



what works
wellbeing

What impact does sport and dance participation have on young people's wellbeing? How can we turn the evidence into action?



the big picture

Taking part in physical activity like sport and dance can be good for our wellbeing. It makes us more satisfied and happier with life, and feel less anxious and depressed.

However, most of what we know is about adults. This briefing is based on a systematic review that was carried out to investigate how taking part in sport and dance affects the subjective wellbeing of healthy young people between 15 and 24 years. Subjective wellbeing describes the good and bad feelings that arise from what people do and think: feelings like happiness or sadness, meaningfulness or futility, relaxation or stress.

The review covers all published studies from the past 10 years. We also examined unpublished reports produced by, or for, sport and dance organisations since 2013.

We carried out some detailed analysis of survey data to understand if young people who participated in sport and dance have higher wellbeing, and what this may be due to.

There is limited good quality evidence for sport and dance impacts on wellbeing. We have an opportunity to measure and collect data in this area and use wellbeing evaluations to build national and local evidence.

“
Having a laugh and a great time while playing sport in the park helps mentally.
”

Public dialogue
participant, London

In partnership with:

what evidence did we find?

There are three types of evidence

- | | | |
|---|------------------|---|
|  | strong | We can be confident that the evidence can be used to inform decisions. |
|  | promising | We have moderate confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions. |
|  | initial | We have low confidence. Decision makers may wish to incorporate further information to inform decisions. |

Strong, promising and initial evidence refer to high, moderate and low quality evidence / confidence as per GRADE and CERQual guidance. For further information on these classifications, please see the Centre's [Methods Guide](#).

All evidence should be considered alongside questions of possible benefits and risks, affordability, acceptability, feasibility and wider impacts, including equity issues, in the user setting. Where the evidence is less strong, these other considerations become even more important.

yoga and group-based activities



These looked at physical activities, including body conditioning, aerobic exercise, dance training, hip hop dance and sports including volleyball, ice skating, Nintendo Wii Active Games

-  **yoga-type activities** have the potential to improve subjective wellbeing.
-  **group-based and peer-supported sport and dance programmes** may promote wellbeing enhancement in youth groups.

how activities are carried out matters



-  **Peer support 'exer-gaming' programmes** can promote group cohesion and positive social reinforcement for taking part in physical activity in overweight young people.
-  **Ensuring positive feelings of competency, relationships with others and autonomy** in competitive team sport (volleyball) players improves wellbeing and creates a more positive sport experience.

No evidence for your activity?

A lack of evidence does not mean that there are no wellbeing benefits from taking part. It only shows that no-one has measured the wellbeing impacts.

You can help us to understand the effect of different physical activity and improve the evidence base by evaluating the wellbeing impacts of your projects and programmes.

what evidence did we find?

(continued)

wellbeing benefits of taking part



Based on sector evaluations, the evidence shows that depending on the type of activity and the way it's delivered, taking part is associated with wellbeing improvements connected to:

- social connectedness
- pleasure
- sense of purpose
- confidence
- interpersonal skills
- happiness
- relaxation
- creative skills and expression
- aspiration and ambition.

However, taking part can also be associated with negative wellbeing in participants, which was connected to participants' concerns about competency and capability.

evidence for different activities



- Yoga or Baduanjin-Qigong** can improve feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, attention and overall subjective wellbeing.
- Yoga** can improve overall mood.
- Aerobic and hip-hop dance** lead to positive mood enhancement compared to ice-skating and body conditioning.
- Dance training** is effective in lowering self-reported depression.
- Empowering young girls through peer-supported exercise** has a positive effect on self-efficacy.

Alone or together? Inside or out?

Analysis from a European and American Survey shows that it matters where you are and whether you are alone or with others.

On average, across all activities including sport, those who were alone demonstrated lower happiness, higher anxiety and lower sense of purpose.

The survey confirmed that being outdoors is better for young people's wellbeing than being inside.

what evidence did we find?

(continued)



Is subjective wellbeing higher for young people who participate in sports?

Analysis of survey data shows us that young people who take part in physical activity rate their overall wellbeing higher; are happier in general; and find their life more worthwhile. These findings are especially strong for those who take part on a weekly basis.

However, **having a job has greater links to higher overall wellbeing than exercise.** In addition, there is evidence that physical activity is not the factor causing the increased life satisfaction: it may be the knock-on effect of being physically healthier, or simply that happier young people are participating in the first place.

But that measure looks at wellbeing reported for life overall. The evidence looks different when you take into account how young people feel 'in the moment' they are participating. This is an important way of measuring, because it can reduce comparisons with social norms - like income levels - and focusses purely on how a young person feels throughout the course of a day, during different activities.

When you look 'in the moment', the importance of employment on wellbeing is reduced. The evidence shows that there is no difference in happiness between young people in or out of work. This means physical activity has a stronger link than employment, on moment to moment experiences. We are confident that this is caused by physical activity because we can see wellbeing increasing during exercise, then reducing again afterwards.

Measuring wellbeing: life overall versus 'in the moment' wellbeing

Evaluative measures of subjective wellbeing (SWB) are people's assessments of how they feel about their lives, overall.

Examples of evaluative measures of subjective wellbeing include: life satisfaction (Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?), worthwhileness of life, or assessments of how people feel overall on a daily basis (e.g., How happy/anxious did you feel yesterday/do you feel today?).

Looking at 'in the moment' wellbeing is taking **experiential measures** into account.

These capture how people feel over a period of time, based on what they are doing moment to moment.

Measuring experience-based subjective wellbeing requires a direct assessment of people's experiences, which normally involves asking them to report how they spend their time and how they feel during or after a range of different activities.



case study: StreetGames' Doorstep Sports Clubs

StreetGames, a registered charity since 2007, make sport more widely available for disadvantaged young people. Through projects, such as their Doorstep Sports Clubs (DSC), StreetGames strive to maximise the power of sport to improve young lives and to positively impact deprived communities.

DSCs are fun, accessible and affordable sports clubs that offer young people in disadvantaged communities opportunities to take part in sport or physical activity.

The DSC programme runs in England and Wales where it is supported by Sport England, Communities First and Sport Wales.

Since 2012, over 90,000 young people aged 14 to 25 years old have been engaged through over 1,000 DSCs.

A key aim of DSCs is to grow the knowledge, skills and confidence of participants so that they are motivated to be independently active in the long-term – ultimately developing lifelong sporting habits.

StreetGames continually monitor

and evaluate participant numbers and profiles, as well as attendance on the DSC programme.

Session observations and conversations with participants and delivery staff provide further detailed information about the delivery and impact of the projects.

A participant survey in 2015 received over 550 responses. The survey included questions on the quality of DSC sessions, the social, economic and sporting needs of participants, their physical and mental wellbeing, and their personal development.

The survey also included a number of questions extracted from the ONS well-being survey, the responses to which showed a higher than average percentage of DSC participants scored in the 'very high' category for life satisfaction, happiness and worth.

The survey found that 69% of the participants reported that they are taking part in sport more regularly since they started coming to their DSC, with 75% attending at least once a week. 37% expressed that this was their only sporting

outlet and the majority of those who do take part in sport, only do so at their school or college. Only 16% engage in a local sports club and even fewer (14%) attend sessions at a local leisure centre.

Concerning wellbeing, compared with national data for 16-19 year olds, DSC participants scored significantly higher than average in the 'very high' category for happiness (54% compared to 37%), life satisfaction (52% compared to 32%) and worth (49% compared to 32%).

There is clear evidence that DSCs are affecting an increase in physical and social wellbeing for young people through regular participation in sporting activity.

Equally, StreetGames' young volunteers are having a positive social impact by supporting the provision of sport for others, while simultaneously experiencing a benefit to their personal wellbeing, interpersonal skills and employment prospects. For more information you can visit the Street Games website at streetgames.org or email ceris.anderson@streetgames.org.

how can we turn this evidence into action?

1

Overall, participation in sport and dance activities are positive for wellbeing

For **commissioners** interested in wellbeing as well as physical and mental health, there is a case for supporting sport and dance programmes for young people.

But which activities are better than others? How should a sport programme be designed to create the greatest improvements in wellbeing, especially for those experiencing the lowest levels?

In the published literature from the past 10 years, there is limited good quality evidence, and very little conducted in the UK.

To find out more about the Culture and Sport Evidence programme, please visit:
whatworkswellbeing.org

2

Build the evidence base for wellbeing in culture and sport

Building the evidence on wellbeing in culture and sport will help to understand what works for wellbeing, for whom, when and where.

This in turn will help **practitioners** in the community sport and physical activity sectors to know how programmes should be designed and implemented to best improve wellbeing.

This will also help **funders** and **commissioners** to know what works, for whom, where and when.

3

Measure what matters through quality evaluation

How do we get there? Embed evaluation into commissioning of sport and dance programmes, as well as design and delivery. **Funding bodies** need to request wellbeing evidence and fund evaluations for programmes to be able to carry out evaluations.

Evaluations need to be fit for purpose: high enough quality to draw conclusions, but appropriate for the size of the programme and the questions that need to be answered.

Projects could use consistent evaluation questions across the sector. This allows comparison of the impacts of different approaches and programmes.

Experiences are important for understanding impacts: evaluating wellbeing 'in the moment' will give us a different understanding from people's overall assessments of life and their wellbeing.

Process evaluations help to understand how impact and outcomes are achieved and are central to building knowledge about what works, for whom, in what contexts and for different types of activities.



more resources

You can find the following resources on our website: whatworkswellbeing.org

other evidence briefings

Culture and sport

Music and singing for healthy adults

Music and singing for adults with diagnosed conditions

Music and singing for adults with dementia

Community

Housing

Wellbeing inequalities in Britain

Work and learning

Retirement and wellbeing

Unemployment, (re)employment and wellbeing

Learning at work and wellbeing

Job quality and wellbeing

how-to guides

How to use the ONS 4 in your survey

How to measure wellbeing inequalities

discussion paper

Measuring wellbeing: a common currency



what works
wellbeing

www.whatworkswellbeing.org

@whatworksWB

We are an independent organisation set up to produce robust, relevant and accessible evidence on wellbeing. We work with individuals, communities, businesses and government, to enable them to use this evidence make decisions and take action to improve wellbeing.

The Centre is supported by the ESRC and partners to produce evidence on wellbeing in four areas: work and learning; culture and sport; community; and cross-cutting capabilities in definitions, evaluation, determinants and effects.



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