

# Impact Report 2023-2024



# Introduction

**On behalf of Active Black Country, we are proud to share our inaugural Impact Report with you for the year 2023-24.**

Active Black Country exists to create and maximise opportunities for local people to find it easier to be physically active, move more and play sport. We have a strong sense of purpose, clear values and are culturally driven to enable change; sometimes we act as a 'catalyst' and take a lead, whilst on other occasions we seek to work through and support other partners.

The Impact Report captures some of the work that has involved Active Black Country but has been reliant upon the brilliant network of local community partners. Some of the stories showcased across the report, highlight the dedication of our partners, stakeholders and people who work to 'Create an Active Black Country.'

Among the year's highlights was the presentation of a report in Parliament in January of Speedo Swim United and Active Black Country's Pop-up Pool initiative, which brought temporary pools to seven schools in disadvantaged and ethnically diverse communities across the Black Country and positively impacted pupils' swim ability and classroom behaviours.

Other projects such as Phase 3 of the Opening Schools Facilities programme, the first Aquatics Sports Showcase at Sandwell Aquatics Centre and a raft of cycling, walking and water safety events held at Merry Hill were also very well received.

Active Black Country has been able to step up its support for schools and community organisations thanks to a greater level of funding from Sport England's Commonwealth Active Communities Fund and grant awards from the likes of the Department for Education to invest in the Opening School Facilities programme.

In 2024/2025 there are some fantastic opportunities to continue our local work to create a future Black Country where all ages, abilities and backgrounds are able to be active, move and play sport.

On behalf of Active Black Country thank you for your huge efforts and we look forward to our future work together.

**Amanda Tomlinson, Chair of Active Black Country Board  
Ian Carey, CEO of Active Black Country**



# Impact in Numbers

**£295,589**

invested in 24 schools to fund Opening Schools Facilities programme – 78 different extracurricular and community projects took place



More than

**300**

women engaged in physical activity opportunities in *Get Out Get Active* programme



Awarded  
**£200,000**

from the West Midlands Combined Authority's Inclusive Communities Fund to manage and deliver the Black Country Water Safety Programme

**115**

community organisations benefited from the Together Fund and B2022 Small Grants schemes, a total investment of **£338,371**

**40**

asylum seekers from Afghanistan benefit from programme of football and ESOL lessons at Walsall FC Community Hub



For the Gen 22 project, ABC achieved  
**85 placements**

for disadvantaged young people working in collaboration with 19 partners, with 12 organisations hosting placements.



2,000 children improve swimming skills thanks to Pop-Up Pool programme

**79.1%**

of participants demonstrated an increase in their ability to swim

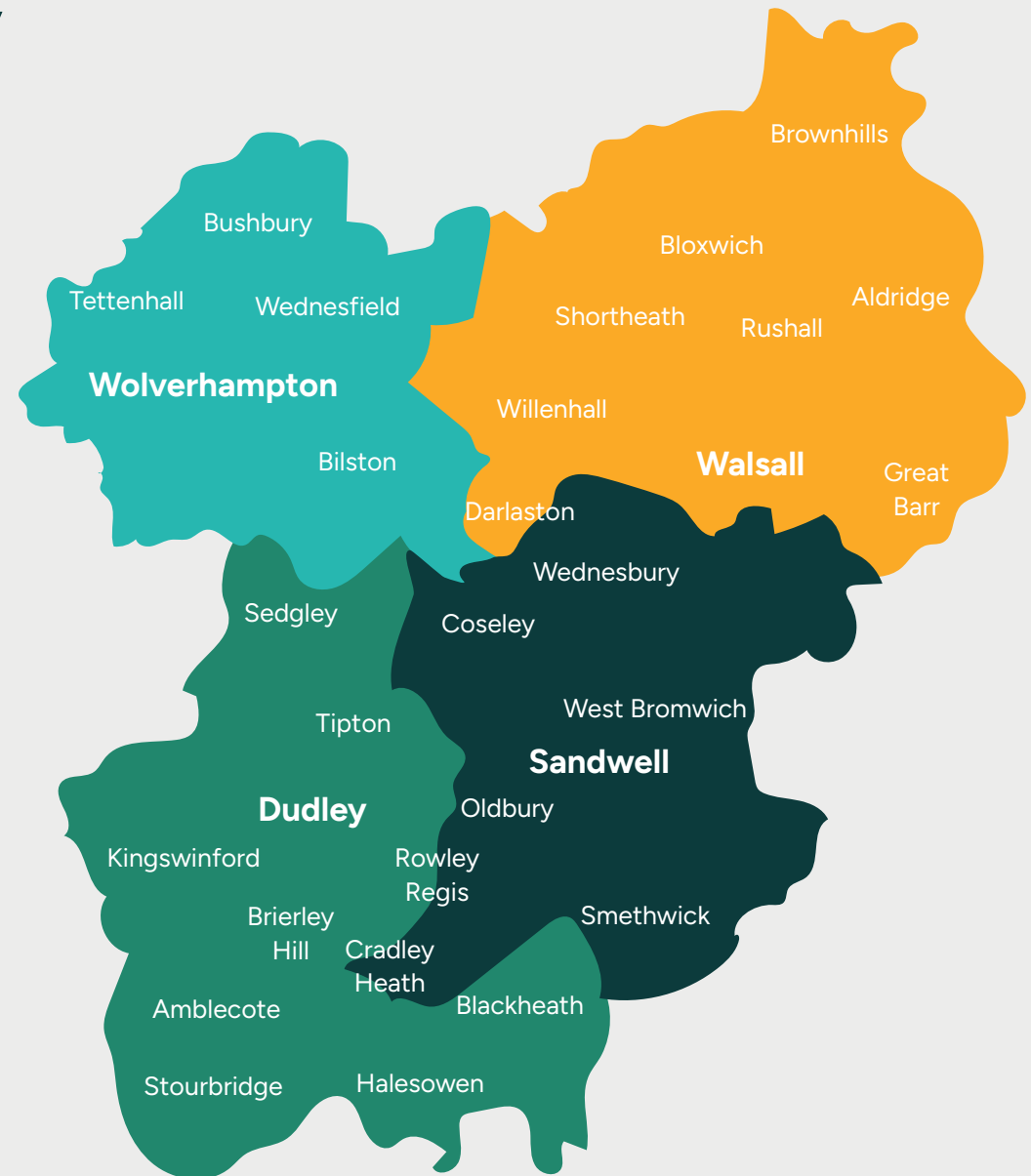
# The Black Country

**FOUR**  
strategic centres

**30**  
towns

**1.26 million**  
growing population

"Of the 1.26 million population of The Black Country, over 437,720 are classed as being physically inactive"



# Our role in tackling inactivity

The core purpose is to understand the Black Country's communities and residents, to connect and collaborate with partners and influence policy, strategy, investment and delivery of interventions. To this end, we established a new Strategic Investment Committee, promoting joint working across key Black Country stakeholders, to ensure greater connectivity with a diverse mix of partners. We also started work with partners on the development of the Black Country Canals Strategy and a Built Facility Planning Assessment Model exercise.

In 2023-24, we made significant strides forward in ongoing work towards delivering the six objectives of the Creating an Active Black Country strategy to tackle the inequalities that prevent local people from being active.

We continued to strengthen relationships and work collaboratively with the councils in Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton as well as a range of partners and community organisations to inspire and enable people to lead an active lifestyle, creating a broad and diverse range of opportunities for individuals that are both inclusive and attainable.

Work across the Black Country is set against the backdrop of an undeniably challenging situation for the region. Deep-rooted deprivation and persistent health inequalities mean that the Black Country has the highest proportion of inactive adults out of any Active Partnership area in England.

**Of the 1.26 million Black Country population, more than half a million residents live in 20% of the most deprived parts of England, with activity levels**

**significantly determined by their income, ethnicity and where they live. Over 437,720 are classed as being physically inactive.**

In a survey designed to gather the views of Black Country residents' on how movement or exercise makes them feel, people remarked that they are:

"Happy, healthy and for that time I'm in a workout nothing else is on my mind, I feel free. It helps with my anxiety and has helped me with depression"

"Exercise relieves my stress, helps me work through problems or challenges at work and makes me feel good"

And a snapshot of views on the barriers preventing people from being physical active:

"It's bad weather, time, not feeling safe to walk outdoors alone, lack of green space locally"

"There is a lack of safe cycle infrastructure ... painted cycle lanes are few and far between, badly designed, and blocked by parked cars"



The ABC team recognises that delivering the strategy to unite the Black Country, and create active, healthier people and places requires a huge collective effort.

We are finetuning joint approaches and desired outcomes to respond to shifting trends and demands in the Black Country, working with partners across the four local authorities. Place-based projects are yielding some success stories, and Sport England this year announced a long-term commitment to work in the region as part of its Place Expansion programme.

Backed by strong intelligence and insight, we are advancing strategic goals and implementation plans to support national and regional policy. Progress can be viewed through the lens of various case studies and projects supporting our four priority themes: Education; Health & Wellbeing; Communities; Workforce, Skills & Employment.

# Communities

**The goal is to increase the range of opportunities to be active across Black Country boroughs, ensuring they are inclusive, attainable and support stronger, better connected, resilient communities. Community organisations have unparalleled reach into under-represented groups and fundamentally understand their local people and places. In the past year, Black Country partners have engaged with and learnt from community groups through a number of initiatives.**

In the wake of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, investment from the Together Fund and B2022 Small Grants schemes helped various projects to get off the ground, boosting activity levels in the Black Country. In total, 115 community organisations received funds. £253,237 of Together Fund grants were distributed along with £135,133 of B2022 Small Grants Scheme grants.

Overall, 42 projects included a level of focus on children and young people; 62 projects included focus on those from low socio economic groups; another 24 projects paid some detailed attention to people with a disability or long-term health condition; and 27 projects included an emphasis on people from culturally diverse communities.

In spring 2022, Sport England and The National Lottery invested in Black Country partners to deliver the Commonwealth Active Communities (CAC) programme. The role included advocacy, role modelling, provision of insight and support, and facilitation on behalf of partners to ensure collective impact.

The CAC programme aligns with Active Black Country's strategic objectives and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan, using Community Connectors to engage with communities and activate local assets, facilitating more opportunities for people to be physically active. The

connectors helped to co-produce and jointly design physical activity opportunities that met the needs of local people. They strengthened existing relationships and built new ones, producing action plans with local authority partners to support delivery.

The aim was to use the 2022 Commonwealth Games as a catalyst to tackle inactivity, leveraging a place-based and learning-led approach to deliver wider benefits in terms of the environment, community engagement and a 'whole system' way of working.

Two significant projects in Wolverhampton highlight the programme's success.

**A green social prescribing walk** utilised the Bradley Arm stretch of canal near the Bilston Urban Village Health Centre. Community Connector Jack Davies (hosted by Canal and River Trust and City of Wolverhampton Public Health) partnered with Health and Beyond and developed a weekly walk initiative by the canal, using an under-utilised asset with potential to activate local residents. The health centre-led walk was actively signposted to local patients, has been incredibly successful with more than 50 participants taking part at its peak.



We were the locality lead for the **Get Out Get Active** (GOGA) programme funded by Activity Alliance that supports disabled and non-disabled people to enjoy being active together. Tasked with exploring the potential of faith centres and faith leaders to reach the most inactive residents in the city, which has one of the largest Indian populations in the country, we engaged with the Sikh community and identified a need for a low intensity group-based activity for women who felt isolated during and post-COVID. Following recruitment of a Punjabi-speaking instructor, we developed a yoga programme that was run at six Gurdwaras, engaging over 300 Asian women in physical activity opportunities in environments where they felt safe and comfortable.

## Feedback

Walk participants:

**“We loved meeting so many nice new people, as it is good practice for us to reduce our language barrier. We have really enjoyed walking as it makes us feel healthier and in general very good for us at our age.”**

**“If I’m honest, I wouldn’t have started this walk, I would have probably only just got out of bed and been stuck inside. This now kickstarts our week, and we prioritise coming each week”**

## Key learnings

- For the Community Connectors, we started to see a shift from delivering physical activity interventions as an end in themselves to using physical activity as a conduit to engaging with communities and co-creating local physical activity interventions.
- COVID lockdowns led to changes to our GOGA delivery model that positively impacted our subsequent work in 2023. Inspired by a social prescribing pilot undertaken with PCNs in the Black Country, we learnt about the potential reach and expanded role of the faith workforce. Recognising the position of faith leaders as trusted sources of information, we developed a course to upskill them to cascade positive messages about physical activity to the local community during their weekly services, which significantly increased engagement with our GOGA programme.



# Children, Young People and Families

**Key to ABC's strategic approach is a commitment to providing young people with the best start in life through a range of varied and diverse opportunities to be active.**

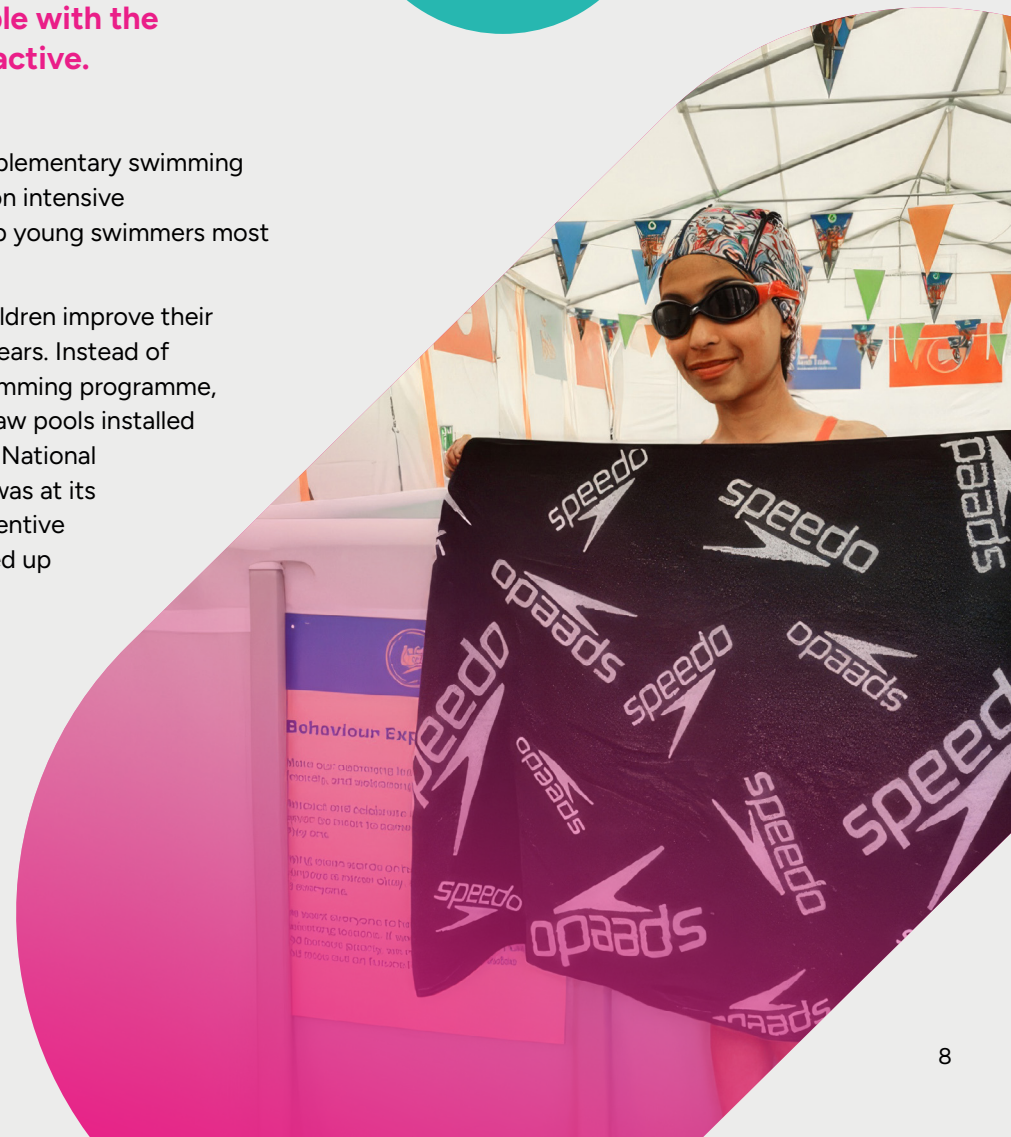
We collected insights in relation to primary school swimming for the last four years, developing a comprehensive evidence base into the swimming ability of Year 6 school leavers. These are vital learnings given Royal Life Saving Society data into the number of drowning-related incidents across the West Midlands and the fact that almost all educational establishments are located within walking distance of open water.

We stepped up the focus on improving swimming attainment rates. Additional funding from Sport England enabled us to appoint a Community Aquatics Delivery Officer, whilst a partnership with Speedo led to the delivery of the Swim United Campaign and a Pop-up Pool programme.

We secured sponsorship investment from Speedo to fund a Pop-Up Pool programme using swimming attainment data from the academic year. Working with a range of industry and local partners, we coordinated the project including identifying a delivery partner, co-designing and supporting with implementation of the programme and leading the evaluation and learning.

The initiative reimaged what supplementary swimming lessons could look like – focusing on intensive interventions that inspire and equip young swimmers most at risk of falling behind.

As a result, we've helped 2,000 children improve their swimming skills over the last two years. Instead of overhauling the current school swimming programme, the Pop-Up Pool project – which saw pools installed at 7 schools targeting areas where National Curriculum swimming attainment was at its lowest – demonstrated how an inventive and efficient intervention can speed up a learner's swim education and get them water-safe quicker.



In January 2024, Speedo Swim United and Active Black Country presented the report and findings in Parliament. The impact of the intensive Learn to Swim sessions was huge:

**742**  
pupils took part

**36%**

Of 308 swimmers who couldn't swim at all before the programme, **112 could swim 25m after it.**

**15.6m** Average improvement in pupil swimming ability.

**79.1%**

of participants demonstrated an increase in their ability to swim.  
9 out of 10 pupils successfully demonstrated safe self-rescue improvement on the programme.

ABC led on the work which also aids our development of Healthy Placemaking, ensuring that the utilisation and activation of places and spaces is at the forefront of partners' thinking and decision-making.

Unintended outcomes were also reported, in relation to the benefits for schools. An improvement in pupil behaviour was reported, with examples given of time in the pool being used successfully as an incentive to

impact on pupils at risk of exclusion. Similarly, pool time was successfully programmed to improve the punctuality of pupils who were persistently late.

As a result of this initiative, we propose to deliver two key pieces of work: a £200,000 Black Country Water Safety Programme, funded by the United by 22 Inclusive Communities Fund; and development of industry guidance into the use of Pop-Up Pools.



## Feedback

"Prior to the programme I'd never been swimming before. I was terrified of drowning in the water. It was great that the pool would be coming to our school because we'd get the chance to learn how to swim. It was exciting and I enjoyed learning to swim with my friends."

St Mary's pupil

"The programme was brilliant. I really liked the swimming teacher, he encouraged me and motivated me to keep on going, even when I was tired. I loved winning my towel and getting *Swimmer of the Day*."

Tameside pupil

## Key learnings

- We know from studying school swimming statistics over recent years that there is a correlation between deprivation and low swimming performance.
- The sector needs the Pop-Up Pool guidance document to determine viability of a programme and schools need to consider some of the additional costs required such as electric installation and increases in utility costs. These should be factored into the decision-making process when considering this intervention against other school swimming options provided by leisure centre operators.



## 2023/24 Black Country School Games Programme

With partners, we designed and implemented the 2023/24 Black Country School Games Programme for children and young people across the region, providing them with opportunities to learn through physical activity and competition to achieve their personal best. We worked with the County Alliance, comprising a range of education partners and stakeholders, as well as Black Country School Games Organisers, to deliver the Games. ABC also worked with partners to evaluate the programme, gaining feedback and insight into activity habits for future programmes and opportunities.

As part of the programme, an Inspire Festival ran at Aldersley Stadium, an aquatics showcase took place at Sandwell Aquatics Centre and a multi-sport festival was held at the University of Wolverhampton which saw the participation of around 1,500 children from some 100 schools in a range of activities and taster sports sessions.

Schools identified and brought groups of pupils to ensure enriching experiences for all attending, with plenty of positive feedback from participants and school staff. Deliverers were also receptive to the exposure and opportunity to promote their offer.



## Feedback

**“Children get to engage in physical activity and a variety of sports with the emphasis on being all inclusive. Since the pandemic, physical activity has become even more important and you don’t have to have a sporting talent to take part which is partly the message of the games.”**

Billy Downie, chair of the School Games organising committee:

**“I really enjoyed meeting new people and being out in the sunshine”**

**“I enjoyed learning new skills and a new sport”**

Participants

**“Great event, especially having the engagement trail along with the competitions for students to see and experience.”**

Summer Games deliverer:

## Key learnings

- Engaging with a range of local deliverers including clubs, CICs and charities to provide activities enabled pupils and school staff to experience and understand opportunities available in their local community – with some of them following up with organisations such as The Royal Life Saving Society and Canal & River Trust to add fresh activity elements to their curriculum.
- The breadth of activities and range of formats was well received by schools, challenging them to ensure their sports offering is equally inclusive. But it remains difficult to track transition into community activity following School Games, so gauging the lasting impact is a challenge, particularly when pupils move from primary to secondary school.
- Blending key messages around water safety alongside other aquatics opportunities worked really well, ensuring children are able to put into practice some of the learning undertaken on the day.

# Health and Wellbeing

We work alongside the local Integrated Care System to enable pathways to activity, connecting the social prescribing system and supporting health and allied health professionals to embed physical activity within their practice. This has led to a number of initiatives over the last 12 months that demonstrated impact against both ABC priorities and those of the Black Country health system.

## Supporting Asylum Seekers

In spring 2023, a cohort of asylum seekers from Afghanistan were temporarily housed in the Park Inn Hotel next to The Walsall FC Poundland Bescot Stadium. To make them feel welcome, a partnership was developed to explore the potential of engaging the young men in positive opportunities. Local stakeholders included Active Black Country, Walsall FC Foundation, Walsall Together, Refugees and Migrants' Centre, and One Walsall.

A programme of football, using funding provided by the Integrated Care Board, utilised the 3G artificial pitch next to the stadium, whilst also providing classroom-based English for Speakers of Other Languages lessons at the Walsall FC Community Hub over a 12-week period.


## Feedback

**"The first months when I became a refugee in this country, I felt lonely and depressed, but since I started playing football in this stadium it affected my whole feelings. It made me meet more friends and start new relationships – and it also made me feel better. May my mood and feelings get better again, and I owe all of this to your kindness and efforts. I really thank you."**

Participant

## Key Learnings

- The ESOL lessons provided by Walsall FC weren't initially taken up by many participants as the sessions clashed with prayer so an alternative arrangement was created, with a representative from Walsall College attending one of the football sessions and signing up 20 residents for accredited ESOL, all of whom proceeded to regularly attend. Participants being comfortable with the college environment and connecting into the local community has social value and raised the prospect of engaging residents in local volunteering opportunities.



**The activities engaged over 40 hotel residents and a key outcome was increased engagement with local health services**



## Social Prescribing

Social prescribing comes in many forms in the Black Country, with dedicated NHS-funded roles hosted by primary care and voluntary sector councils and additional capacity that sits within housing associations and community groups. We worked closely with the Black Country's social prescribing system to support the workforce with their understanding of the local activity-related opportunities that they could signpost clients towards.

One example included the **Wolverhampton Referral Programme**. Social prescribers in Wolverhampton sit within WVCA, the voluntary sector umbrella organisation for the city. Following engagement with the workforce that explored the types of activities that would benefit their clients, a bespoke programme was launched that incorporated: a light intensity group activity; aqua aerobics; walk with a therapist; and daytime dancing. The programme engaged 41 residents into activity, with the aqua aerobics being the most popular referral route.

## Feedback

**"We can already see they [Community Connector] can make links beyond the obvious groups who are our 'go-tos. Communities can be sceptical of drop in/out officers, so the Connectors longevity is impactful".**

Local Authority partner on Walk with a Therapist:

## Key Learnings

- Whilst referrals from social prescribers came steadily, a text message sent to suitable patients from a health centre in Bilston led to the majority of programme places being taken. This form of communication, from a trusted source of information, was vital in terms of reaching underrepresented groups.
- ABC commissioned a third party to deliver the walk with a therapist scheme. The referral information required exceeded the usual processes with which social prescribers in the city were familiar. This was time-consuming and created a barrier to them engaging effectively with that part of the programme.

## Sandwell Mental Health Programme

Working with partners, we developed the Sandwell Mental Health Programme in response to engagement with social prescribers with a view to aligning with the Integrated Care Partnership's strategic priorities on mental health and supporting the workforce. Insight from social prescribers highlighted that almost all of their service users were dealing with low-level mental ill-health.

**We partnered with Mind to:** bring more localised provision to the doorsteps of residents and tackle the barriers which prevent them living healthy, active lives; develop partnerships with health centres, GP practices and other primary care providers, social prescribing link workers and well-being coaches; provide tailored activity provision and services with local physical activity providers, upskilling individual coaches and teams in delivering accessible sessions.

**Two referral routes were funded:** **BoxClever Mentoring** delivered 12 weekly 60-minute fitness sessions at Langley Lodge, with non-contact boxing used as a recurrent theme and an end goal of a Wolf Run to motivate the group. 14 residents from Sandwell (ranging from 20 to 63-year-olds) took part in the sessions. **Sandwell and Birmingham Age UK** delivered weekly wellbeing walks from West Smethwick Park, providing activity opportunities to 10 inactive older Asian women. Their initiative sought to bring awareness of the importance of talking to others about mental health. The walk is now being delivered sustainably by volunteers.

## Feedback

**"Craig of BoxClever Mentoring has a talent and a passion for working with children and it really shows in the way my child talks about him at home. From the first interaction my child had with him, I think that had an amazing impact on them from day one! They have massively changed since working with Craig and it's down to him for showing them the right way to cope with things and for this, as parents, we are eternally grateful! We are so proud of the progress made."**

Participant's parent on a similar programme involving Hargate Primary School in West Bromwich:



# Healthy Placemaking

Increasing the range of physical assets, networks, facilities and places to get people active is a key priority for Active Black Country and considerable progress was made. The Black Country was one of the pilot areas for the first phase of the **Opening School Facilities (OSF) programme**, a Department for Education-funded initiative to support schools to open their sports facilities to both school and community users outside of curriculum time.

In line with strategic objectives, we identified schools in places that would benefit the most from the OSF intervention thanks to strong partnerships with the likes of ConnectEd in Wolverhampton, local authority public health teams, the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, the Violence Reduction Partnership, plus StreetGames.

Distributing funding where it was most in need – £295,589 of investment was provided to a total of 24 schools in Year 2 (an increase from 11 schools in Year 1); 78 different extracurricular and community projects took place with most being sustained into Year 3; 1,586 activity sessions were delivered with 2,690 children and young people attending them; 538 individual community users attended a school site to participate in a physical activity out of school hours.

It was critically important to build effective relationships with partner schools to enable continued programme progression, whilst communicating longer term programme objectives. Discussions with schools focussed heavily on the engagement of underrepresented groups and on the sustainability of projects for the longer term.

We streamlined “evidence of spend” processes to ensure accuracy and efficiency in the reclamation of grant funding for schools from the DfE.



One solution piloted at Gospel Oak School in Sandwell saw the introduction of a school-based Community Connector, part-funded through the OSF programme. The role adds capacity to the school to deliver community-focussed programmes, perform high quality outreach to assess needs in the locality, and to arrange delivery of projects to address this need. The benefits of having community-focussed capacity was also seen at the E-ACT schools in Walsall. A Regional Community Manager oversees the operational delivery of community programmes and has a remit to engage with the local community at three schools in the Borough. Willenhall E-ACT Academy reactivated its 25m pool for extracurricular use. With this additional capacity in place, OSF project development and delivery is much more efficient and impactful.

Year 3 of the programme includes the participation of an additional 21 schools.

## Feedback

**“Regular sports activities boosted children’s physical fitness and mental health, fostering a love for being active”**

**“We have provided a place where inclusivity has been at the forefront. This has given people with different fitness levels, backgrounds and socio economics a safe place”**

**“The project supported the increased use of facilities on the school site. The playing fields usage went from zero to facilitating up to four games each weekend”**

**“By removing financial barriers, we ensured that all pupils could access the sessions without families worrying about cost implications”**

Participant schools

## Key Learnings

- Support from ABC and programme partners resulted in schools maximising their allocated funding, which was an excellent result given the capacity challenges faced within schools, who naturally gravitate towards adding extracurricular provision to their portfolio rather than building a wider community offer that’s much more challenging and time-consuming.





## The Black Country Canals Strategy 2024-2029

Together with partners, we are developing the Black Country Canals Strategy 2024-2029 to unlock the potential of the region's waterways.

The Black Country is rich in both its natural and built heritage and environmental assets – including its extensive canal network, ancient geology, rich wildlife and open spaces. But too many of these assets are 'hidden', inaccessible or not celebrated by both residents and visitors alike.

### A pan-Black Country built facilities planning assessment

The assessment was undertaken to:

- support Active Black Country and individual local authorities in their strategic planning for swimming pools and sports halls provision.
- inform sport-specific strategies by National Governing Bodies of sport or other organisations.
- provide assessments to inform investment for swimming pools and sports halls.
- inform the health and wellbeing strategies of local authorities and the important role those facilities can play, helping to determine the future provision.

# Workforce, Skills and Employment

The Black Country People Plan sets out the ambition to develop a physical activity workforce that's reflective of the population and can engage and inspire local people to be active.

Funded by Sport England, the Gen 22 programme – a partnership with the other five West Midlands Active Partnerships – provided Active Black Country with the opportunity to lead on a programme that directly addresses People Plan priority areas. ABC also developed the evaluation framework and supported data collection in conjunction with Coventry University.

Using the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games as a catalyst, Gen 22 targeted people aged 16-24 years from disadvantaged backgrounds who volunteered for host organisations from the West Midlands that deliver social action through sport and physical activity. The aim was to build their confidence and self-esteem, develop life skills and ultimately to improve their employability for the physical activity sector.

Together, we recruited 458 young people to participate in the programme (ABC facilitated the provision of 85 volunteering placements within 12 different Gen 22 projects), considerably higher than the target of 360. Of this number, 56% were from the 16-18 age bracket, 27% considered themselves to have a disability or long-term health condition and 37% were from ethnically diverse communities. Among the Black Country projects was a collaboration with Walsall Wizards and Wolves Slam Basketball Clubs offering 15 young people the opportunity to complete Level 1 and 2 Basketball Coaching qualifications.

This initiative supported individuals to undertake 30-hour volunteering assignments connected to physical activity and wellbeing, creative or digital, and it made a huge impression – the volunteers and hosts confirmed that Gen 22 improved their confidence, mental health and connectedness to the local community and region.



**“It has helped  
me get an  
understanding of  
employability for  
my future”**

## Feedback

**"It has helped me get an understanding of employability for my future".**

**"Upskilling myself and learning how to deal with difficult situations through practical experience whilst volunteering".**

**"Opportunity to learn new skills and the staff have helped to create a map to getting a job in swimming".**

**"Got the chance to deliver sport sessions and turned into paid work as a sports coach".**

Participants

**"They've all shown the willingness to learn and most, I think 90% of them, are still involved in volunteering now as well which is brilliant. As a result of this, I do expect to move volunteers to progress to employment in the future. I want them to work towards it, and they are. They have got a lot more skill than I even realised"**

Host

## Key learnings

- The most positive aspects were: the opportunity it afforded disengaged young people to improve their lives; the programme encouraged Active Black Country and the other Active Partnerships and host organisations to widen their networks, forming relationships with organisations not normally on our radar.
- We carried out extensive work with partner organisations best placed to identify young people who would benefit the most from participation to maximise the impact of the Gen22 opportunity. We met and discussed Gen22 with far more organisations than were actually involved in programme delivery, broadening Active Black Country's normal sphere of influence for future programmes.
- After evaluating Gen22, we developed a framework document which can be considered in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any future initiatives of this type including any volunteering and social action programmes for young people.



**GEN22**

# The Year Ahead

We aim to deepen collaborations with partners to deliver a series of exciting projects across the four local authorities to drive transformational change.

Spurred by the success of the Pop-Up Pool programme, we were awarded £200,000 from the West Midlands Combined Authority's Inclusive Communities Fund to manage and deliver the Black Country Water Safety Programme from this summer onwards. It aims to reach at least 4,000 children at up to 80 schools across the Black Country to raise awareness and knowledge of water safety and improve National Curriculum Safe Self-Rescue attainment rates.

We are also growing water safety programmes to engage people from ethnic minority communities, establishing new links with organisations and working with a diverse range of partners. We're also aiming to offer more training and development opportunities to increase the aquatics workforce across the Black Country in line with the strategic goals of our Equality Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

Through Community Connectors, we aim to forge stronger connections with community organisations and their leaders to aid delivery of projects tailored to the needs of local people to enable healthier and more active lifestyles.

In partnership with the local authorities of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton and the Canal & River Trust, we will launch the Black Country Canals Strategy 2024-2029. The shared vision is to bring the canal network to the forefront of residents and visitors' minds by enhancing and adding to the natural infrastructure in the Black Country, increasing accessibility and improving active travel offers.

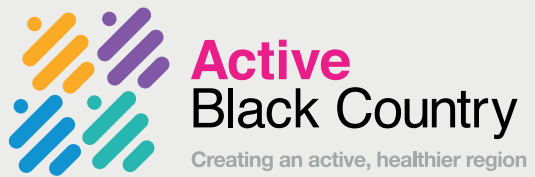
Get Out Get Active was a great success in the Black Country and 2024 will see an extension of work with places of faith and in partnership with the Activity Alliance to deliver a more impactful programme of activities.

Over the next year we will commit to supporting Sport England's sustainability strategy through the projects we collaborate on. Environmental sustainability sits at the heart of the green social prescribing walk in Bilston, which supports joint work to develop the Black Country Canals Strategy "to create the conditions for a vibrant and accessible network of spaces which promotes active and healthy living, a thriving natural environment and an attractive offer for residents and visitors".

Active Black Country Chief Executive Ian Carey says: "In a momentous year of change for our organisation, it's fantastic to report on the incredible impact projects are having in improving activity levels across communities, aligning with Sport England's Uniting the Movement 10-year vision.

"There's much more to be done to empower people to be active, so it's vitally important we build on this momentum and strive to achieve wider impacts over the coming year.





[www.activeblackcountry.co.uk](http://www.activeblackcountry.co.uk)