited as follows:

- 35% would answer 4/5 to the test question
- 35% would answer 1/2 to the test question
- 30% would answer 3 to the test question

The test questions were as follows:

1. *To what extent do you participate<sup>8</sup> in sporting and cultural events and activities on a scale of 1-5 where 1= never participate in sporting or cultural activities, 5=frequently participate in sporting and cultural activities?*

2. *To what extent do you attend<sup>9</sup> sporting or cultural events and activities where 1= never attend in sporting or cultural activities, 5=frequently attend sporting and cultural activities?*

This ensured a balance of participants with high and low levels of activity and interest in sport and culture. The sub-committee agreed that it was important to enable the participants to explore the widest possible definitions of culture and physical activity.



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<sup>8</sup> Participation should be taken in its broadest sense. It will include occasional rock climbing, being a regular member of a five-a-side football team, part of a running group or a gym or exercising on an individual basis, i.e. going for a run but not in a group. It will include volunteering for cultural organisations, taking part in dramatic productions, attending dance classes or singing in a choir, for example. People should mark 3 and above if they take part in any physical or cultural activity.

<sup>9</sup> Attendance should also be taken in its broadest sense. It will include people who watch live sporting fixtures/ cultural events on screens, who physically attend sporting fixtures, are audience members at the theatre, dance or musicals; visit museums, galleries and/ or heritage sites.

## 2. How people define sport, culture and wellbeing in the context of their own lives

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Participants were asked to consider sport and culture as broadly as possible. It was established early on in the dialogue that for participants' physical activity included everything that required exertion: from traditional team sports, to walking, household chores and dancing to live music. Culture, in their view, should be considered as a way of life rather than an exclusively artistic and creative endeavour. In considering how sport and culture could help people to live their lives well participants reflected that having time for themselves, being able to connect with others and develop skills were all significant. In discussing the wellbeing barriers they faced participants in London particularly focused on having insufficient time in busy lives. In both locations a lack of money was perceived as a significant barrier to improving wellbeing through sport and culture. Cultural and social difference was raised by many as an issue which was of benefit to community wellbeing but had the potential to affect individual wellbeing adversely if they perceived themselves to be on the outside of a group, or not 'good enough' in some way to join in with a group enjoying cultural or sporting activities.

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The dialogue on sport, culture and wellbeing began by asking participants to list as many physical and cultural activities as they could think of and the group discussed the findings. This enabled facilitators to explain that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing is interested in a consideration of sport and culture in their broadest sense. The subsequent presentation on why policy makers are interested in the interaction between sport, culture and wellbeing was intended to help participants to:

- Gain an initial understanding of the existing wellbeing evidence
- Consider autonomy, relatedness and competence as needs that are important to wellbeing
- Draw on their own experiences of sport, culture and wellbeing throughout the dialogue.

This fed into a small group session in which participants explored the ways in which physical and cultural activities can help people to live their lives well. This encompassed a discussion on the barriers to wellbeing. Towards the end of this session participants worked together with the facilitator to group elements that could create a good quality of life under:

- Freedom to take part/ watch (autonomy)
- Shared values/ connections (Relatedness)
- Developing skills (competence)

Some things were identified as being at the very heart of a good quality of life. These are described later in this section, as are observations about participants' views on the effect of physical and cultural activities on, for example, physical and mental health, feelings of self-worth and motivations to participate in, and watch, sport and culture.

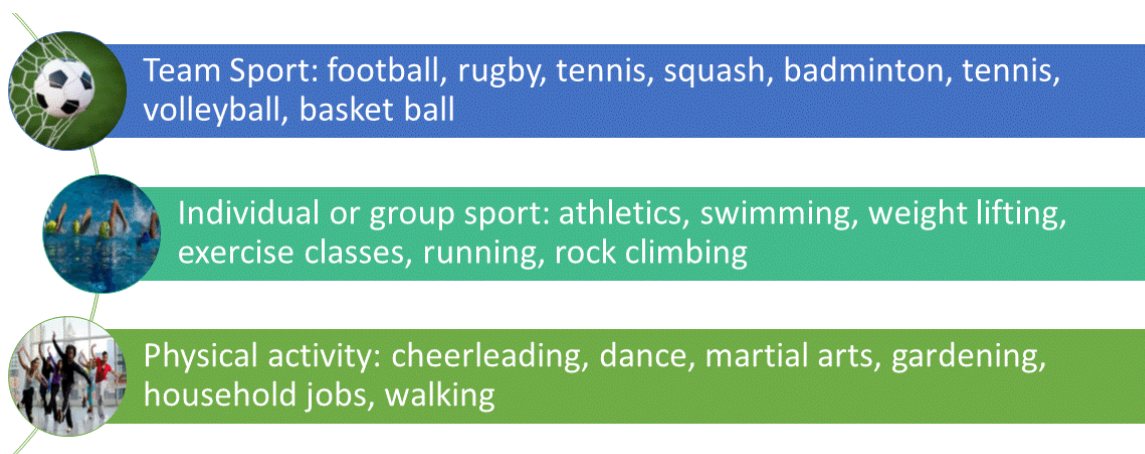
### 2.1 Physical activity

Participants spontaneously mentioned an extremely wide range of physical activities. They included team sports such as football, rugby, cricket, volleyball and netball. One participant felt that team ball games were the core element of all sport,

*I regard them as basic staple sports... These are all kind of spin-offs from football and cricket. All new sports are based on these.* – South Tyneside

Participants equally mentioned sport played in pairs or doubles including tennis, badminton, squash and fencing. They noted sporting activity might be done by individuals on their own or in groups such as swimming, weight lifting, exercise classes, running, rock climbing, martial arts and water sports including canoeing, rowing and scuba diving. As they considered physical activity in its broadest sense they went on to mention a host of additional pursuits including dance, martial arts, gardening, walking (the dog), household chores, physical computer games such as Xbox, and playing in the park. The range of activities mentioned are summarised in figure 2.

Participants felt there was a distinction to be made between sport and other physical activities, but they felt that they all fit in to a broad definition of physical activity. One participant echoed the views of many



**Figure 2:** Physical activities summary

when he said,

*Most of the [items I listed] are physical activities completely, keeping you fit and healthy. But the other ones ... are not something which keep you physically fit but are kind of community activities. As a family you can go together and have a great time, it's a kind of leisure activity. – London*

Others felt there is a difference to be noted between group and individual activities,

*Bicycling, walking or swimming. You can do it by yourself as well, things like yoga or gardening you don't need another person, even if you go to the gym you put music on and you can do it by yourself. – London*

## 2.2 Cultural activity

For participants 'culture' as a broad term encompassed artistic and creative endeavours such as the performing arts including theatre, opera, concerts, film, choirs, dance performances, playing instruments and going to gigs. In addition they mentioned the visual arts such as temporary exhibitions and visiting museums and culture which might be an individual experience or a performance such as poetry or reading. A summary of cultural activities is included in figure 3.

Some London participants expressed surprise when they began to list individual cultural activities at how much material they had gathered and how much there was for them to do in London. As one person said,

*I realise how lucky we are in London. Not everyone in the country would have all this on their doorstep. – London*

Another also pointed out that, although price is a factor, some activities are available for a reduced price or for free,

*There are a lot of things going on in London that you have to pay for, however, sometimes you can get cheap tickets for the opera, for the theatre, for the family. You can also find free physical activities. – London*

For some defining cultural activity only in artistic terms was harder and they quickly wanted to broaden it



Figure 3: Cultural activities summary

out as they perceived culture in that sense to be limited to people who could afford to get involved,

*We need to think about [the] whole society not just those that can afford to go to the theatre and so on. I found it a bit trickier [than listing physical activities]. - London*

Others didn't find listing cultural activities a particular challenge,

*For us it was just, "What is culture for us?" It wasn't a thing of price; it was just what's a cultural activity? Theatre, painting, opera, dance, ballet, you know, cultural things. - London*

They also included in their list of cultural events festivals, firework displays, watching Christmas parades and going to the circus,

*In South Tyneside this Christmas they brought three camels with the Kings on. There were thousands of people down there. It was very cultural. - South Tyneside*

Importantly participants included activities which define culture as a way of life rather than strictly something which might be considered art. In this they included travel in the UK and around the world, camping, wine tasting, preparing and eating food, weddings, school fairs, religious festivals, attending events in a place of worship and family get-togethers and celebrations. One participant stressed the need to include the latter in a listing of cultural activities,

*Food and culture are important and so is family. It is important to do these things together. I know that because I've been around the world. Spanish culture is very different...The kids go and play in the park, and the women stay home. Every culture has something to do together. - South Tyneside*

Those that mentioned wine-tasting said that this was an important part of learning about other cultures,

*We are also talking about countries because different countries produce different wine. This makes it cultural as well because you are learning about different countries. - London*

In South Tyneside in particular participants also included elements which they felt might be on the edge of societal boundaries including drugs, illegal raves and binge drinking. As two participants said,





on the importance of having time, good health and access to activities. They emphasised that having personal choice and freedom to take part are significant elements in gaining wellbeing from sporting and cultural activities (see figure 4).

The key points under freedom to take part are summarised in figure 5

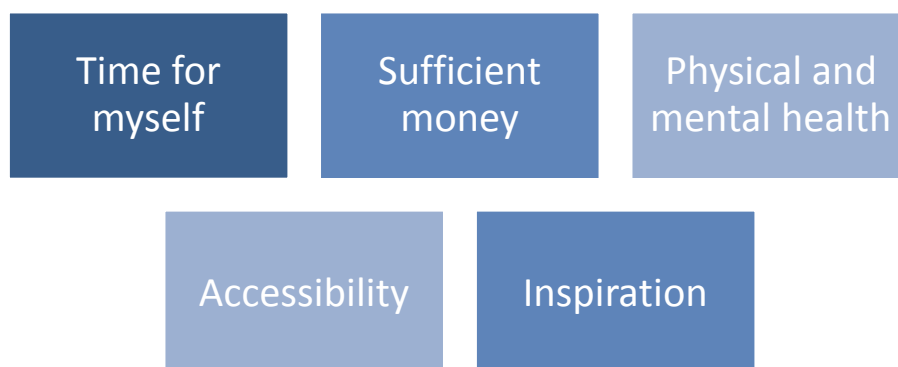


Figure 5: Key points summary.

### Time for myself

For many 'time for myself' was linked to freedom of action in culture and sport. Participants talked about freedom as being,

*Time for yourself. I do a lot of things with people, but I do like to go walking by myself. I would rather walk alone than with someone else. It clears my mind and makes me aware of things around me. When I am by myself I am sort of able to look around me. It distracts me and helps me to clear my mind and think things through.* – London

For some of those present at the dialogue solitary activities are about freedom from connecting with others and the ability to retreat from the group when necessary. This is also relevant in a consideration of belonging, as it may not always be positive for wellbeing to be constantly in the presence of others (see 'sense of belonging' on page 16). Participants in South Tyneside expressed the same view,

*I was particularly thinking about gardening. So for me it's the ability to take time out and be on my own. It's not about connecting, it's about freedom from having to connect.* – South Tyneside

### Sufficient money

Both groups also saw having enough money to participate, or to take part in free activities, as an essential element of the freedom to take part or watch. As one person said,

*Having a laugh and a great time while playing sport in the park helps mentally...No cost for this, which is the most important thing. You are spending time together, time is money, but at least you aren't paying for the activity.* – London

### Physical and mental health

Freedom to choose the activities you take part in or watch was seen by many participants as strongly related to physical and mental health. They suggested that you can only have such autonomy when you are feeling well, or when you are actively striving to improve your health,

*We agree that cultural and physical activities will help you to feel good within yourself, will help your physical health as well so you don't get sick.* – London

Participants in both London groups felt there was a strong link between freedom to choose and mental and physical health. They referred to this point on a number of occasions with three examples being given below,

*I was thinking more about mental illness. If you have depression, taking part in sport and talking to someone about it, meeting up with people from the community and having a coffee, or getting out there can really help with mental illness. - London*

*For instance if you have a physical activity with a group of people, you meet, you talk, you go out walking with your neighbours. Basically if you do group activities it helps you share your problems and you don't feel so depressed. It's important that you don't have depression. – London*

A third person commented that,

*Feeling good [is important] because you can do things that otherwise you wouldn't be able to do. – London*

Additional examples are to be found in the following sub-sections as participants in both locations saw health as a linking theme between autonomy, relatedness and competence. For example one person said,

*Socialising for both [physical and cultural activities] is important here as it helps you to see people and learn new things. That has an impact on your mental health. Mental health is strongly linked to physical health. You are more prone to health issues if you aren't mentally well and this affects your ability to choose what you do. - London*

### **Accessibility**

In South Tyneside participants emphasised the importance of activities which are accessible to everyone as an important element in choosing whether or not to participate or watch,

*Freedom to take part in whatever they want, whether it be to do with disability, gender or sexual orientation or anything like that. – South Tyneside*

### **Inspiration**

For others freedom to choose is linked to being inspired to do something,

*I put inspiration and choice. If you can't participate you can still be inspired by watching other people achieve. If you have a team for example, and your team does well, you feel enjoyment. – South Tyneside*

Participants in both locations mentioned at various points in the dialogue the 2012 Paralympic Games as inspirational for others,

*Surely [...] seeing someone disabled in the Olympics must have inspired loads of other disabled people. - South Tyneside*

Post-it notes gathering participants' key points showed that the freedom to take part in and/ or watch cultural or sporting activities hinges on having adequate *time, money, confidence* and having your *individual needs* recognised and met. They stressed the importance of *time for yourself* and the value for your freedom of choice in *having a laugh* and *feeling happier*. They noted the value in *doing something I believe in* and having activities in your life which *release stress*.



Figure 6: Summary of post-its gathered on freedom to take part in and/ or watch

The post-its collected are summarised in figure 6.

## 2.5 Connecting with others

The key points under connecting with others are summarised in figure 7.

Participants related very strongly to the idea that physical and cultural activity facilitates wellbeing by bringing people together. As one participant put it,

*Feeling connectedness. That's generally so that you feel part of a wider community. You feel like you are not alone. This is good for your wellbeing.* – London

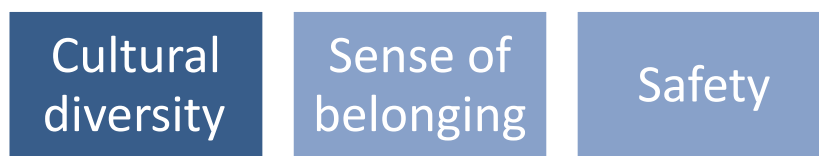


Figure 7: Key points summary

This view was expressed across both locations, often linked to health outcomes as well as wellbeing. A participant in South Tyneside said,

*I think interaction is very important as part of our health and wellbeing. The more people interact through whatever activity it just alleviates isolation.* – South Tyneside

Participants gave many examples of their wellbeing being improved by connecting with others,

*I have quite a large attractive dog. It's amazing. I can't take him out without somebody stopping and admiring him. So immediately there is a correspondence...you go away feeling, "Oh that was nice", it makes one feel happy.* - London

And,

*I go to this street feast in different parts of my area which is North East London. You just see different types of people. It's not just [about] food, people are united. You get all different kinds of people, different age groups, different cultures.* – London

*If you're part of a group it can build your confidence, this make me happy. This is specifically from being part of a group. The connectedness.* – South Tyneside

## Cultural diversity

Connecting with different cultures was seen as an important element of developing shared values despite difference,

*Different cultural and physical activities [are important]. You are working with people from different backgrounds, different genders, different everything. You're working together to achieve something. This improves people's lifestyles, they can see someone who has something different to what they have. This can make you feel better.* – South Tyneside

There was an underlying sense in the London group that diversity was a really rich seam of connection for people,

*I go drumming in the park. I love people, all people, whatever colour or beliefs, coming up and being gathered in by the drumming. They join with me and we all enjoy it together. It's really good.* - London

### Safety

For a small number of participants feeling safe was expressed as an important part of connectedness and therefore their own wellbeing,

*I feel safer where I live because of the connections I have with people in my area.* – South Tyneside

*If you're surrounded by four or five mates you are a lot more confident going out on the street on your own.* – South Tyneside

Not feeling safe as a barrier to participating or watching sporting or cultural activities is explored further in section 2.7 on barriers.

### A sense of belonging

Being included and a sense of belonging resonated with both groups, but was the particular focus for a lot of discussion in London. As one participant said,

*I think the thing that we agreed on was inclusion. That's the main thing. When I was younger and at school, being part of a team. Even just being part of it. It's not about the competitiveness, it's about having fun with others.* – London

For a lot of people being part of 'the team' was important for them as children (see section 3) and remains important to them as adults,

*We've got belonging here and also a sense of identity, so if you're in a team and you're called the Lions, so you feel like I'm part of the Lion team. You feel you are part of something that you can belong to and feel a sense of identity for.* – London



For many this sense of belonging is strongly linked to feelings of self-esteem both of which are significant for wellbeing,

Figure 8: Summary of post-its gathered on connecting with others

*If you feel like you belong it will raise your self-esteem, if you believe you belong somewhere. If your friends keep inviting you somewhere and you never go they will stop inviting you. You should grasp the opportunity, you will get more invites and you'll feel happier. You will feel part of the team. – London*

For some participants ensuring you are up-to-date with current television or social media trends and can discuss them in social situations contributes to this sense of belonging,

*I have put national events and TV shows that can be discussed in social situations. Developing your social skills and connecting with others, even the XFactor, though I hate it, if everybody watches it you've got something to talk about. Developing your social skills is a big part of your wellbeing. – South Tyneside.*

On post-it notes participants recorded areas in which they felt that connecting with others and having shared values through culture and sport already do, or have the potential to, offer, specific wellbeing benefits for them. In London they cited points such as, *integrating with your community, making new friends and sharing problems*. Participants in South Tyneside highlighted the importance of feelings of *self-worth* when you are connecting with others, the *sense of belonging* and the interaction with others which enables people to *experience less isolation*. They discussed the importance of someone's *social and economic status* on how connected they feel; the value of *learning about new cultures, meeting like-minded people* and *having an identity* in your community.

## 2.6 Developing skills

Key points raised in developing skills are highlighted in figure 9.

*Every time you experience something new you learn. Whether you want to or don't want to. – London*

This is a view shared by participants in both locations. Some participants said they noted art galleries and museums down as cultural activities in the developing skills section of the quality of life chart,

*Because you learn about art and it makes you more cultured. You can converse about it. – London*

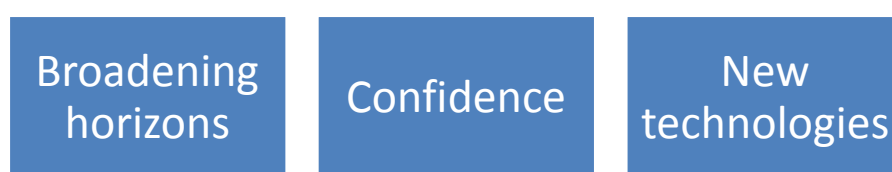


Figure 9: Key points under developing skills

### Broadening horizons

For a number of participants developing skills is about broadening your horizons to ensure your life is not limited,

*Having the opportunity to broaden and expand your skills. It means you are not capped, there's always something to reach for. – South Tyneside*

For one participant this was linked to going to the theatre,

*If you do go to the theatre and watch a play. You might think, "I hadn't thought of that". It plants more questions and broadens your horizons. [The play is] making you question things. – London*

## Confidence

Increasing confidence by learning new skills in either physical or cultural activities was mentioned in both locations as an important aspect of wellbeing. It was mentioned in relation to leadership roles in team sports,

*Even in a team you have vice-captain and captain so you try to achieve more. This gives you more confidence within yourself to do something different than what you're used to...It's about taking part in something but it's also developing a skill. – South Tyneside*

And in relation to developing skills by watching factual programmes on television and learning by listening to lectures,

*If you watch documentaries or go to lectures then you are learning facts and figures. I was also thinking about cultural activities, ways of developing skills by participating. – South Tyneside*

It was felt that both sport and culture had a role in building confidence as people develop new skills,

*Sport and culture, they build confidence. Once you're engaging with people, you can be very withdrawn, but as you get into a group you build confidence. - London*



**Figure 10:** Summary of post-its gathered on developing skills.

## New technologies

For some the huge role new technologies and social media play in society is a barrier to wellbeing, a point which is picked up in section 2.7 (see page 21). However, one participant, who had brought new technologies in to the discussion early on in the dialogue, felt that learning new skills in social media in later life can have a very beneficial effect on wellbeing,

*The person I care for is on Facebook. You won't believe how much her mental wellbeing has changed. The lady I'm talking about is 84 years old. She has now really honed her abilities on Facebook. When she goes to bed she is not lonely, when she wakes up she is not lonely. She said it changed her life. We don't see how much learning about this supports people. – South Tyneside*

## Wellbeing benefits

On post-it notes participants recorded areas in which they felt that developing skills in culture and sport already do, or have the potential to, offer, specific wellbeing benefits for them. In South Tyneside they cited points such as, *developing more interests* and *being more aware of what is going on locally*. They felt that confidence could be built by *developing more of an active role within another area or industry* and *having the opportunity to grow or expand skills*. Participants in London highlighted points such as the impact of learning new skills on *feeling better about yourself* and the importance of developing an *intellectual curiosity and having fun whilst being good at a skill*.

They discussed the importance of *having a sense of achievement* and *knowing where to go for advice* on how to develop new skills in sport and culture.

## 2.7 Barriers

A consideration of autonomy, relatedness and competence and their role in people's wellbeing in relation to taking part or watching sporting or cultural activities, quite naturally led participants to consider barriers to wellbeing. Key points made in a discussion of barriers are summarised in figure 11.

Some of the barriers identified by participants, such as lack of money, are external factors imposed by where we work or our capacity to earn money for example. Others, such as cultural and social difference, are internal factors, issues that we perceive need to be taken into account when considering whether or not to participate, which may be both real and perceived. In both cases they are considered by participants

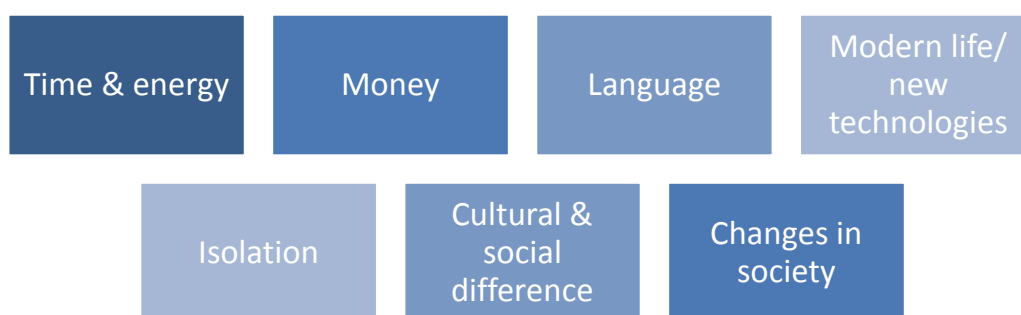


Figure 11: summary of key points under 'barriers'.

to be actual barriers to being able to take part or watch a physical or cultural activity.

### Time and energy

Although mentioned less frequently in South Tyneside, participants in London stressed the importance of having both the time and the energy to take part in or attend physical and cultural activities. They felt that a lack of time and energy was a serious barrier to participation. This is summarised by the comments of four participants, one highlighting the long working hours of some people,

*We also thought time. If you work 12 hours a day you don't have time after work to do anything else.* – London

One participant thought about the responsibilities of looking after children and the effect that can have on what you are able to do,

*If you have a child it can restrict your time.* – London

And another mentioned a lack of energy as a barrier when your work involves manual labour,

*If you have been working hard physically then you won't have the physical energy to do physical activities.* – London

The effects of being tired not only for individuals, but for those around them, were discussed early on in round 1 in London,

*When you're tired you can't function, you feel stressed, tired and hungry. When you are tired there is a lot of strain on your brain from lack of sleep. You will get stroppy. You will tell off your child. You will feel bad.* – London

## Money

For some money and time are equal barriers,

*You can go horse riding, you can go to the ballet, you can do all these things. But only if you can afford it. Only if you have the time.* – London

Participants in all groups emphasised lack of money as a significant barrier to taking part and/ or watching cultural and sporting activities. One person felt that this is layered with an additional barrier if you see a lot of things being advertised which you would like to get involved in but you can't afford them,

*There is no point in promoting something as making your life better if it costs a bomb and not everybody, people on low incomes, can access it.* – South Tyneside

People also perceived some cultural events, particularly in the performing arts such as theatre, as being out of the price range of many and a luxury which cannot be included in most people's budgets,

*It's a huge portion of society that cannot afford them and don't even think about going to the theatre because that's not a prime expense for them.* – London

Others in both locations echoed this point and saw the effects of the recession as a primary barrier, enforcing the point that people only pay for essentials in times of austerity,

*Whenever you get a recession, I've been through two recessions, you do find this [culture and sport] is the kind of thing that suffers quite badly.* – South Tyneside

Others mentioned the cost of transport to attend cultural and sporting events and activities. They highlighted that it is not just the price of attendance that must be considered,

*Money, it depends how much you've got, if you can't really afford going far. Some people are happy staying in their local area, some people go further. There might be an issue there for some people. Even taking a bus into South Shields now is £3.00.* – South Tyneside

They voiced their perception that there might also be costly equipment or clothing associated with their chosen activity,

*Even if you join dancing now you've got to have different things: leotard, different shoes. You can't just go on and join wearing tracksuit bottoms. You have to have special equipment for everything.* – South Tyneside

## Language

In a diverse society participants were aware that language is a barrier to taking part or watching cultural or sporting activities for some people. They saw a particular barrier to finding out what's going on in their local area,



*In terms of language that's another problem. The majority of the people within a certain group can't find out what's available to them. – South Tyneside*

Participants also raised language as a barrier to developing skills,

*For us a barrier would be language. You can't learn a new skill because you don't speak the language. – London*

One participant could see the challenge very clearly having experienced it himself when visiting India and finding his enjoyment of a festival restricted,

*It is hard for me going to India because I do not speak the language even though my mother is from there. I feel like an alien sometimes because I need a translator. We go to this festival where everyone throws paint at each other. I think I'd enjoy it more if I could speak the language. - London*

### **Modern life and new technologies**

Some participants linked their own, or a family member's, experience of computer games and social media use to barriers to connectedness and therefore participating in cultural and sporting activities. One participant shared her experience of her son's increasing isolation,

*My 27 year old son now has a problem because he is always playing Fifa games and he's so shy now when he goes out. He doesn't go to any cultural activities. His art of conversation is not brilliant. I think to myself, "What is the next generation after him going to be like?" – South Tyneside*

In South Tyneside one group spoke of the challenge that social media presents of potentially reinforcing prejudices through social media use. They thought the anonymity of the internet to be a real barrier to social integration, as a space where people do not feel the same social taboos they would feel if interacting in other social situations,

*A lot of my family have had problems with social media. [The problem is] people are not face-to-face. You are not getting a true reflection of what people's thoughts are, do you know? I mean it's like bravado. They're being anonymous and saying things that they shouldn't. They are not diversifying. – South Tyneside*

For some social media use is potentially an expression of loneliness,

*Regarding connections, there is a level of loneliness through connecting via Facebook, even though it is social and a form of networking. This puts it in the barriers section if it is not combined with real life socialising. – London*

And for others the Internet becomes a screen to real life, a way of avoiding situations which might otherwise be frightening or too challenging,

*Some people just sit on the Internet because they are too afraid to participate. – South Tyneside*

### **Isolation**

Isolation leading to a lack of confidence and self-worth was raised in both locations but highlighted during round 1 discussions by participants in South Tyneside. In some examples given, isolation was cited as a barrier due to mental illness,

*If you have a disorder for example. If you actually really have anxiety about leaving the house and doing things and meeting people. When you're not receiving the correct support to deal with that, you may be stuck in a vicious cycle. – South Tyneside*

For many isolation can lead to a lack of confidence which will make it more difficult for people to participate,

*When you feel isolated you certainly don't have the confidence to really join in, or be yourself. Once you gain confidence and you get over the isolation then that gets your mind to think, "Well I can develop myself."* – South Tyneside

It was also clear to some that isolation can stem from many causes including those cited in this section. Such barriers mean that it might be very hard for some people to take advantage of what is happening in their local area,

*All those fantastic local events taking place. How many people can go? I know a lot of people who are isolated and sit at home and just think that they can't participate. This is a huge barrier and that's why people lose confidence.* – South Tyneside

### **Cultural and social difference**

In London participants brought a number of examples of where perceived and actual cultural and social difference can create barriers to participating and watching cultural and sporting activities. Some raised various cultural restrictions as a barrier,

*According to my culture you can't do certain things. People have different cultural restrictions. If you have a dominating partner who prevents you doing activities. [This leads to] isolation if you have no one to do things with.* – London

Another person raised this point specifically in relation to religious dress codes,

*Sometimes religion stops you doing things, for example if you are a Muslim lady and you want to swim.* – London

And a third in relation to religious festivals,

*If you are going in an area where only white people are they probably won't celebrate Diwali or Eid. That's not good if you want to celebrate these things.* – London

Whilst recognising the value of interaction between different cultures and different social classes at a community level, for some participants at an individual there are very clear barriers to participating in events when you perceive that those taking part are different from you either culturally, socially or in terms of their perceived success in life,

*If you are in an area where your neighbours organise events and they are very successful and you are not, you might feel less good about joining in. My neighbours organised a trip to Blackpool. We really wanted to go but I felt we aren't as good or successful as them, so we decided not to. The coach cost a lot of money too.* – London

Participants also raised social class as a barrier to participation or watching the performing arts in particular (they cited theatre and ballet in a previous discussion), something they felt could only be overcome if you had a very strong desire to attend,

*I also think they are very middle-class in that [the people who go to the theatre and ballet]. If you are from the lowest socio-economic group, you've got to have the aspiration to do this, which isn't always easy. When people want to join clubs they may not have or feel like they have the soft skills to join.* – London

Others in both London and South Tyneside felt there was a barrier for some groups of people in attending events organised by others,

*My daughter, when she was 17, they said, "Come to our club up the road." She would never go to an organised activity. That's so un-cool. It's quite hard to reach out to teenagers. Teenagers don't want to go to a youth club that is being run by the local council. – London*

There was a strong sense from a minority of participants, particularly in South Tyneside, that consideration must be given for those who in life experience barriers to accessing the services they need. One participant cited homeless people as those who would have strong barriers to taking part and watching cultural and sporting events and activities,

*The people I work with are homeless people...If you are on the fringes of society you are not going to be joining in...If you are carrying your life around in your bag, you haven't had a wash in three months, you are not going to want to be involved with people. You are not going to want to participate. – South Tyneside*

Another person gave the example of people with disabilities or carers who they felt would experience significant barriers to taking part,

*If you have a disability or a caring responsibility it's not really allowing you to take part or participate no matter how much you want to do it...You lose out quite a lot unless you have a support system. – South Tyneside*

One participant also suggested that people who are overweight would also experience barriers and that participating in sport and physical activities is more possible for people who already have a certain level of fitness,

*If you are fitter you can cope with mixing in your community better. If you are a stubborn stone weight you don't want to take part. – South Tyneside*

### **Changes in society**

A strong minority of participants in South Tyneside said that changes in society have created new barriers to taking part or watching cultural or sporting activities which did not exist when they were young. This included the view that society as a whole has become lazier and less motivated to take action for themselves,

*People's lifestyles in general have become a lot lazier and the way they think. By that I mean somebody likes to go shopping on line and they'll think of that as a cultural activity. Therefore they might not think of doing some of the things we've been talking about for themselves. – South Tyneside*

Another person raised a lack of competitiveness as an issue having seen changes over time to the way team sports are played without scoring points or announcing winners in, for example, football leagues,

*I see there are a lot of schools participating in football competitions, but they aren't keeping score. [This means] they don't have the opportunity to experience success...Teaching some sport without competitiveness means you'll have limited success. – South Tyneside*

One participant, supported by others, voiced a concern that the youth clubs available when he was growing up are no longer part of the experience of children and young people in South Tyneside.

*When I grew up there were youth clubs in almost every estate. Tennis, cricket and other things. These things seem to have been wiped out over the last 10 years...Youth clubs are a massive gap in our society, whether it's through the Brownies or other [sporting] clubs. – South Tyneside*

Participants in London in round 1 did not discuss changes in society in this way, although it was a bigger issue for them in the round 2 discussions as reflected in section 3 onwards of this part of the report. Participants in South Tyneside felt that since they had seen a change since they were children and felt that sporting activities in particular are less accessible to young people now than they were twenty or more years ago. As reflected in the quotations above they felt this was due to a predisposition to do more online than actively taking part; a desire in the education system not to encourage competitiveness in schools; and because of a loss of public facilities that are key to participation for some children and young people.

### 3. Promoting wellbeing as a way of improving quality of life

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When asked to consider to what extent physical and cultural activities should be promoted as a way of improving people's lives the majority of participants responded positively. For some wellbeing should be considered the main element of the message whether this means using the word wellbeing or not. A minority are concerned that it is patronising or too controlling to tell people how they might live their lives well. Terminology is important to participants. They felt that phrases such as feeling better and happier resonate more with people than the term wellbeing. For participants important concepts to communicate in any messaging around sport, culture and wellbeing are fun, enjoyment, friendship and belonging.

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After discussions about a good quality of life participants were asked to consider whether those involved in organising and promoting physical and cultural activities in participants' local area should talk about the ways in which these things have the potential to improve quality of life. Their responses to this are distilled in this short section together with participants' thoughts on which groups of people would be particularly receptive to wellbeing messages. In section 6 of the report this discussion is taken further as part of the round 2 session with a focus on who should do what to take advantage of the wellbeing benefits of sport and culture.

#### 3.1 Wellbeing and food

In London one sub-group of participants focused on wellbeing messaging in relation to food and healthy eating. One person referred to the work of the NHS in relation to promoting wellbeing. She expressed a concern that the messages are not emphasised enough to make a difference to people's behaviour,

*The NHS promotes, not only healthy eating, but also physical activities as a way of encouraging wellbeing. Walking, or that sort of activity are promoted by the GP as advisable, but they don't highlight all these aspects.* – London

For another participant poor food choices, those that are detrimental to our wellbeing are linked to poor mental health,

*What we eat is linked to our wellbeing, but bad choices come from our state of mind. If we are lonely or depressed we start eating the wrong food. It's about empowering people to make good choices.* – London

A focus on food and wellbeing messaging was not considered to be helpful to some participants who felt that this is knowledge they have and that it is up to them to decide whether to take action as a result of this knowledge, or not,

*I don't need to be told things such as eat a fruit kebab not a burger at a music concert. I don't need to be told these things are good for my health. You just know that they will automatically improve your health.* – London

#### 3.2 Educational levels and existing knowledge

In this section participants considered the extent to which people are aware of the wellbeing message and how a call to action might be incentivised. People in London felt that your awareness of or willingness to receive wellbeing messages might be related to your level of educational attainment,

*If you are educated you are probably more aware of keeping well. Education is such a big part of receptiveness to wellbeing.* – London

Another participant in the London group also felt that education was an important part of this discussion. He stressed the importance of role models and the knowledge of wellbeing passed to children at an early age by their parents,

*It's the education you received from your parents. My father was very sporty and so it was part of his life. Eating fruit etc and no take-away was ever part of my upbringing. It's about having good role models. – London*

### **Awareness of the message**

Some participants felt that they were aware of wellbeing messages through the activities with which they are already involved. One participant mentioned her participation in a group for the over 50s which she felt used wellbeing effectively as a way of encouraging people to get involved,

*I belong to an organisation called New Horizons. We do Pilates, learn foreign languages etc. They have a teacher in and it is all promoted as good for one's wellbeing. – London*

Other people in London said they were unaware of any organisations that used wellbeing as a core element of their marketing messages,

*No one says if you do this you will have a better life. I think they should, but they don't. They don't promote their activities in this way. If someone said if you do this you would be better mentally I would do it. – London*

### **Incentivising the call to action**

London participants focused on using techniques with an emotional draw, including incentives, to encourage people to participate and watch cultural and sporting activities to improve their wellbeing,

*You need to create a need emotionally to get someone involved. Whether it's a young generation with games, and there has to be an incentive to get involved with certain activities. I think in terms of incentives. It is offering incentives, benefits and prizes which will encourage people to do these types of things. If you can create an incentive and engage them emotionally. – London*

Three participants in London gave specific examples of incentives which they felt were valuable via the Duke of Edinburgh Awards,

*The reason why my two daughters have done the Duke of Edinburgh Award is because at the end of it you get something from it. There's an incentive. It goes further for university applications. There's an incentive and reward which means something. – London*

Paying for involvement in the local football team,

*The local football team when my son played football, some of them got paid. A little contract was quite serious and you get some money every time you went. I thought it was a good idea because you had the chance to learn about commitment, about reading the small print. You can't just dive in and learn everything in half an hour, if you stumble and fall, you've got to keep going. And that's when your confidence will be built the most. – London*

And incentives through life insurance policies,

*It's about the incentives and learning and knowing what you can get out of something. In the field I work in, I sell life insurance policies. They actually pay you, your premium reduces if you maintain your quality of life. – London*

### 3.3 The pros and cons of using a wellbeing message

In a consideration of the pros and cons of using a wellbeing message participants reflected on the value of adapting the message for the audience and getting the language right so that it is accessible to everyone. They also thought about the extent to which the term 'wellbeing' is helpful to society to describe a good quality of life or ways of living well.

Participants in South Tyneside were somewhat more convinced that a wellbeing message should be incorporated in to local promotional materials for sporting and cultural events. Although in both locations the concept did gain traction over the two rounds of the dialogues. In round one two participants in South Tyneside summarised the views of many,

*I think they should do it [promote wellbeing messages locally] massively. The reason being, when you're doing something physically, you are increasing your endorphins and that's supposed to increase your happiness in itself. – South Tyneside*

*[Using a wellbeing message] should be the main thing because everybody's main goal in life is to promote their own wellbeing and to be happy. I think it would encourage a lot more people to take part in them as well. – South Tyneside*

One stressed the importance of health and wellbeing messages for health and wellbeing. They compared the information available now to a time when people weren't being given the resources they needed to save and improve the quality of lives,

*I think to educate people about health and wellbeing is so important. Unless that is clear people will not take a big step, or even know how to take a small step. I think 15 years ago people didn't talk about breast cancer. Now because of the media and doctors and nurses and families people have a little lump and they go to the doctor. How that can actually improve people's lives. – South Tyneside*

For others there is a feeling that society is reaching saturation point on the number of messages about health and wellbeing which people hear every day,

*The flip side of the same coin is that perhaps there's so many messages out there already that it's ramming it down your throat a little bit – South Tyneside*

Those who felt that it was not an appropriate form of promotion for sport and culture said that wellbeing wording would not be relevant for them at all, or for others with a similar questioning approach to life,

*It's the mind-set that the person has and the wording. I don't think [it helps] if you say to someone, "Go to this event it can improve your quality of life." How do you know it can improve quality of life? It's about the wording, but even then that probably wouldn't take me to the decision to attend. – South Tyneside*

A concern was aired that wellbeing messaging could have the opposite of the desired effect if it was interpreted as telling people how to live their lives,

*That's what we're up against. The public sector telling you that you should be good and you can go running. It seems very preachy and very patronising and it's the nanny state again and that's something that I think people might question. – London*

#### Adapting the message for the audience

Participants were more positive about the use of wellbeing messaging when they discussed how people might receive the message. Throughout the dialogue, particularly in London, it was felt that a tailored approach to wellbeing messages was important,

*The older you get the more aware you get about how important doing activities can be in wellbeing. People of different ages receive messages in different ways.* – London

For a minority of participants the purpose of the wellbeing message should be to present options and enable people to decide on their own course of action, not tell people what to do,

*You don't like to be told what to do as human beings. However, to be given options, to be empowered as people is a better option.* – London

For some it would help people to take part if the messaging included information on what is available as part of the activity,

*It's probably access to these facilities. If it said equipment provided, that might spur them on a little bit because they wouldn't have to buy anything.* – South Tyneside

A discussion by a sub-group in South Tyneside raised the point that particular consideration should be given to how to target the wellbeing message to children and young people, particularly as, in their view children and young people have a high level of communication skills,

*Teenagers and young people are really good at communicating with each other, maybe just putting the main points, not over complicating it could be a good start.* – South Tyneside

Participants said that children are given a lot of knowledge at school and as such are able to reinforce to others, including their parents, the importance of health and wellbeing,

*My children are constantly coming home telling me how I can be more healthy, how I can change my life and what I should be doing and all about the NHS things.* – South Tyneside

A small number of people said that they felt that the enjoyment of the activity should over-ride any quality of life messages,

*I think the issue of fun is more important than health or wellbeing. If you're 12 you just want to have some fun, you're not thinking about your health, you don't want to go on a run.* – South Tyneside

### **Using the term wellbeing**

For some people the term 'wellbeing' is potentially a barrier to people who might otherwise be excited by sporting and cultural events. They suggested subtler techniques,

*Does there have to be a wellbeing message at the local level? Local people will be getting it in a subliminal fashion...they can promote it without using the actual word wellbeing. People are getting the message without the actual word being used.* – South Tyneside

Or alternative wording might be more appropriate when people are not clear what is meant by the term 'wellbeing',

*I don't think we're actually clear properly on what the word wellbeing means. So maybe to say that it's fun, to say that you'll get a better sense of the community, say how many other people will be going.* – South Tyneside

### **Getting the language right**

Participants in South Tyneside were very conscious of the need for the use of Plain English using an authentic voice, to which the intended audience can relate, when communicating the wellbeing benefits of sport and culture.



*Using the right language [in messages]. If you see something in the Queen's English you might think that's not me, especially if you are working class. You look at it and it seems inaccessible, you wouldn't feel connected to it. – South Tyneside*

This short exchange demonstrates the importance of getting the language used right to avoid putting off people who would otherwise be interested,

*It can also be patronising to use more colloquial language. – South Tyneside*

*There is nothing more irritating than a fake Geordie accent. – South Tyneside*



## 4. Participating and spectating

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Participants in round 1 of the dialogue discussed the relative experience of participating in or watching physical or cultural activities or events. The discussion revealed that for a minority participation has a greater positive impact on wellbeing than being involved as a spectator. However, this is not a view shared by everyone. Rather more participants felt that both activities are equally valid in terms of wellbeing with some saying that dividing a consideration between spectating and participating was not helpful to them when thinking about their wellbeing. Participants discussed powerful experiences when both participating and watching. They talked about gaining skills, being inspired and arriving in a state of flow by being totally absorbed in activities which took on a special significance for them providing experiences they would cherish and remember for a long time to come.

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Participants were asked to describe to the person sitting next to them a particularly memorable:

- a) Sporting activity that they either took part in or watched
- b) Cultural activity that they either took part in or watched

They were then asked to use post-cards and coloured pens to create an image for each of the activities. This prompted a discussion on how the participant felt whilst taking part or watching the event and to gain reactions from others on how they felt when the event or activity was described to them. Towards the end of the discussion participants were asked to reflect on the difference in feelings between watching a cultural or sporting activity and taking part in one. In round 2 this was explored further with a consideration of the length of time these feelings last and a consideration of the effects of the impact of taking part and watching events over time. These are presented in section 5 of this sub-report.

### 4.1 Competence

A number of the examples of lived experience described by participants related very strongly to two of the three elements of the framework described earlier on in round 1 (competence and connectedness). The three threads, including autonomy, run through all the experiences brought to the discussion, but autonomy was not the primary focus when people described their physical or cultural experiences. The following two subsections 4.1 and 4.2 therefore focus on Competence and Connectedness. Beginning with learning as a key theme for participants, under which most participants raised an experience of participating in a cultural activity, although one participant mentioned learning from watching a sport on television.

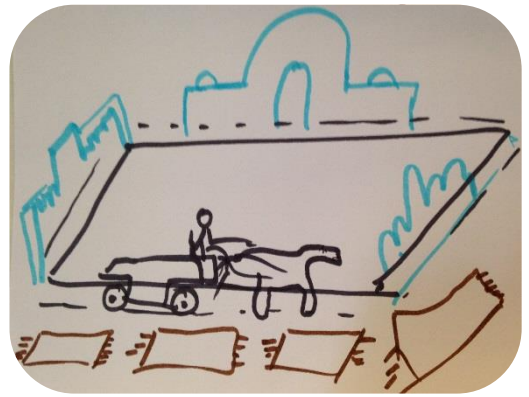
#### Learning

Travelling abroad was seen as participating in a cultural activity by a number of people who felt that learning was an important part of the experience,

*I see this very much as taking part. I was in Argentina and Bolivia. It made me feel fantastic. I was able to explore new places and learn about food, cultural activities, a way of socialising.* – London

Another described a visit to Iran,

*I have never been somewhere I felt so mesmerised and surprised. I went to a very old square called Isfahan Square. It really brings you back to a time where time doesn't pass. It gave me goose bumps. It made me feel excited and surprised by the country. I was travelling around so I consider it to be watching and participating as I was learning from other cultures. – London*



In this example a participant reflected on how content the people in Cambodia appeared to be despite living with very little compared to people living in the west who have much more but appear less satisfied with life,

*I saw a lot of poverty after the Polpot dictatorship, yet you see people who live off what they fish in the lakes. Everyone seems to be happy anyway. When you go back to your own life it makes you ask yourself what makes us unhappy in our western lives and complain a lot. I really had a lot to learn from this experience. – London*

Others saw the wellbeing value in learning about other cultures whilst having experiences in the UK. For one sub-group in London weddings came up as a cultural experience that they wanted to reflect on in terms of wellbeing. For one person attending a wedding of someone from a different culture from your own is a learning experience,

*I went to a Greek wedding and learned lots. I've been learning lots of new dances, new food, new and different traditions. This is fun when you don't know what to expect. I enjoy the difference between the different cultures. – London*



Others said that the experience might not always be positive,

*You sometimes feel like you're intruding a little bit. That can be a bit intimidating. It can take some confidence to introduce yourself and that kind of thing. – London*

Learning a language was cited by one participant as an important cultural experience,

*I like languages because I get to learn about the culture as well by watching films and reading articles in the paper. – London*

The positive experience for one person was drawn from learning something new by watching a rugby match on television in which England were playing,

*I never usually watch rugby. It was quite enjoyable...I was quite fascinated watching the match. England lost which made me feel a little bit sad. The learning made me feel pleased with myself. – London*

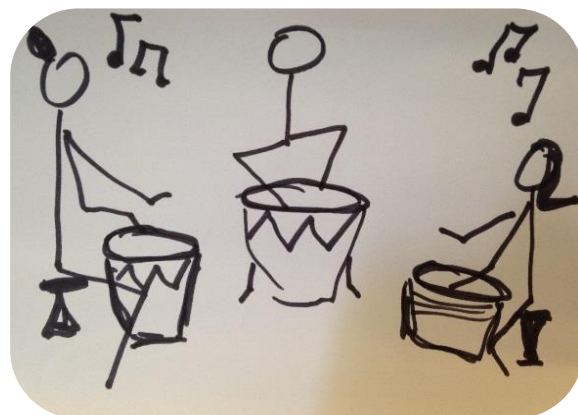
One participant combined a visit to a historic site with learning more about her passion for plants and gardening,

*Mine was a visit to a Castle in Gloucestershire. I went to visit my mother, I'm really into gardening, and I had a gardening tour at the castle. The person was very up on plants, all the Latin names. I*

*really want to hear about that. It was a memorable thing for me, to see new plants, and see how I could use them in my own environment. It was a sunny day too.* – South Tyneside

The final learning example was raised by someone who had begun to learn drumming in the park and who beautifully described her learning experience to the others in her group,

*Mine is about drumming. People bring their drums to the park and you can hear it in the distance. People come with women and children. It makes you miss a heartbeat. It's lovely to gather people in. I both watch and participate. I am trying to learn how to drum. It makes me feel very happy and it is great to be able to have a choice to be involved.* – London



### Gaining skills and trying something new

Being able to gain new skills was considered by many to be a significant aspect of wellbeing once prompted to think about it in relation to the specific examples provided by group members,

*Learning new skills and things like that. It's really important. It inspires you to know that no matter how old you are, whether you have a disability, no matter where you come from, you can take part in anything new, you can learn new skills.* – South Tyneside

Several participants described the wellbeing benefits of successfully trying out a new activity,

*Attending my first spinning class. When I'd finished my son told me he was proud of me. He didn't think I could do it.* – South Tyneside

*I recently joined a gym and found I could work the machines at a good pace. It made me feel so good to be able to keep up.* – South Tyneside

For a minority of participants new experiences in other countries were significant for them. The experience described enabled them to get out of their comfort zone by doing something, perhaps very challenging, but equally satisfying,

*I did water sports in Dubai. It was so much fun, I'd never done it before. My kids encouraged me and so I had no choice about taking part, but I really enjoyed it. I was frightened but I loved it and would love to do it again and again. I also swam with dolphins so I'm never going to forget this event. It made me feel like a million dollars.* – South Tyneside

Others on hearing about these new experiences said they felt happy and inspired to take up a new challenge themselves.

### Being inspired and challenged by a demonstration of skill

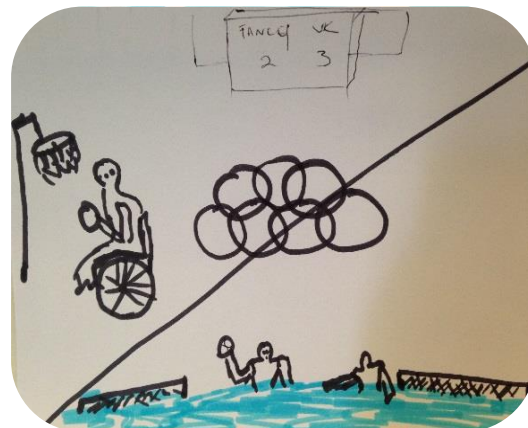
The theme of being inspired and challenged continued strongly throughout the dialogue. One woman participant spoke of her new ambition having volunteered during the Great North Run,

*I sort of took part in the Great North Run, but I wasn't running. I was helping a friend with the catering at the finish line. I cheered on the last few runners once everyone else had left. I now have the goal to run it myself one year, so much so that I've given up smoking.* – South Tyneside

For a number of participants the skill being demonstrated as they watched an activity was both surprising and inspiring. A London participant expressed surprise at the skill being shown at the Paralympic Rugby when he was a Games Maker at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games,

*I observed the French guy, number 10, playing really hard. I was sitting with my colleague and we thought, "What does he have on his hands?" and we saw that he had no hands and was playing with prosthetics. It made me feel excited and mesmerised. Disbelief, seeing someone who is so strong with only half their limbs. I was surprised. –*

London



Some participants expressed surprise that the cultural activity they had been to see was interesting and inspiring. One man powerfully described the emotional experience of going to see War Horse at the Lowry,

*It was fascinating. I didn't expect the play to be fascinating. It wouldn't have been something which I would have chosen to do, but the animation of the horse and the puppeteering, the way they made the horse's head snugly into the soldiers and the people, and the twists in the movement of the eyes and ears and the horse struggling on was the most emotional experience I've ever had. It really did affect me. I am not prone to crying too much. It was emotional because of the way it was done. The pure skill of the puppeteers, the drama side of it was brilliant. –*

South Tyneside



Other theatre experiences included someone who knows a lot of people who are involved in television and theatre production for musicals such as Shrek and Wicked. She said that for her attending a musical is,

*Great to watch and it's great to see how much effort is put into these shows to put on for the enjoyment of others. The skill, the set pieces, everybody contributes, dancing, arts, performing, for one goal, to entertain people. [When I go to a show] I'm looking to see how they did everything, the stunts, the performances, where the set pieces come from. I look at it from a production point of view. –*

South Tyneside

For her the wellbeing benefits are increased by having some technical understanding of how a show is produced so that you can critique it.

### Total absorption

As many of the quotations given in this section on competence show, many people experience great feelings of wellbeing when they are in a state of flow, when they are totally immersed in a cultural experience in particular. We heard from participants who had goose bumps when visiting an old square in Iran; or were moved to tears at a performance of War Horse; felt visiting the opera was,

*earthmoving and wonderful* and drumming in the park, *makes* Facilitating engagement to gain insight [www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk](http://www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk)



*you miss a heartbeat*. All these experiences are specific to the individual who is completely absorbed in their chosen cultural activity, they describe feeling moved and very positive about these experiences. They are special to them as individuals and put them in a different state of mind.

## 4.2 Connectedness

Feelings of belonging were frequently described as part of the memorable experiences people were illustrating and talking about in this session. Connecting and re-connecting with others, with yourself and with nature are all important components of wellbeing.

### A sense of belonging and interaction with other people

Belonging to a group of like-minded people, sharing an activity and spending time with the people who are, or were at one point, important in your life are important aspects of wellbeing according to participants reflecting on physical and cultural activities and events. One mother used time at the local pool to bond with one of her children,

*I go swimming a lot with my youngest. He's old enough now to stay in the smaller pool by himself and I go and do some lengths. We hang out in the Jacuzzi and have fun and I always feel good about it after. It's not just for me, it's because I've taken him as well. I've made the effort and it's like one-to-one time. I have twin sons so I have to give them different things. And obviously I feel good about doing my lengths. I like swimming. It's good.* – London

Others brought more public events to the fore in their descriptions,

*I went on an inter-faith walk which takes into consideration all different faiths...We just went to churches, mosques and a Sikh temple. I got an awful lot out of it because it gave me a sense of community and belonging. They help me to increase my knowledge as well of other religions. It was seriously uplifting and inspirational and I felt a sense of unity between religious groups.* – South Tyneside

There were very positive reactions to this South Tyneside example,

*I love it me. In the media there is a lot of negative stuff about other religions and about multiculturalism.* – South Tyneside

*People are making friends and it shows everyone is the same underneath.* – South Tyneside

In describing a night out listening to a live band in a pub one participant talked about having,

*A brilliant, brilliant night.* – South Tyneside

He said that he regularly does this with a friend and everyone feels good as a result. He said people enjoyed the music, the dancing and the interaction with others.

*It's energetic. It gets people moving, it gets people talking. Then you meet someone that you've seen before. You are having some verbal contact with them. You don't know who the people are but they do welcome you. Plus there is a physical activity. You are dancing for two hours, you don't even realise that it's exercise. I slept like a log last night. It's a cultural activity with a physical endurance aspect to it.* – South Tyneside

He added that the really important aspect of this event for him was connecting with a group of happy people,

*It's the interacting with people, seeing people smile and talking to them. You're surrounded by people that are happy.* – South Tyneside

Others also mentioned connecting with others at live music events and agreed mentioning how infectious happiness can be,

*I went to see The Killers live. It was an amazing atmosphere and I met loads of new people. I think although I was watching, it was actually participating. I really enjoyed it and felt elated for days. The enthusiasm of everyone around me was contagious. – South Tyneside*

The feelings one person described in taking part in a craft group were centred on belonging, a feeling of wellbeing that resonated with many participants in both locations,

*I belong to a craft group and develop my creativity. I had a great sense of friendship and belonging and achievement when I completed the activities, developing new skills and escapism. – South Tyneside*

One person spoke of attending a Festival and how it helped him to be with like-minded people,

*For me the Unity Festival, an anti-racism festival and celebrating with music food and beer. I got the sense I was right in thinking the way that I've always thought in the last 10 years. Thinking that multi-cultural Britain is not a failure. It's a good thing to celebrate...It made me feel good because it endorsed what I have always been thinking. To be with a lot of people that feel the same way as well. – South Tyneside*



For one participant belonging to more than one culture is important for her wellbeing. She described attending a carnival in St. Vincent in the Caribbean where there is a celebration involving throwing blue paint,

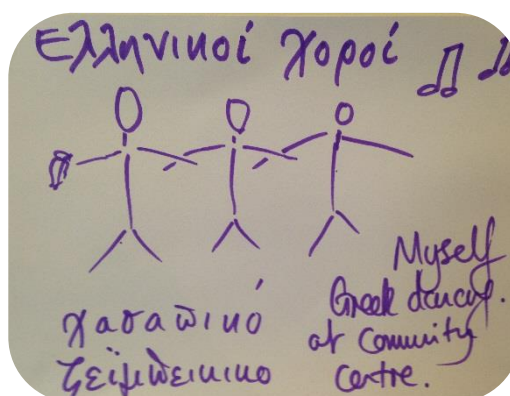
*I threw paint and did everything. It is just brilliant. I'm British and I was born here but I really enjoy the carnival and Caribbean. It makes me feel like I'm part of two worlds. – London*

Belonging is also an important part of the experience of one participant who regularly attends Greek dancing lessons. She spoke of the friendships she had formed and doing something just for herself, being able to re-connect with herself in the process,

*It's a Monday evening for an hour and a half or so and there's a few of us who all know each other and we've been going for years and years. We get on very well and see each other socially when we can and it's a great sense of camaraderie and enjoyment. – London*

Connecting with others and being part of a group of like-minded people was highlighted in one description of watching the FA cup in the pub,

*I was excited but nervous. It was Arsenal versus Aston Villa but obviously Arsenal won. But the whole sense of being together with everybody, you don't even know half the people in the pub but within seconds you're all talking together, singing together. – London*



In another sub-group in South Tyneside a participant described how she felt when attending a summer festival air show,

*It was so much fun. Waiting, chatting and networking with people. And I met new friends. I was reluctant to go but we enjoyed it so much. My kids enjoyed it and as always talked about planes and pilots thinking they were risky fun jobs. My kids are now becoming pilots. Last Bank Holiday I did fly with my son. It was an amazing experience, perhaps one of the most important experiences I've had in my life. – South Tyneside*

## Reminiscence

For some people the feelings associated with taking part in a cultural activity were not necessarily about the activity itself, but rather more related to remembering past activities or people. Participants described experiences which were memorable and poignant. For example, one man described meeting up with an old friend that he hadn't seen for 15 years. They went to York and Scarborough visiting an exhibition and York castle. He said that they reminisced about when they were younger and,

*It felt good to see them again, [but] it felt like I was getting old as well...I'm still single. It kind of feels like they've moved on and I'm still searching for what I want. – South Tyneside*

One participant reflected that what had been described to the group made her feel,

*You came away feeling like you were aware of what you hadn't achieved compared to what you have achieved. It's a slightly sad story. – South Tyneside*

And other said,

*The past isn't always good for you, not good for your wellbeing. – South Tyneside*

Participants referred to other cultural activities as important in remembering times past. One participant drew a picture of attending Royal Ascot. She said that she enjoys going annually to this race meeting because,

*It's very elegant, there are picnics and there are lots of colours...People seem to really enjoy the meeting itself. It is a fabulous day out. It's a very English event, it's quite glamorous and fun. – London*

However, her primary purpose in attending Ascot,

*For me it's all about memory actually, remembering my late husband. I'd never been before [I met him] and I thought it would be a bit snotty. I met a lot of my husband's friends that way. I see people that he knew. He was a Ghurkha, so it's about memory. – London*

## 4.3 Additional wellbeing benefits

Key points under additional wellbeing benefits are summarised in figure 13.

In addition to connectedness and competence participants described a very wide range of benefits resultant from either participating in or watching a physical and/ or cultural activity. These are described via the participants' specific lived experiences in the section that follows.

### Building confidence and a sense of achievement

Building your own, or the confidence of others, was described as a significant aspect of wellbeing by many participants taking part in or teaching physical and cultural activities. One participant described his experience of teaching a group who will be giving a live performance of *Guys and Dolls* the 1950s musical.



He spoke of how the members of the group of young people had grown in confidence as they worked together. For him teaching an activity to others which is both physical and cultural has enabled him to, *Learn new skills, has helped me to build my skills and confidence as a teacher. It's basically building self-esteem for each individual but it's also keeping everybody together, grouping them. It's a lot of interaction.* – South Tyneside

Other participants on hearing about this experience said,

*I liked your aspirations. I liked that you wanted to do more of this to build your confidence, your aspirations.* – South Tyneside



Figure 13: Summary wellbeing benefits

Another teacher, this time in London, described setting up an assault course in his school for the five and six year olds that he teaches. He explained that,

*Obviously I feel good. I think this rubs off on the children as well. To see them want to go on the assault course and some of them are quite scared to do it. And you think to yourself a five and six year old is unlikely to be scared. Maybe the parents have smothered them too much. Some of them don't want to do it even on the lowest beam. I say, "Just put your arms out, I am holding your hands." I told them to take their time and careful not to fall. Most of them are getting their confidence up as well. This is very rewarding.* – London

A personal trainer said that his work, particularly when he has to use a range of techniques to coax those he is coaching to enable them to make the most of sessions, makes him feel,

*Like I have really made a difference.* – London

A participant talked about working towards the Sports Leadership Award and the Duke of Edinburgh Award,

*It's about communicating with people you don't really know. It's the same with the sports leadership award, both of them really build your confidence...It's nice to have a drive towards something...I probably wouldn't be able to sit here and speak to you lot, a group of people I didn't know, without it. So it has been very important to me. It made me feel more confident.* – South Tyneside

Other people described a specific game or match in which they had played. A game of tennis for example, *It's most memorable because I've only been playing for two years. It was a sunny day and that doesn't happen here very often, it was also about improving my skills...It's a sense of achievement for me.* – South Tyneside

Others admired this achievement, seeing it as inspirational,

*You can try and improve your performance as a result of that. To see other people improving with a bit of application, that inspires you to make a bit more effort on what you are doing. – South Tyneside*

### Escaping from the realities of life

Participants described the value to their wellbeing in escaping for a moment from the realities of life. One participant attended an England versus Lithuania football match at Wembley, he said,

*I felt I was part of something, a big event. It was an escape. – South Tyneside*

A participant in London shared a similar feeling when attending a regular dance class,

*That for me is just my escape from everything that's going on. – London*

Playing basketball with a close friend was seen by one participant as an escape through fun, bonding and laughter,

*Playing basketball is always a real release as we don't get to play together very often...We never take it seriously but it is contact with someone and we laugh at jokes. – London*

### Regular activities promoting wellbeing

The memorable physical activity described by a number of London participants in particular was one that they repeated frequently. One man described the positive feelings he has when making regular trips to the park close to his home, sometimes with his children, to use the gym equipment freely available for all. He said,

*When I go to the park area from inside it makes me feel really good and makes me smile. When you look at the same faces, even if you don't know much about them, you say hello and ask, "How was your day?" – London*

Others agreed that there are strong wellbeing benefits in this activity. They felt it was really important to value things close to home,

*It's lovely to hear that he appreciated the little things around him. These things are free of charge and near to his home, but they make a big change to his life as he can go there with his children. – London*

Doing a regular, local, free activity chimed with others. One woman with health challenges explained the wellbeing benefits to her of attending a weekly pilates class, the value in meeting other people with whom she has a lot in common and feeling good about her achievements,

*I go to Pilates at the Centre, which is free at the moment. It is with other people. Sometimes I have asthma or back pain, so I can't do much but mostly I participate and meet like-minded people. It's a lovely Centre. It makes me feel great after going, to know that I'm socialising, learning and listening to my body. It brings me an awareness of myself. It makes me feel good. – London*

One woman who regularly takes long walks with different walking groups and friends described a particularly memorable walk which typifies her experience of the activity,

*The last time we went to the South Downs and it was very sunny and windy. It was a good day. We ended up in Brighton and I always feel good afterwards even though it's hard to get up on Saturday mornings when you've been working all week, but it's always worth it in the end because it's also very sociable because you meet a lot of people. You are in the fresh air and nature and all that after you've been in the office all week. I just find it very beneficial. – London*

For others doing something so regularly that it becomes a routine has both positive and negative aspects. One man described the goal he had set himself to go to the gym three times a week,

*When I get to that third day it doesn't make me feel like I've accomplished anything in particular because I just set the same goal for the next week and the week after, so I don't know if I'm consciously getting something out of it every time I go. – London*

### **Sense of achievement and pride**

For some a sense of achievement for their own achievements or the achievements of others evoked a sense of wellbeing. One participant described auditioning for being accepted as part of the chorus for a musical show. She said,

*I haven't sung for many years. I didn't really know what I was getting myself into. It was tiring. I nearly gave up on two occasions. We sang a song called, 'Lord don't move this mountain, but give me the strength to climb.' Which was so powerful it helped me to persevere. It finished nicely, it was tiring and stressful. I am left feeling a sense of achievement. – London*

One participant was part of the organising team for a major kite flying festival in Gujurat state in India. He described how kites are flown against opposing teams and that the aim is to cut the strings of the opposing team's kite with your kite. He said his sense of achievement came from being one of the people who arranged everything,

*There is a very competitive atmosphere there. That's during the daytime. In the night time there is music and dancing. We all put money in to buy the food collectively, we do everything together...it makes me feel amazing. – London*

One participant found she could get cheap tickets to the National Theatre via her drama group tutor. She felt proud of *being in the know* but also because of having a significant theatre on her doorstep. The plays she has seen include *Everyman* adapted by Carol Duffy with Chiwetel Ejiofor in the lead role. She also described seeing a play with Jude Law which also led her to reflect on feelings of pride in the achievements of others,

*The actor carried the whole thing; the sets there, the choreography. I felt quite proud of Britain as it's our national theatre. It belongs to everyone actually. The audience is full of tourists and what we have here is tremendous. – London*

Another person described being involved with the organisation of a dinner dance for Age UK, she stressed the value in having a mix of cultures and generations,

*We always get to meet new people. It was quite culturally diverse and you've got so many different generations involved. [It was] really nice. It was a few days before Christmas so made me feel really good. I think for them it was nice for them to have a Christmas atmosphere together.*

### **Positive impacts on mental and physical health**

Physical health was raised as an important factor by a small number of participants. One woman spoke of swimming to combat high cholesterol and as a way of recuperating from hip replacement surgery,

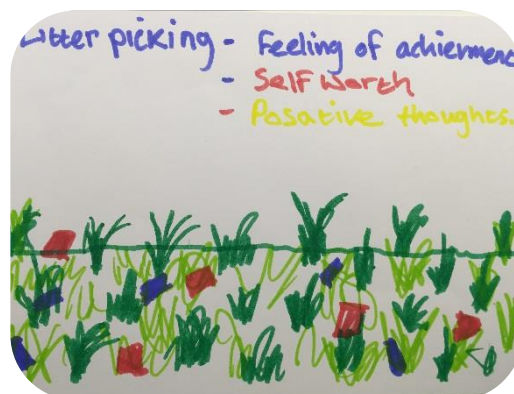
*Swimming has saved me. It's good for everybody – London*

Some people felt that the positive benefits of doing something physical are enormously powerful and extend from physical to mental wellbeing and stamina,

*I used to run at six in the morning and then get to work. When I run in the morning and do a proper training, when I sit at my desk and I try to think I feel sharper than if I didn't do it. Your brain wakes up quickly if you run in the morning, you don't feel tired at all and you can just keep going. – London*

A number of participants in both locations cited examples of a physical or cultural activity which had helped them to recover from a mental illness, mental trauma, or simply improved their state of mind. One participant said that volunteering in a community activity was an important milestone in improving other aspects of his life, including moving on from depression,

*I went litter picking not long ago with some volunteers. I got the sense of self-worth out of it, it coincided with me getting a job. I do not think it is just coincidence that this really lifted me out of the depression. This helped me to get in to the community and actually do something good rather than just collecting my gyro every fortnight. – South Tyneside*



A teacher described taking his class to the National Portrait Gallery which, because of the tranquility associated with the space, he saw as relaxing describing that in terms of therapy,

*I liked it, it was quite therapeutic. You can't exactly run around there, but it was nice to be in a different, quieter, environment. – London*

A rather more dramatic example of a cultural experience being therapeutic was given by someone who had been in the Philippines when the 2013 tsunami had come in land. He described his family losing everything and he called it,

*Pretty devastating. – London*

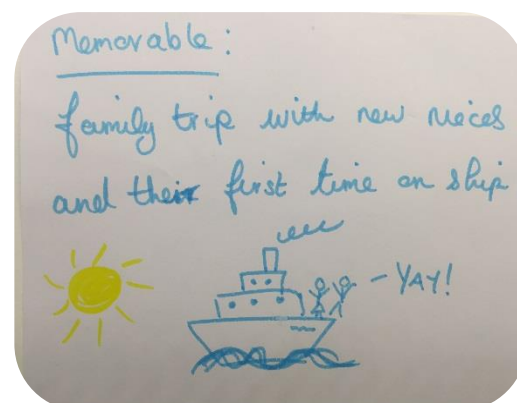
He talked about people's resilience in the face of heart-breaking events. Before the tsunami came ashore the people had already planned a community religious celebration. Despite the events that unfolded, they decided to go ahead with the planned celebration as best they could. He expressed surprise at the community's ability to carry on with their family parties and use it as a small step towards recovering from the trauma,

*I was watching these people and I thought after all that happened, this whole place has been destroyed and here they are jumping up and down, eating, celebrating and enjoying as families. Well they are really resilient. They are just celebrating life. – London*

### Feeling happy and enjoying something

As is evident from the majority of quotations in this section, participants spoke of feeling happy or a sense of enjoyment when they described cultural and physical experiences. The happiness is provoked from a combination of the feelings described previously in this section but for some this is the primary wellbeing emotion that they wanted to share. One participant was a spectator when the England Women's Football team were winning a match,

*I really enjoyed seeing their success. It made me very happy and I think it makes us women feel more equal when we are part of such an amazing event. – South Tyneside*



One person described a ferry trip to Blythe that she took with three generations of her family including her mother who is a wheelchair user and the two daughters recently adopted by her sister. She said,

*It made me feel very happy because there were three generations of girls out as a group. It was lovely for us all just to be together. We loving being out on the sea. It made me feel uplifted. [It was] everybody else's happiness that uplifted us all.* – South Tyneside

On hearing this story another participant reflected,

*I think it's really nice that your happiness is from other people's happiness.* – South Tyneside

Another simply enjoyed attending a theatrical performance,

*Mine was the theatre to, me and my friend went for a meal before. We went to see Dirty Rotten Scoundrels; my friend kindly took me. It was memorable because it was the first night. The audience participated, it was all round a thoroughly enjoyable experience.* – South Tyneside

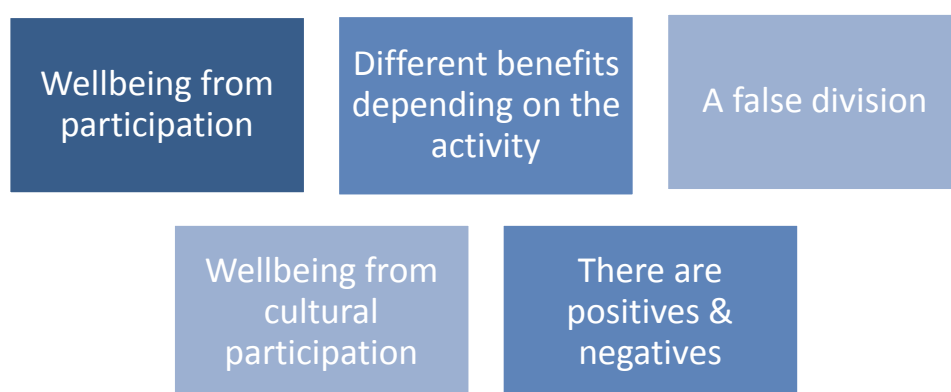


Figure 14: Summary of key elements

#### 4.4 The elements of sport & culture that have an impact on wellbeing

The dialogue has revealed a wide range of views on the various impacts of cultural and physical activity on wellbeing. When considering spectating versus participating, neither one had a noticeably more positive impact than the other as far as most of the participants were concerned. What is clear is that for the majority of participants across both locations there are positive wellbeing benefits from both aspects of the dialogue whether watching or participating. In the following section we begin with the minority who see the strongest benefit from participation.

##### Strong wellbeing benefits from participation

For some participants across both locations there was a sense that greater wellbeing benefits are derived from taking part in a physical activity or a cultural activity. They mentioned sport,

*I think participation gives you a greater sense of wellbeing. You can feel nervous [before participating]. When you get there people can kick you up the arse, make you do it, you do get a lot of enjoyment out of it, whereas before you are panicking. I have anxiety issues, when it comes to sport I need a good kicking to do it, [nevertheless] I just feel like I get more the benefits if I take part.* – South Tyneside

*Especially in sport activities when you're taking part more, when you're watching you are more passive.* – London

And they also mentioned participating in cultural activities picking up again on the benefit of learning whilst participating,

*Learning something is more important. I think this is part of my personality. I like to learn, I don't like to waste my time. When I organise activities for my son we go to museums. We do other things which he can learn from... I personally enjoy spending my time this way. It gives me more joy than just watching something. I prefer to be engaged.* – London

### **Different benefits from participating and spectating**

A number of participants explained that they do not necessarily gain more positive benefits from participating than watching, but the benefits gained are different depending on the activity, One London participant compared the experience of watching a performance of Carmen at the Royal Opera House with performing in a play with her drama club. She describes both experiences as *powerful* but she suggests that she gained more from the sense of achievement gained from performing,

*The acting was more powerful for me compared with the Opera House experience of watching. It's a different powerful feeling. One is appreciation and one is participation. Appreciation for the opera, admiring the people in the production, it was earthmoving and wonderful. Participation in the acting was a sense of achievement, one gets through it all without forgetting one's lines.* – London

This view was echoed by a participant in South Tyneside,

*You have something like the great North run, even if you're not participating, but if you're in a large crowd you do get a sense of fulfilment.* – South Tyneside

For one participant the difference is between the value of competing and of being entertained,

*When you participate in something it gives you a competitiveness and a feeling that I want to be better. When you are watching it's very nice to have this feeling of being entertained.* – South Tyneside

For a number of participants in South Tyneside gaining different, but nevertheless valuable, wellbeing benefits from watching and participating only applies to cultural activities,

*Yes, I think watching a cultural event can give you as much satisfaction as participating in it. Not so much with the physical activity. I think you get more out of it participating then spectating.* – South Tyneside

*I think with cultural activities you can get as much out of it if you're watching a film, if you're watching a play. You can get as much out of it as participating.* – South Tyneside

### **A false division**

In the dialogue it emerged that for a significant minority of participants there is no difference in wellbeing benefit between spectating and participating and, more than that, as one person said,

*I think dividing spectating and participating is false. Even if you are attending an event as a spectator you are participating.* – South Tyneside

Others agreed with this view saying that when attending an event either by applauding, cheering, being swept up in the atmosphere, being amazed, dancing, singing along and being inspired that you are as much a participant as if you were on the stage or the pitch yourself and that both have important wellbeing benefits. For them society should encourage people to both participate and spectate,

*Both [participating and watching] are equally important. They are 50-50 equal. They both equally contribute to wellbeing. One without the other, if you just sit and watch, you know the physical activity is important for your health. People should both participate and watch. – London*

Some though felt that watching on the television or at the cinema is perhaps not so much an all embracing feeling, although seeing a live event on a large screen with others around you provokes strong wellbeing feelings,

*I didn't get the chance to go to Wimbledon [but] I can watch on the big screen on the grassy area. People were really in a good mood. Everybody cheers. This is different from watching by yourself or with your family [at home], which [has] limited benefits. This was something different. – London*

For one of the London sub-groups watching is a good alternative when participating is not possible. One participant described the impact of working 12 hour shifts in a very physical environment. He felt that watching something is a good proxy for participation if you do not have the physical energy left to take part and,

*Sometimes watching can give you energy as well. You can't expect to participate if you don't have energy and your only option left is to watch. If you come home from work then you want to sit down and look at the comedy programme or something that makes you happy. At that time you can't expect to go and participate in physical activity or something. – London*

The same person also felt that shorter days in winter also contributed to watching instead of participating in physical activities,

*Winter is six months. How can you go outside when it's already dark? There is only one choice left and it is to watch. – London*

This view was shared by others in both locations where groups talked about appreciating things that they themselves could not or would never be able to do themselves,

*I'm not an opera singer and I never will be, so it's different giving yourself this joy of having the option to listen to someone who is amazing. It's just a really pleasurable activity. – London*

A view echoed in South Tyneside,

*Those that can, do. Those that can't, watch. – South Tyneside*

For others watching is a step along the way to participation, for example, the participant who mentioned drumming in the park,

*I really enjoyed listening, it was really inspiring and it made me want to have a go myself. It fills me with joy and happiness. It's creating music for pleasure, for yourself and for others. - London*

### **Wellbeing benefits from spectating**

The person who mentioned the kite flying festival in India said that he would feel very different about the festival if he was only watching it and not taking part, but not necessarily in a negative sense,

*Perhaps we would enjoy more just watching, not worrying if we were cutting enough kites. – London*

Others agreed that there are wellbeing benefits from simply watching something,

*For me watching can sometimes be more relaxing. Sometimes it's nice to take a break. – London*

Others agreed,

*It's joyful. I went to a gospel concert last year and I really enjoyed it. I love singing, I sing as well, and I love watching others. It's relaxing.* – London

### Positives and negatives

Some participants could see pros and cons in both watching and participating,

*There is a positive and a negative side. For example I like to participate more rather than just watching because it's keeping me fit. What I notice though is if I come back from work on Friday and try and play and perform well and I lose, this serves as demotivation. If I try to play on Saturday or Sunday afternoon I will be able to focus on the game more and I am less likely to mess up.* – London

So for a number of participants when the activity takes place in busy lives is an important factor in whether or not the activity gives you wellbeing benefits. For others mixed benefits might occur when watching when you would rather be joining in, even if you are gaining pleasure from spectating,

*If I was enjoying watching and I wasn't participating there might be a certain amount of frustration. I may think, "Why aren't I doing that?"* – London

For others frustration whilst watching sport is for quite another reason. One participant described her frustration about not being able to watch a full tennis match live from Wimbledon because she has other commitments which take her away from the television,

*Well initially I'm very happy but then as time goes by I realise I've got to leave to do the school run, so I get frustrated by the end of it. I can't put the radio on or anything because if I tape it I don't want to know the outcome until I've come home, but then I've got to do the dinners so it's all quite frustrating.* – London



## 5. The impact of a lifetime of experiences on wellbeing

In round 2, case studies on sport, culture and wellbeing specific to the dialogue locations were used as a launch pad for participants to consider their own life time of physical and cultural experiences and the impact these have had on their lives over time. Experiences in childhood came to the fore in both locations as an incentive or disincentive for their ongoing desire to participate or watch sporting or cultural activities. It was clear that a fear in childhood can have a long-lasting negative impact on people's motivations going forward. Swimming was particularly highlighted in both locations as an activity that has created in many long-lasting negative emotions. People spoke of many of the barriers to enjoying sport and culture they had encountered over time and how, in some cases, these had been overcome.

Participants were asked to think about all their experiences of taking part in (rather than watching) physical and cultural activities. They were asked to draw on their earliest memories and build on them to include events that might have happened very recently. Firstly they listed their experiences on as many post-it notes as they wished to use adding the age when the event happened to the post-it. They were asked to record positive experiences on green post-its, negative experiences on yellow post-its and experiences that had neither positive or negative connotations on pink post-its.

They discussed these experiences in pairs and then, working with their small group facilitator, developed a timeline to consider all the experiences together. Figure 1 shows a completed time line for the blue group in London. A full description of the process is available from the round 2 process plan included on page x of the Technical Appendix.

Predominantly participants recorded experiences that had happened as children with some reflecting on events that had happened more recently, some tracked the change over time.

### 5.1 Influences and feelings in childhood

It was clear that for many participants' experiences in childhood have had a profound effect on their desire to participate in or watch sport and culture in later life. The main feelings expressed are summarised in figure 15.

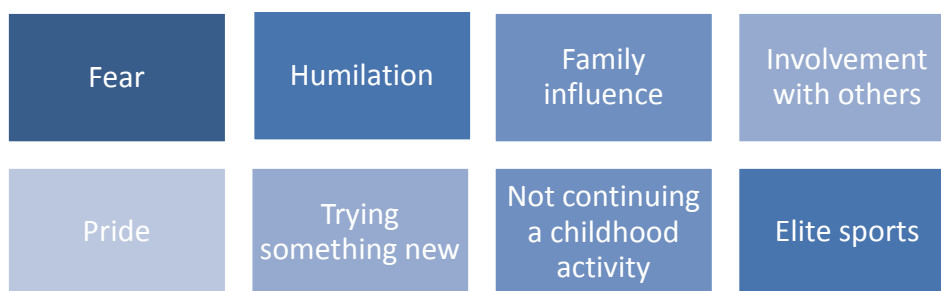


Figure 15: Summary of key elements

#### Experiences provoking fear

A number of participants in both locations described very negative experiences involving water and swimming which, we see throughout this section, have affected them throughout their lives,

*I had a bad experience. When I was two years old somebody put me under the shower and left me there for minutes. It was nasty. This is may be why I'm scared of water. Still now I don't like water going over my head. – London*

*When I was 12 I was thrown into a school swimming lesson. There was a male teacher with a group of 10 people and someone threw me into the middle of the pool. I swallowed a lot of water and I've never been able to swim since. – South Tyneside*

For another participant the fear engendered by the experience was for another person,

*I knocked out my best friend accidentally with a hockey stick when I was 12. I never played again. I think it is a very dangerous game. – South Tyneside*

A school experience had a significant effect on one participant who, because of fear of speaking publicly, developed a childhood stammer,

*I had a big thing with my accent when I was younger. A lot of people in Sunderland don't pronounce their h's. Standing up and reciting poetry in front of the class, I would get picked up from the teacher for trying to speak like everyone else. I developed a stammer. – South Tyneside*

He went on to explain that he now loves reading but it is only now that he is in his 60s that he has taken up acting and overcome the fear of speaking in public.

This fear was shared by another participant because of her accent. She explained that at her first English lecture at the University of Manchester she was called on to read out loud a section of *Paradise Lost*. She explains the negative effect this had on her,

*I just wanted to die, nobody could understand what I was saying. University became a bit of a problem for me [because of this experience]. – South Tyneside*

### **Humiliating and embarrassing experiences**

Others shared negative experiences of humiliation as a child. These often involved something going wrong while performing, or simply not enjoying the experience of performing on their own as in this example,

*I remember having to sing in front of everyone at assemblies alone. – London*

And another remembered embarrassment at a childhood performance,

*I performed as Joseph in the school nativity. The reason it is negative is because I stood up on the stage, forgot my lines and fell over in front of everyone. – South Tyneside*

Another felt they had made a fool of themselves playing football,

*It was just me one-on-one with the keeper and I went to kick [the ball] and I just went flying. That was not the end of my football career. I still play head balls and stuff. – South Tyneside*

Another was equally undeterred by an experience as a child in which they were embarrassed and scared having got lost when out on a hike with a large group of people,

*We didn't know the way and we truly got lost and they had to send out a helicopter. They found us because I was wearing a bright yellow jumper. I got in to big massive trouble for that. I still went walking again. – South Tyneside*

### **Family influence**

The influence of family was very significant on what participants did and didn't do as a child. For some not having a choice on the activity they undertook provoked strongly negative feelings as in this case,

*My father thought I was too soft. He was part of the YMCA. So I was pushed to participate in team sports. When I was seven or eight, he thought he must do something to make me stronger. But I*

*hated it. I have always been scared of combat. Once I had to do a combat with a girl and I lost. I was so embarrassed.* – London

And sometimes the influence of family was entirely positive, even though the participant described having little or no freedom to choose what they did, as in these three examples,

*I really wanted to go to Brownies as a child. Sometimes I wouldn't want to go in the winter. But my mum would make me go. And it was far better for me in the long run. Because your parents do often know what's best for you.* – London

*I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for [my mother] pushing me.* – London

*My Grandma brought me up and once I was out of her restrictions making decisions was essential. Maybe I would have gotten in to less trouble if I hadn't had to make [my own] decisions.* – London

One participant described the potential isolation she faced because of not joining in an activity that the rest of the family were very much involved in,

*The family all wanted to do cheerleading. I didn't, I stopped. All my cousins, everybody would congregate together to practice their routines. I'd rather go off and watch rugby or something. But it was difficult because of course I'd like to be the same as them.* – South Tyneside

Other participants were impressed by the sacrifices made by their parents to enable them to do an activity and, as in this participant's case, explained why this spurred them on to do well,

*Times were hard for my mum and dad at the time to buy instruments. You cannot share the recorder. You have to buy your own instrument. They bought me a recorder. I knew it was hard for my parents financially. I was really good at it. The reason I wanted to be good at it was because I knew that financially it wasn't viable for me not to try.* – London

One participant echoed the views of others when he expressed the view that his parents had prevented him from progressing in a cultural sphere in which he was interested,

*My mother gave me a lot of fear about pursuing music as a career.* – London

### **The involvement of others**

Who else is involved in an activity can have an enormous impact on whether it provides you with any wellbeing benefits according to a number of participants. For example one person found kickboxing was not for him as a child because,

*[There was] too much aggression, too much testosterone.* – South Tyneside

For another a love of theatre began at the age of 9 because of the group of people also involved,

*It was just being with all the people from the theatre groups. People tend to be full of energy. It was just a different, great experience. And now I am a performer.* – South Tyneside

Beyond that it was explained that who else was motivating you to get involved was important. One participant took part in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme because,

*I was definitely driven through other people, through teachers and other friends.* – South Tyneside

### **Pride**

A sense of pride was raised by some participants as a feeling evoked by a positive childhood experience,

*When I was at primary school I took part in a competition for Britain in Bloom...I won for our Borough. I had to go to an awards event that was hosted by the retired local weatherman. That was a good experience. – South Tyneside*

For another participant being good at something and feeling proud of herself, did not lead to enjoyment,  
*I tried out ice-skating when I was at school to a high level, but I never went skating again because I actually hate skating. While it was something I was good at, and I was proud of myself, I did not enjoy it. – London*

### **Trying something out**

Trying something for yourself was raised as a positive experience for a number of participants. One man had, as a child, enjoyed trying out cooking a family meal with his friends,

*When I was an eight year old [in India] we would get all the ingredients together and try and cook together underneath the tree. I still remember the taste of the food we made. We were happy with ourselves, our parents were happy with us. We enjoyed it because we did it. – London*

Another participant described being able to choose an activity. This choice led to a very positive outcome,  
*We had our own theatre at school. It was brilliant. You had a choice. You had theatre, sports or art. They created an arts class for me and I won a prize in the Daily Mail for one of my pictures. – London*

### **Being challenged**

A number of participants spoke of being challenged which they saw as both good and bad for their wellbeing. One participant described to the group a situation when he moved from primary to secondary school in Colombia when children are encouraged to take part in a trainee military academy,

*I found this idea very challenging. I asked people who were already there how they found it. They told me that if you came late the teacher would ask you to run 10 times around the grounds. This was all on Saturday and Sunday. I decided not to join because of this. – London*

For this participant reflecting on the decision provoked some feelings of regret,

*They were all very strong, I admired my friends' strength. So I felt left out. – London*

For another participant the challenge of performing at a very high level was very positive, but ultimately the barriers to participation were greater than her will to pursue the activity,

*I started at a gymnastics club. We competed for the County in the end. It was fantastic. I won major awards...I really enjoyed it. It was something I found that I was good at and I loved it. Then when I was 13 I just fizzled out. They wanted me to take out insurance to do more advanced stuff and my parents couldn't afford it. They were also concerned that it was dangerous. – London*

Others spoke of continuing to challenge themselves as adults,

*Back in my 20s I was working in a restaurant in France. I used to have two hours break so I challenged myself to swim in a local swimming pool for those two hours break. – London*

*For another participant the challenge was also possible because of having more time, but she stressed that it wasn't necessarily easy for her to connect with the others involved,  
I like challenges. I like to rise above challenges. I love singing, but I never took time to challenge myself to singing but now I audition and got through. This was my time to shine. When I stated to*

*work with the other actors they were a lot better singers than me. They snubbed me a little bit, but I decided to persevere and get through. I've challenged myself and now I'm also taking singing lessons.* – London

### **Not continuing an activity into adulthood**

A number of participants spoke of activities they had started as a child but, whether they enjoyed them or not, they no longer take part in. For one participant a house move meant she discontinued horse-riding,

*I used to do [horse-riding] a long time ago. It was a good experience. I did not take it as professionally as I would have liked to do. It made me feel very good. I enjoyed it enormously I must say. It was quite fun. My parents moved away and I had to stop because I was riding locally.* –

London

Another participant found that moving to adulthood and having children meant that she no longer undertook any sporting activities,

*When I went to secondary school I was involved in the netball team, the football team and other sports activities. Once my children came along I didn't do sports any more.* – London

### **Elite sports**

One participant described his progression from being a *dare-devil* at home by jumping down the stairs using pillows for protection to this experience as a thirteen year-old,

*We broke into a mine-shaft and jumped on my bike...I went under water, the current carried me 200m. I felt on top of the world afterwards.* – London

As a result of this experience,

*I started competing at school. My success was positive. I did really well with my physique and qualified for the Canadian Olympic team. We have the ability to do incredible things in our lives; adults sometimes limit themselves as opposed to children.* – London

Other participants had experience of competing at an international level and saw it as very valuable to their lives and their wellbeing. One participant described swimming competitively for South Tyneside at the age of 13,

*I had the opportunity to go to Sweden where there was an Olympic sized swimming pool. There were children from all over Europe. We represented England in the relay. I [still think] it's a really good life skill to have. I think everyone should swim.* – South Tyneside

For both these participants, elite sport was a positive life-changing experience, with the skills and wellbeing benefits gained being carried in to adulthood.

## **5.2 The effect of time on the feelings experienced in childhood**

### **Overcoming fear**

As we have already seen a fear of swimming was a recurring theme in all sub-groups in both locations. People spoke of their battle to overcome fear. Some had achieved this as is shown by these three participants who spoke of having to break through the fear in order to live positively,

*Sometimes you have to overcome a fear. For example swimming. If you have had a bad experience this feeling will last until you either learn to overcome the fear. It could be that it stays with you all your life or you could learn to become more confident. If you overcome the fear you can change completely.* – London

One participant only began to feel happier about swimming once she had a child herself,

*As I got older and I had a child myself and she went swimming. I never showed her that I was scared of swimming. Eventually I started to learn to swim by watching other people swimming. Now I'm a very good swimmer and I love it. Now I look at the swimming experience and I don't have fear of the water again.* – London

Two participants had been pushed into swimming pools when a child. For one the fear is beginning to subside due to taking adult swimming lessons with a good teacher,

*I wrote down an experience that was quite dreadful to me. The memory related to swimming as a child which didn't go very well. But then as an adult I had a very good teacher so it became a more positive memory. I can swim. The positive thing is I'm less scared now.* – London

For others the fear of swimming, having been thrown into a school swimming pool, has never been overcome with resultant long-lasting impacts on their wellbeing,

*It makes you isolated. You tend to stand with your back to the wall trying to avoid swimming. You are still fearful as an adult. I can't even swim today either.* – South Tyneside

One participant felt that, rather than diminishing, their fear had become stronger. They do now swim, but feel that the fear remains,

*When something happens in childhood to some extent the fear becomes stronger rather than diminishing, even though my experience with swimming has changed I won't however be able to get rid of the fear of something completely.* – London

Another participant felt that fear of anything is harder to overcome. They spoke of the difference between minor incidents and other more traumatic events which can have a lasting impact,

*I think some experiences, even though you think it's humiliating, eventually you will see the funny side of things. Fear is a hard thing to get over. You can only get so far when the fear will stop you from getting any further.* – South Tyneside

For other participants being able to put their childhood experiences to one side and move on positively was extremely important. She felt that a focus on negative experiences would not help her with her new life having moved to the UK as a child,

*For me I don't care about my childhood because I really feel that this is my home, this is what's on offer, I'll take it and make my life exciting and feel happy, feel fit and healthy. What is not there for me here?* – South Tyneside

## **Health and wellbeing**

Health and wellbeing were significant factors for some as they shared experiences with their co-participants. One participant thought about the fact that having been a healthy child he is now more frequently unwell,

*I do not remember being sick as a child. Life was sports as a child. I feel like I'm sick more now that I don't do anything [physical].* – London

Other participants spoke of health and wellbeing in relation to the time it might take to fully recover from a serious illness,

*When I was very ill and I came out of hospital the staff pushed me into the wellbeing programme, through the exercise referral, with the swimming and everything.* – South Tyneside

They explained that it took a long time to recover. Another participant said that when he was recovering from a heart attack and a quadruple heart bypass his mental health deteriorated severely and the impact on his life was very long lasting,

*I went into depression afterwards and then I did rehab for twelve weeks. I drifted about for about two years and that's when the depression really kicked in.* – South Tyneside

For him the solution was taking up squash with a friend, which, over time became more competitive and helped him to improve both physically and mentally,

*I started playing squash with a friend of mine. It sounds silly. The idea was to play squash slowly, not competitively. About a year later my attitude completely changed. I improved my flexibility. That was really fantastic for my confidence, the little things that you can do really have an impact on your wellbeing.* – South Tyneside

### **Enjoying things not done since childhood**

For some participants taking up an activity that they had not pursued since childhood was very positive for their wellbeing in adulthood. For one participant it was being able to ride a horse,

*I did enjoy horse riding for many years. The whole experience. The contact with the animal was one of the most important parts. You will never forget about it. I stopped doing it many years ago, but last year I went to Scotland and even though it was 15 years since I last rode I really remembered things and really enjoyed it.* – London

For another it was ice-skating,

*Years later I tried skating again and I thought I would fall over but I managed it. It really made me feel good to remember how to skate even though I haven't done it for so long.* – London

### **The length of time feelings last**

Participants expressed the view that there are a variety of experiences associated with either a good or a bad experience. For some regularly taking part in an activity means the positive wellbeing feelings last a long time,

*When I do my drumming the good feeling lasts for a long time. If I continue I just get a passion for it which lasts.* – London

A childhood negative experience, such as forgetting the lines and falling over for a performance in a school nativity, for some is something that they continue to think about, but it hasn't prevented them from performing later in life,

*It really knocked my confidence. But I've always performed and stuff like that. It didn't hold me back. Obviously it was traumatic and I'm still feeling it to this day, but I have performed since.* – South Tyneside

However, for others a childhood coping with being bullied has a very long-lasting impact on your life,

*Whenever anything happens you start reflecting on those things again. It can stay with you for your whole life if you've been bullied.* – South Tyneside

And for others taking action as a result of an experience has turned long-lasting negative feelings in to positive feelings of wellbeing,

*Deciding not to do cheerleading with the rest of my family has sort of given me an independence to do my own thing. In a way the negative experience was eventually a positive.* – South Tyneside

Another participant in London felt it was very important to learn from the mistakes of her parents and give her children more positive life experiences,

*A massive negative in my life was my parents never encouraging me to do anything. I did it all on my own. When I eventually had my own children I thought, "I'll never go down that route." I have learned from my experience so I encourage them to do everything, give them as many opportunities as possible.* – London

A number of people agreed with this view saying that enabling children to experience as much as possible physically and culturally was important,

*Children especially, getting them to do as many activities as they can. The memories stick with you forever.* – South Tyneside

For some whether the feeling lasts or not depends on the extent to which you were involved and you enjoyed it as this exchange demonstrates,

*Winning the FA Cup, winning the world cup, they were temporary feelings [of wellbeing]* – South Tyneside

*If you particularly liked it then it lasts a long time. I went on a French exchange as a child. I've got that for life.* – South Tyneside

### **Affecting other parts of life**

Participants were asked to think about how their negative and positive experiences have affected other parts of their life. For some an early life experience can effect everything else,

*If you've had a crisis experience as a child it can have a permanent effect on every part of your life.* – London

*If you go on holiday, if you continue with your fear of swimming then you can't swim with your daughter. So it can really affect your life.* – London

For one not having taken part in sport as a child has in his view had a negative effect on many other parts of his life,

*Growing up and not doing a lot of sports and because of that I didn't have many friends. As I got older I found it very difficult to socialise with other people. Now I am at university and doing all these other sports and so I can socialise better than when I was young.* – South Tyneside

Another participant gave a particularly vivid example of working abroad for an oil and gas company which involved being in a desert compound for six months where the only thing available to do in leisure time was to play football. This experience had positive physical health benefits for him but was negative for his wellbeing and bad for the mental health of many around him. He stressed that the sport helped them to get through the experience. He said,

*I was as fit as I've ever been in my life only because there was sport and there was nothing else to do, it wasn't that great. All we ever did was compete. It was a very difficult time. People really went*



*crazy. One guy tried to hang himself. But the sport gave us togetherness. It was a very good example of when sport is a great thing to have within you.* – South Tyneside

For some positive experiences enhance all parts of your life. One participant summarised the views of many,

*[They] enrich your ability to mix with other people. By participating in experiences, group experiences, the cultural exchange experiences you then acquire confidence that allows you to proceed in the workplace a lot easier, instead of feeling fear.* – South Tyneside

### 5.3 Barriers to taking part

In the previous sub-section we describe a number of fearful events which generally were experienced in childhood. Participants said that it is much harder to recover from a fearful experience,

*Humiliation you can get over and bounce back from. Fear, you can't. It lasts forever.* – South Tyneside

#### Bullying

A participant spoke of the impact of being bullied at secondary school. The fear of this recurring prevented him from taking part in sporting activities. This led to a long-term concern about participating,

*The competition and sometimes bullying in school got very intense as it went on. At secondary school things got a bit nasty and it put me off from wanting to do anything later.* – South Tyneside

Others had similar experiences. A woman said that she enjoyed playing rounders and netball at school. She wanted to keep going and improve but was eventually put off by the reactions of others to her ability,

*It was constantly, "Why is she playing? She is not good enough." The teachers wanted me to stay on but the other girls made me feel like I stood out. So I left. I probably would have got better if I'd stayed a bit longer. They made me feel rubbish that I wasn't up to their standards.* – South Tyneside

A mother explained that her son has dyspraxia which affects his co-ordination. She described other children in the school really putting him off taking part in PE lessons,

*The other children say to him, "Hurry up". It puts him back in his shell. He was never given a go, he has really tried but then he's told he's not good enough. A million times he's asked me to write a note to get out of PE because he's being picked on.* – South Tyneside

#### Time and money

Another significant barrier described by participants, particularly in London is summed up simply by one woman,

*Just time really.* – London

Linked to this was a specific barrier caused by working long hours. Again the responses of two London participants summarised the views of many who emphasised this as a barrier,

*Work can hold you back from doing the things you want to do. Now that I am semi-retired I have much more time to do what I need to do. Time and money.* – London

*Work sometimes takes over and I get stressed. The intention [to take part] is there. It's just lack of time... Life gets in the way sometimes.* – London

A participant in South Tyneside agrees,

*I used to play cricket until I was 18. It's just fitting it in around work. Some people do fitness classes and stuff like that, that is not really me. I've watched a lot of sport and stuff like that.* – South Tyneside

For others lack of time is not only caused by work, but also by juggling a range of commitments on a daily basis as an adult,

*We grow up and we realise we have lots of responsibilities. I have three kids at home. These are the choices that you have to make, these choices that your responsibility forces you into. You must dedicate more to earning money, you must work more hours, you must be there for parents evening, there is a lot of juggling going on.* – London

Participants in both locations raised lack of money as a barrier which had, for some of them always been a concern,

*My mum couldn't pay for all of the activities we wanted to do [as children] if they weren't free. I have four siblings. The people who could go for the [activities] you pay for would progress to a much higher level.* – South Tyneside

Others spoke of social class as a barrier to participation,

*There were certain [physical activity] classes which were exclusively middle-class. The kind of people you get there. If you don't live on their estate and live their lifestyle then you [won't be accepted].* – South Tyneside

### **Ill health and accessibility**

In response to a participant who suggested that age might be a barrier to participation one person responded,

*That's not so much about age as it is about health and capacity to participate. In New York [we heard in the case study] there is a person right now doing the triathlon at the age of 74. So age is not necessarily the thing that holds people back, it's more like health.* – London

A person in South Tyneside had an example of playing football to a high level but having a major injury when he was 17 which stopped him from playing. He recognises that he has led a successful life and had a good career, but regrets not having been able to continue to play football for health reasons,

*I concentrated on a career in business and I think because of that I probably haven't done that much exercise for the rest of my working life. You can see from my shape that I have been unable to participate.* – South Tyneside

For one participant a large group of people makes her feel concerned and she would be deterred from attending any even in which she had to join a throng,

*I do not want to go to these festivals. I just don't like big crowds. The crowds make me feel uncomfortable.* – London

Others spoke of the price of attending cultural events as a significant barrier to attendance. She felt that she had seen increased prices over time which had turned previously accessible events become something only wealth audience members could consider,

*There was a lovely opera festival. It was very accessible about five years ago, the price was good...The tickets are very expensive now, it's all smartened up...they are all dolled up. I think it's totally wrong...it's become very elite. It's gone for being everyman to only being for the elites.* – London

Others suggested that the price, perceptions of who the cultural activity was intended for and whether or not your friends wanted to join in were definitely barriers to their participation,

*Taking part in cultural activities can be more to do with a pressure from your peers. If I went to the theatre to watch a play I would feel out of place. I wonder whether I would fit in or not because of my age and other factors.* – London

Other spoke of barriers caused by a concern about the reaction of others. One participant, a Muslim woman, would like to go swimming but she isn't sure how people will react to the way she dresses while swimming,

*Sometimes there is a hesitation to take part because it's the way that people react. You don't know if people go swimming with leggings or things like that. It is awkward, it puts people off to take part even though they want to address their physical and mental wellbeing...One of my friends is overweight and she loves swimming but she doesn't want to go because of her body. This is a different thing, but it is all about how people will react to you.* – South Tyneside

### Health and safety

Perceptions of health and safety as a barrier to participation in organised or self-organised physical activities was strongly expressed by many. The following are two examples from London,

*I went to my old gymnastics club. Everything has changed because of health and safety regulations. They don't have a proper Olympic beam to practice on. You think, "No wonder we cannot produce gymnasts of the future."* – London

*As a child we were climbing trees and things. Now they take down trees in playgrounds in case a branch falls down.* – London

Another participant felt that society has changed for the worse in this respect,

*We are living in a strange culture. If your children are going to an activity, if your son gets an injury you will be the first person to go there and say to them, why did this happen? Before it wasn't like that. We can't blame them. This is the blame culture we are living.* – South Tyneside

However some participants felt that the changes in social behaviour affect our ability to take part in cultural and physical activities more than health and safety requirements.

*We used to go down to the countryside where there was a stream and everything. Now it's full of people sitting, drinking and taking drugs. In such anti-social behaviour you don't want your kids playing out. There are people lighting fires there and drinking cans of beer. It's not just health and safety.* – South Tyneside

### Practicalities

For others cultural and sporting activities are not always possible for purely practical reasons, particularly when attending a major public event. As one woman said,

*The festivals, the air shows and the Great North Run and all those things. There is the actual event but getting there, trying to park, buses, trying to figure out how to get there.* – South Tyneside

She saw this as very real deterrents to participation.

Equally it was felt that practically speaking there are no longer the facilities and systems in place, particularly in South Tyneside to help people to engage in sport and culture. One participant summarised the views of many when reflecting on the change since he was a child.

*When I was at school the caretaker [would make sure] everything was open to you to play football in the evening. Now as soon as the school is closed they padlock them up and you can't use the facilities.* – South Tyneside

## 5.4 Overcoming barriers

Participants talked about a range of ways in which barriers to wellbeing can be overcome drawn from their own experiences of life. Some talk about culture in terms of art, literature, music and the performing arts as a means of improving your wellbeing, others talked about other cultural experiences including television providing an example for how the quality of life can be improved and food as a way of bringing people together.

### Using culture to overcome barriers

Some participants described the release from stress, and therefore the ability to overcome potential barriers to taking part, in listening to music as these two examples demonstrate.

*I think listening to Elgar can give me a real release and really affect my mood and makes me feel better. It makes you realise that you're not on your own and really lets you out of a terrible mood. During a bad time I got hooked on Madame Butterfly.* – London

*When I wake up and I go to college I often use headphones to listen to music. This helps and takes me to a different place. I'm so into the tune that the music takes me to a different place.* – London

For one participant theatre has an important role in reflecting back challenges audience members may have in their own lives and show ways of working through the barriers,

*There's also literature and theatre. You may have seen 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time'. To see that you are represented in theatre can be very helpful and make you feel like you're part of the human race. It doesn't always have to be about able-bodied people. That's why we need theatre. We need to see whether things can or can't work out.* – London

### Creating a balance within the education system

In response to the examples of bullying in South Tyneside one participant felt that there is often too much emphasis on competing either in sport or academic subjects at school. She felt that this could be changed by having a more balanced approach to both sport and academic work enabling children also to enjoy their own free time. She felt that there was too much pressure for children to achieve and to compete. At school,

*I felt there was too much going on. Part of my teenage years were missed out on the opportunity to get involved. I didn't have that balance and if I'd had the opportunity to do it I would have gone out with my friends, gone to the park or gone to Newcastle for the day.* – South Tyneside

### Responses to health challenges

Participants gave examples of when physical or cultural activities had helped them or a family member to recover from ill health,

*My sister has a son with cerebral palsy and she started taking him to riding school and it's really helped him. It is bizarre. Those kind of activities are super important and essential if you have any*

*physical issue or mental illness you must have some kind of cultural or sporting activity in order to heal or make life easier.* – London

This was a view shared by another based on her personal experience,

*I suffer with asthma and I find doing things like yoga [really helpful] because it teaches you how to breathe properly as well as doing physical movements. I use less of my inhaler because this does help.* – London

### **Bouncing back from difficult times**

For others television provided the cultural backdrop through which they were able to recover from a difficult period in their lives,

*When my marriage split up it was a very hard time for me. In a TV show I was watching one of the parents is also going through a break-up. It really encouraged me because through it I could come to believe that it was okay that I might be a single parent and that I can do anything. It was an inspiration.* – South Tyneside

Another person tentatively suggested that food, whether in celebration or simply from need can bring people together and overcome the barriers they are facing to their own wellbeing,

*I know it sounds ridiculous but food breaks down barriers because everybody eats. For example, in soup kitchens, people are eating together. It includes everyone, all the volunteers, everyone sits down together and eats with the homeless people.* – South Tyneside

A third person gave a personal account of coping with a challenging time in his life using sport and travel in particular to relax and give him a focus for his feelings,

*When I was a teenager I went through a really bad patch, I didn't know what I wanted, confusion. And I turned to sports and cultural activities, I realised what I wanted for my future. That helped me and actually changed my life. It helped me to resolve confusion over who I was, where I was. I am gay by the way, and for me it was very hard. I had a girlfriend, I was going to marry her. Through swimming in sports and through travelling, it put me on the right path to change.* - London

## 6. Who can do what to ensure people can take advantage of the wellbeing benefits of sport and culture?

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There was recognition amongst participants that many wellbeing benefits derive from participants taking control of their own wellbeing. However as the discussion unfolded people who felt that it was entirely their responsibility began also to consider the benefit in others providing support and services to improve the quality of people's lives through sport and culture.

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Having discussed their experiences of sport and culture over time participants were encouraged to think about the most effective channels for communicating with people about their own wellbeing and secondly to describe who should do what to ensure people can take advantage of the wellbeing benefits being offered in local communities and nationally.

### 6.1 What individuals can do for themselves

There was a strong belief expressed, particularly in London, that individuals are the main motivator in improving their own wellbeing through sport and culture.

As two participants summed it up,

*There is no greater impact than taking personal responsibility.* – London

*I have always done things myself. I always persevered. I drive myself as much as I can.* – London

One sub-group felt that it is important to give individuals the message that,

*You are in control of your own destiny. Start off with 10 minutes of exercise a day. This is all you need. In 10 minutes you could do some yoga, meditation and relaxation.* – London

There was a concern expressed that people,

*Turn to government and other institutions for help. At the end of the day if you want to do something, get up and do it.* – London

Another participant shared this view,

*I can depend on the government, on clubs, or whatever else but I should really be taking responsibility for myself.* – London

For some people whether you are able to motivate yourself depends on childhood experiences,

*I was a Boy Scout since I was five. Thanks to the Boy Scout organisation I did so many outdoor activities. It did influence me quite a lot.* – London

Another participant said that he felt that it is very much up to the individual to motivate themselves, but he recognised that people's personalities play an important role, but that ultimately it is up to the individual whether they take part or not,

*If you are an extrovert or like contact with people then you will search out these activities. If an organisation wants to influence your activities, you don't have the personality, you won't do it. Any organisation can offer you anything, it's up to you whether you do it or not.* – London

Others raised a concern that not everyone is able to help themselves,

*Sometimes you are not in the right frame of mind to decide what is good for you. If you have a mental illness you need help to take those decisions.* – London

Participants felt that people, in order to take action themselves, needed to be more clued up on what is available locally. They suggested pubs as a good place to communicate forthcoming events, activities and programmes,

*You can get the message across in pubs. Parties are usually for drinking, but you can also promote healthy activities.* – South Tyneside

For some participants it was clear that not all individuals have the skills or capability to help themselves,  
*Some people are weaker than others so they need support.* – London

For some individuals do not only have a role in helping themselves but also in advocating wellbeing benefits to others,

*Spreading your own personal experience and what you've gained from it is helpful. When people talk about something with passion it makes you want to go. We've seen that just sitting here.* – London

Another agreed saying that it is important not only to tell someone about an activity, but also to go with them and encourage them,

*Sometimes it's nice to do something with someone who is good to drive you. Someone who will help you pass your limits.* – London

There were concrete suggestions made for specific age groups.

### **Young people**

Participants felt there should be more available for teenagers and those activities should be promoted using social media and other techniques which would resonate better with the age group than some more traditional means of advertising,

*What about flash mobs? They would never forget if it was something like that.* – South Tyneside

Others felt that promotions using systems already in place for young people would be effective,

*Teenagers tend to go for the bus pass. It would be nice if you could combine the bus pass with a voucher or entrance ticket.* – South Tyneside

A fear was expressed in London that young people are often forgotten when sport and cultural activities are promoted,

*There is so much unemployment among teenagers. You don't really see many activities. I would like to know there is stuff going on for young people.* – London

### **Parents and families**

Participants felt there is an important role for parents in the health and wellbeing of their children.

*Parents can be motivated and encouraged to take part in things for children. Some activities, all the parents come together.* – South Tyneside

For some having support from family and friends to improve your wellbeing is essential,

*The most important [in promoting wellbeing] is the family, the people around you. If you don't have family your friends are very important. This is very important for motivation. – London*

Another participant agreed with this view,

*If you don't have family support it is hard to make changes. They help you to be motivated. – London*

For example one participant felt there was a very simple step which could be taken by parents,

*Parents should encourage you to go out more rather than sitting in front of the TV. That would be a good start. – London*

### **Retired and older people**

Participants said that for older people, who might be missing their work routines on retirement, could be encouraged to take part in something with a group of like-minded people and/ or to share their knowledge and experience,

*They can really pass on their skills and knowledge and train them to pass on their knowledge to young people. – South Tyneside*

## **6.2 What other organisations can do**

Suggestions were also made for specific organisations to support the delivery of wellbeing programmes.

### **Schools, community groups and the third sector**

A number of participants saw a role for schools in encouraging children to participate from an early age,

*For small children at school I would have maybe the fitness or PE teacher actually organising something for them at playtime. Within school time though not after-school because a lot of kids don't want to stay in school. – South Tyneside*

Others felt that schools that don't have the skills or facilities in house could share with others to enable more children to take part,

*Some schools have a really big playground so they could do some competitions, which is physical, whereas another school may not have these kind of facilities. – South Tyneside*

Participants were clear that local clubs should be as inclusive as possible in the activities themselves and how they are promoted,

*All clubs or societies should have a remit to open their doors to as diverse a number of people as possible. For example a rowing club. Their remit should be wide. Physical and cultural clubs too. – London*

In London participants felt there was a role for community members to come together to make change,

*What about the community? Maybe if everyone in an area is feeling distance [from cultural and physical activities] is a barrier they could get together and create a petition or work together to gain better access for themselves. – London*

### **Health and social care professionals**

One person with experience of obesity in her family felt that people should be shocked out of their habitual behaviour,



*One of my cousins has got three children. Him and his partner are obese and they've let their children become obese. I think social workers need to talk to them. If you are getting your child obese it is abuse. Why aren't they getting into trouble for over-feeding their kids? – South Tyneside*

A number of participants cited the important role of doctor's surgeries and GPs in promoting wellbeing, *GPs. When people come to them for depression they should be referring them on to groups that can help them. – South Tyneside*

Another was excited by the idea of GPs overtly promoting wellbeing through physical activity, *The idea of GPs in the NHS getting involved in people's wellbeing and physical health is pretty amazing. In the GP surgery they could have more videos of people exercising to try and encourage you. There could be exercise people there showing you how to do exercise and be healthier. – London*

In order to do this effectively it was suggested that GPs should be fully aware of what is available locally, *GPs should be better informed of the options so they can advise you. They should be able to tell you what is available to you in your local area. – London*

And of taking a strategic overview on local issues, *The GP practice know the facts and figures. They measure those things and that data could be very important for looking at what actually are the major issues in these areas. I am thinking of a strategy you could develop. This would help you think about how [effectively] local resources are being used. – South Tyneside*

### **Local authorities**

Some people expressed concern that there was a limit to how motivated some individuals could be to take part in sport or cultural activities without some kind of external support. In response to another participant suggesting that wellbeing was entirely up to the individual she said,

*That's nice, but in reality it is not as simple as that. Sometimes there are many obstacles. The local government and local authorities should in fact be supporting things. – London*

For some there is a barrier between the work of the Local Authority and what is happening to people on the ground. It was suggested that there is an opportunity for local authorities to really engage with third sector organisations to get the wellbeing message out,

*[Local authorities] could save money in the long run by creating a network within a local authority. I know we've got Health Watch up here which kind of help promote [wellbeing] doesn't it? You've still got that kind of barrier between the council and the people. – South Tyneside*

Another person also explored what they felt to be a break-down in communication between local authority departments which was counter to providing useful information on the wellbeing services available to the community,

*Some departments do different things. There is no real co-ordination. I am not complaining, because I know the fact is there are cut-backs. We've been in recession for 12 years now and it hit councils really bad. They now need to get back on track and the PR needs to be sorted out. The diplomacy to come together [across departments] and talk and make sure they get the [wellbeing] message out. – South Tyneside*

People also spoke of the role of local authority run organisations,  
Facilitating engagement to gain insight  
[www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk](http://www.hopkinsvanmil.co.uk)

*Libraries and leisure centres. Local people always go there so it's a good place to advertise.* – London

One person suggested that the What Works Centre for Wellbeing could offer advisers who would co-ordinate national and local information on wellbeing,

*These are like field specialists. Someone who is able to advise you on what's going on in your area. Let you know how and where to go. Someone who is a specialist in his or her field, who is passionate about the activity who can advise you on what to do.* – London

### **National organisations and government**

For some it is really important that the wellbeing message is promoted centrally from the national government to ensure it has the necessary reach and impact,

*I think all things should be addressed at a national level. Have things downstream from central government. I think it would have a bigger impact from a local perspective.* – South Tyneside

It was felt that a national promotional campaign would help to get the wellbeing message out very widely,  
*Government should encourage people as well towards these opportunities with lots of advertising, "If you do these activities there will be certain rewards to your personal wellbeing".* – London

For some participants a top-down approach would work well,

*It's like a pyramid. It comes from the very top. Originally from Ministers, then to the MPs, then to the local councillors, then to the local people.* – London

Whereas for some there needs to be a much greater focus on local needs,

*Each area has different individual needs. I think that obviously you couldn't really have a blanket covering all the same areas. I don't know how you really get round that. That's like coming from a national to a local level. It could be different for each area.* – South Tyneside

For others it depends on the issue,

*Anti-social issues need to be dealt with on a national level.* – South Tyneside

A role for government was also identified in incentivising the promotion of wellbeing to employers running small-to-medium-sized enterprises (see below – business community).

One participant felt that national government could also incentivise sporting and cultural activities to the unemployed through Universal Credit and other benefit schemes,

*Has there been any thought being put in to Central Government to give a larger scheme for people that are on benefits? If they take part in a show or join a club and whatever they might get added benefit. This might be wellbeing and help them to get off benefits or something like obesity.* – South Tyneside

### **The business community**

For some there should be an onus on businesses to support the wellbeing of their employees. One participant felt this was particularly true of a large workshop working in a very sedentary role,

*I think big companies need to deal with [wellbeing] issues. If you're sitting in a call centre for 40 hours a week you've got to have some social responsibility. Maybe getting a big corporate discount on a gym [membership].* – South Tyneside

Others felt this would work well for large corporations, but would be more of a challenge for small and medium-sized enterprises who would not necessarily have the available funds,

*SMEs are cash-strapped. There are no incentives. If the government were to give tax incentives for this exact thing...then that could be a possibility even for small to medium-sized companies.* – South Tyneside

In London participants had mixed experiences of being offered wellbeing programmes at work. One participant felt that third sector organisations could work with companies to make sure they understand the wellbeing message. It was felt this was a specific role for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing,

*It's really important that if some charities, like your Centre, communicate with people in the workplace that there are lots of benefits of having high wellbeing at work. I used to work for British Airways, they used to mention wellbeing.* – London

Others didn't have such a positive experience,

*In my company no one thinks about wellbeing, even internally. They only care about the fire alarm practice once a week. This is health and safety. That's all.* – London

Some suggested that larger corporations could take a role in sponsoring wellbeing programmes,

*If there is a series of [wellbeing] courses around the country. You may have Nike promoting it because it's a sports group. They may pay for it.* – South Tyneside

Others echoed this view and said they had specific examples of this happening in their local area,

*Private companies should do things for the public as well and for the community, not just employees. McDonald's in my area provides all the equipment to clean the canal.* – London

The key messages for stakeholders are listed below:

#### **What Works Centre for Wellbeing:**

- Identify field specialists to support people in an area to identify what is going on, to be a passionate advocate and to provide a bridge between the national and local picture
- Communicate with people in the workplace the benefits of having high wellbeing at work

#### **Schools, community groups and the third sector**

- Encourage children to participate from an early age
- Share facilities locally to expand what is available for everyone
- Act inclusively
- Come together as a community to make change

#### **Health and social care professionals**

- Shock people out of habitual negative behaviour such as over-eating
- Encourage GPs surgeries to refer people to local organisations and to promote wellbeing in their surgeries
- Make sure GPs are fully aware of what is available locally
- Encourage surgeries to use their knowledge of the local picture to develop wellbeing strategies and use local resources effectively

### **Local authorities**

- Provide support to vulnerable individuals so that they too can access local wellbeing services
- Take the opportunity of really engaging with third sector organisations to get the wellbeing message out,
- Use existing PR channels to provide useful information on the wellbeing services available to the community,
- Ensure that all departments involved in wellbeing co-ordinate their activities
- Use local authority funded services to promote wellbeing

### **National organisations and government**

- Promote the wellbeing message centrally to ensure it has the necessary reach and impact
- Develop a national promotional campaign
- Deal with anti-social behaviour at a national level
- Incentivise the promotion of wellbeing to employers running small-to-medium-sized enterprises
- Incentivise sporting and cultural activities to the unemployed through Universal Credit and other benefit schemes

### **The business community**

- Support employee wellbeing
- Encourage larger corporations to sponsor wellbeing programmes

## 7. Concluding remarks

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The four sport, culture and wellbeing dialogue sessions in two locations demonstrated clearly that at a fundamental level, from our earliest childhood, sport and culture can have an extremely significant impact on wellbeing. The report concludes that physical and cultural activities are effective as a route to improving wellbeing. They provide joy, inspiration and a state away from everyday life which can be all absorbing and put you in a different and often improved state of mind.

Participants were more comfortable with defining sport in it's broadest terms from elite sports to physical activity including everyday household chores which require an expenditure of energy. They defined culture as a way of life, referring to group activities such as festivals, weddings, musical events and drama groups which bond people and activities which bring cultures closer together such as travel and weddings. Of course in this definition they also embraced creative endeavour such as the performing and visual arts.

A core idea in the dialogue was one of infectious happiness, drawing on the joy of others to improve your own wellbeing.

For most participants making a division between the wellbeing impact of spectating and participating in sport and culture is a false dichotomy. Reaching out and appreciating what's available; sometimes making outward connections; sometimes taking time out for oneself without the demands of anyone else; sometimes losing oneself in the flow of the moment in a positive way were all seen as extremely beneficial to wellbeing and occur when either participating or watching. It is important that decision makers bear this in mind when thinking about wellbeing and formulating new policies in this area.

Equally important was the use of language when promoting sport and culture as a route to wellbeing. Many participants preferred terms such as *fun*, *enjoyment*, *friendship* and *inspiring*. For some the term wellbeing is potentially a barrier to people who might otherwise be excited by sporting and cultural events. They suggested subtler marketing techniques and use of language to engage potential participants and spectators.

Participants in the dialogue were clear that there is an opportunity for the What Works Centre for Wellbeing to be a passionate advocate for the value of sport and culture to wellbeing; to identify local field specialists to support people in an area to identify opportunities available to them; and to provide a bridge between the national and local picture. Participants emphasised the need for individuals to make their own choices about how sport and culture can improve wellbeing but also felt that there is a role to play for local, regional and national government, the education system and the business community in promoting sport and culture as a really effective route to wellbeing.

All participants were encouraged by the dialogic approach and many hoped there would be further opportunities for individuals to share their views using this methodology. They hope that the Centre will take the findings resultant from their fruitful discussions further.

## 8. Acknowledgements

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HVM is enormously grateful to the public dialogue participants in South Tyneside and London. They made a great contribution to the programme in honestly and openly sharing their lived experience of participation in and watching sporting and cultural activities. All participants were engaging and committed to giving up their Saturdays to take part. Some of their voices can be heard, talking about their experience of the process, in the short film *The Excitement of Sport and Culture* available here:

[http://bit.ly/SCW\\_participantvoices](http://bit.ly/SCW_participantvoices).

The specialist contributors to the programme who gave their time and knowledge to both the delivery team and the participants helped us all reflect meaningfully on sport, culture and wellbeing. We acknowledge those who attended sessions giving presentations and providing information in response to participant questions: Nancy Hey from the What Works Centre for Wellbeing; Catherine Mottram and Andrew Honeyman from DCMS; Louise Mansfield from the Centre's sport and culture evidence team; Catherine Parker from Public Health England; Councillor Moira Smith, Councillor Alan Kerr, Alison Saleh, Tom Hall and Richard Barber from South Tyneside Council; Lucy Smith, Councillor Barrie Hargrove, Tara Quinn, Coral Flood, Donna Wiggins from Lambeth and Southwark Councils, Helen Shearn, Head of SLaM Arts Strategy, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. Helen Shearn gave us links to materials<sup>10</sup> which were very helpful as we designed the dialogues.

We are equally grateful to those presenters, and others, who agreed to be filmed for the stakeholder voxpops available here: <http://bit.ly/sport-culture-wellbeing> including Catherine Parker, North East Public Health England Centre; Gregor Henderson, Public Health England; Councillor Jim Dickson, Lambeth Borough Council; Sue Owen, Permanent Secretary, Department for Culture, Media and Sport. These helped participants to understand the context in which they were discussing sport, culture and wellbeing and the importance of the discussion to policy makers.

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<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government. *Health Attendance? the impact of cultural engagement and sports participation on health and satisfaction with life in Scotland*, 2013

NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, *Wellbeing self-assessment*, 2006

<http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=105935>

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# What Works | Wellbeing

Creating Connections  
Hopkins Van Mil

Dialogue findings prepared by:

Hopkins Van Mil: Creating Connections Ltd

Company No. 0903788

Registered Office in England and Wales: 6a Dean's Yard, London SW1P 3NP

T: 07985 514638 / 07961 887081

E: [info@hopkinsvanmil.co.uk](mailto:info@hopkinsvanmil.co.uk)

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