

# **A sport and physical activity needs assessment for children and young people in the London boroughs of Camden and Islington**

## **Executive summary**

This report provides an analysis of data collected as part of a research project funded by Camden Council and Islington Council. The research sought to understand the needs of the boroughs in their provision of sport and physical activity for young people aged 0-18 (0-25 disabled) with a view to increasing their participation in it.

### Research areas

The research focussed on the following areas:

- Strategic context - Local and national policies which relate to physical activity for young people.
- Participation - The extent to which young people in Camden and Islington participate in physical activity.
- Motivations and barriers - The factors which provide barriers and motivations to young people when taking part in sport and physical activity.
- Supply and demand - The supply and demand of sport and physical activity opportunities for young people.

### Methodology

The research was carried out between March and August 2013 using a mixed methodology approach. Both qualitative and quantitative information was collected from a range of sources and perspectives to meet the project objectives. These included:

- A survey of young people (CYP Survey) - 1,696 responses across 37 primary and 11 secondary schools.
- Six focus groups with various cohorts of young people, parents/carers and sport and physical activity stakeholders.
- 34 telephone interviews with a range of stakeholders.
- Desk research.
- A survey of 73 local stakeholders.

- Community Health Environment Scan Survey (CHESS) - assessments of six identified geographical areas of need by young people. These were carried out by local young people walking around the areas, providing opinions and insight.

## Findings

The following headline findings were found in each of the research areas:

### *Strategic context findings:*

- There is significant wider research evidence of the contribution that physical activity can make to prevent non-communicable diseases. This has led to greater emphasis in national, regional and local policy on improving physical activity levels.
- There's a clear policy context and thread running through most of the key policies related to increasing physical activity levels within Camden and Islington for the benefits it can bring to improving the lives of young people.
- There is no national system for measuring the physical activity levels of all young people.
- In comparison to London and England, Camden and Islington both share characteristics that are evidenced to impact on the sport and physical activity levels of young people.

These include:

- A high density population.
- An ethnically diverse population.
- High childhood obesity rates.
- Areas of significant deprivation and high levels of child poverty.

### *Participation findings:*

- There is a low level of participation in physical activity among young people in Camden and Islington, with only 11% of all respondents to the CYP survey meeting the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines (recommendations on how much physical activity people should participate in to be healthy).
- Levels of physical activity decrease as young people get older.
- The problem is more acute for girls with lower activity levels reported across all ages by girls than boys. The decline in participation as girls get older is also steeper.
- Participation in physical activity by young people in Camden and Islington did not change depending on socio-economic status or the deprivation of the area lived in.
- Disabled young people were found to have lower participation levels than non-disabled young people. 41% of disabled young people reported doing 60 minutes of physical activity on zero days in the last week. 32% of non-disabled people had not done 60 minutes on any of the previous seven days

- Lower participation in physical activity was reported by those from an Asian/Asian British background and in particular, those of an Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi background.
- National research suggests a growing concern at the risk of sedentary behaviour.

*Motivations and barriers findings:*

- The motivations and barriers that influence people's participation have been grouped into five themes – personal priorities, self-perception, impact of others, perception/experience of provision and environmental context.
- For girls and disabled young people some of the barriers and motivators were particularly evident.
- For girls the significant barriers affecting levels of participation were:
  - Lack of a physical activity habit being formed at an early age.
  - Lack of confidence when it comes to physical activity and sport.
  - Self-consciousness when taking part.
  - Lack of role models.
  - Availability of suitable activities.
- For disabled young people the significant barriers affecting their participation were:
  - Reluctance to travel.
  - Lack of confidence.
  - Parental affordability.
  - Availability of suitable activities.
- Some young people can't take part in physical activities because their parents can't afford to pay. This is particularly so for parents with multiple siblings, those from low income backgrounds, those with children with learning disabilities and parents of under-5s.

*Demand findings:*

- The top five activities most in demand from young people that responded to the CYP survey were (in rank order) football, tennis, bowling, trampolining and dodgeball.
- There is considerable difference between primary and secondary aged young people in terms of the activities they would most like to do as well as between girls and boys across Camden and Islington.
- Young people were asked what their perfect places to exercise in would look like. Responses to this question suggest that they would like environments that:
  - Offer a choice or a variety of activities.
  - Enable them to be with friends.
  - Have lots of space.

- Are local to them.

*Supply findings:*

- Get Active London (the main single source of information on how to be active in Camden and Islington) has limited information on the activities young people and disabled young people in Camden and Islington are most interested in.
- Catering for demand is sometimes an issue for approximately half of the providers that responded to the stakeholder survey and the majority of providers think that demand for physical activity provision will increase in the next five years. However, these providers stated a lack of funding, a lack of facilities and a lack of (qualified) staff/volunteers as the key challenges in relation to getting more young people active.
- Evidence from the areas explored through the CHESS scans suggests that those parts of the boroughs lack a range of high quality, age-appropriate facilities for young people to be active in. Many of the outdoor facilities reviewed by young people in the CHESS areas were deemed in need of improvement (34% needed significant improvement and 47% needing some improvement).
- Young people have a variety of needs when it comes to physical activity opportunities and these should be reflected by the provision that is available. Consideration must be given to catering for a range of skill levels, providing a chance for competition for some, but not others and for learning and achievement, but again, not for all. The need to provide social, fun and safe physical activities also came out strongly.
- In the areas explored through CHESS, the young people identified a number of access issues that prevented or could prevent their use of physical activity facilities such as children's playgrounds and multi-use games areas. These issues included facilities being poorly lit, locked, situated within gated communities and signs which create a negative perception of the facility e.g. signs warning against drug use. The evidence also suggests the need to improve access for young people to school's facilities outside of the school day.
- The assessment of structured provision (physical activity opportunities led by an adult) within the CHESS zones suggests that if young people are to have access to three hours a week of structured physical activity provision then there is need for a significant increase in supply.
- The production of this research was made more difficult by the lack of information available about young people's physical activity habits. While many services within the councils, and their commissioned leisure contractors, collate data about when and how young people are being physically active, it has been found that this is often piecemeal, inconsistent and incomplete.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made:

1. Establish a physical activity pathway to help all young people become more physically active.
2. Implement the National Obesity Observatory's standard evaluation framework for physical activity to monitor and evaluate young people's participation in physical activity.
3. Collate and integrate data across services on young people's participation in physical activity.
4. Raise awareness of the recommended levels of physical activity for young people to be healthy.
5. Significant improvements to be made to the promotion and communication of physical activity provision across the boroughs.
6. Improve the quality, range and appropriateness of physical activity facilities.
7. Ensure young people have more access to all community assets.
8. Make more activities more affordable.
9. Create more, and a greater choice of, physical activity opportunities.
10. Improve the appropriateness of physical activity opportunities for all young people.
11. Encourage all young people to form a physically active lifestyle.
12. Effect change to increase levels of physical activity among girls.
13. Effect change to increase levels of physical activity among disabled people.
14. Improve the skills of the physical activity workforce.