



Learning from the Family Engagement Project



INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Welsh Government launched the Healthy and Active Fund (HAF) in partnership with Sport Wales and Public Health Wales, a £5.4m fund to encourage and share innovative ideas that help people live healthy and active lives. HAF's aims are to:

- Sustainably increase the physical activity of those who are currently sedentary or have very low levels of activity.
- Improve levels of mental well-being by promoting social interactions and increasing or improving access to spaces and places for physical activity.

The StreetGames Family Engagement Project (FEP) is one of seventeen projects funded through HAF. It uses an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and is viewed as a long term approach to engaging with families living in under-served communities. Currently operating in seven local authorities in Wales, it aims to engage with families who are inactive, isolated or who have challenging circumstances which may impact on their health and wellbeing. To date, the FEP has engaged with over 400 families and is working with over 60 delivery partners.

Originally designed as a three-year fund, Welsh Government extended the funding period by a further year in response to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which paused delivery options. Over the past four years, family engagement approaches have become embedded into the work of the partner organisations involved. Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs) and StreetGames have gathered insight along the way to highlight the achievements of local projects and how they have overcome challenges in delivery. Case studies and progress reports capture that journey¹. This report draws together that insight.

Why Fund A FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT?

As StreetGames began planning for the FEP, the need for investment was clear:

- 1 in 3 young people in Wales were growing up in poverty. Of the UK nations in 2019, Wales had the highest percentage of children living in poverty nationwide (31%), followed by England (30%) then Scotland and Northern Ireland (24% each)².
- Young people in less affluent areas were (and still are) less active. In 2018, there was a 13 percentage point difference in sports participation in Wales according to socio-economic indicators. 42% of pupils in schools with high eligibility for free school meals took part in sport and physical activity 3 or more times a week, compared with 55% of pupils in more affluent areas³.
- Sport Wales reported that adults living in a household in material deprivation were less likely to have participated in a sporting activity in the last four weeks (47%) than those who were not (61%)⁴.
- Low income families struggled to afford to buy enough fruit, vegetables, fish and other healthy foods to meet the official nutrition guidelines leaving them at a greater risk of diet related illness, such as obesity and diabetes (Food Foundation)⁵.
- Children and adults living in households in the lowest 20% income bracket in Great Britain are two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems than those in the highest.⁶


In 2023, the case for investment in family engagement approaches is arguably even more important. There is strong evidence to suggest that the pandemic and increased costs of living have affected people's ability to access sport and physical activity opportunities. For example:

- The latest available data continues to show that 31% of children in Wales are living in relative income poverty⁷.
- In August 2023, Sport Wales reported that 52% of respondents with children agreed that the cost-of-living crisis has had a negative impact on their ability to be active compared with 34% of respondents without children. 47% of adults with children say they've been doing less sport and physical activity due to changes in the cost of living compared with 24% of adults without children⁸.
- Young people living in more deprived areas have less access to opportunities to be active and the participation gap is widening – there is now a 15-percentage-point difference in participation in organised sport outside of the curriculum three or more times a week between the least (FSM1) and most deprived (FSM4) areas⁹.
- Our latest research shows that 40% of young people from lower-income households said that their top concern was 'mine and my family's finances and the cost of living'¹⁰.


We have also learnt through past experiences that an intervention was needed that could help young people to be active for the long term. LTOs are successfully providing sport and wellbeing opportunities for young people living in under-served communities where opportunities to play sport and be active are either limited or non-existent. However, it remains difficult for these young people to progress or transition to further opportunities when they don't have the resources and support network around them to help. One of the most important parts of the support network is family members and we have recognised the need to develop 'activity know-how' - the skills, confidence, appetite, enjoyment and knowledge of how and where to be active. With this in place, we hope that families increase their ability to continue their activity journey beyond the provision organised by StreetGames and LTOs.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TARGETS

At the outset, FEP's targets were to:



Increase physical activity levels of
265
families by equipping them with the 'Activity Know-How' to sustain a long-term habit.



Improve social interactions between families and their community, leading to increased mental well-being.

FEP also intended to support sector change so that:

The sport/physical activity sector is better at meeting the needs of families living in poverty.




The health sector better understands the role that sport/physical activity can have on the well-being of families living in poverty.

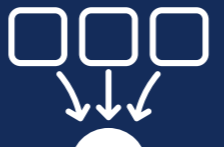
The FEP project has exceeded these targets. To date:

468
families living in under-served communities engaged with the programme.

1,339
individuals have taken part.



390
learners from LTOs have been trained, more than six times the original target.



All seven project areas are incorporating family engagement approaches in their ongoing work.

Families increasing physical activity, improving social interaction and mental wellbeing

The extent of participation suggests that not only has the project been successful in achieving its aims, but also demonstrates a high level of need for the programme. One of the challenges in assessing whether FEP participants as a cohort have increased their levels of physical activity and mental wellbeing has been capturing quantitative monitoring data during the pandemic. Planned face to face data collection by Doorstep Sport Advisors (DSAs) was no longer feasible. With services and staff under pressure and managing additional risks, especially as face-to-face activity resumed, data collection was a labour-intensive process and validated questionnaires used by the HAF programme such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and the International Physical Activity Questionnaire were proving to be a barrier for participants.

With agreement from the funder, alternative qualitative approaches were used to review how outcomes were being achieved. StreetGames and LTOs gathered regular feedback from families and shared insight with each other. These extracts and stories give a flavour of the wide ranging impact of the FEP. They help to show in the families' own words the interrelated nature of the physical activity, social interaction and mental wellbeing outcomes that can be achieved when the right opportunity and support are provided. Through FEP, families got more active, felt better, socialised, spent quality time together, gained confidence and ultimately improved their activity know-how.

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It has definitely helped (increase confidence to create/play games at home). Not only for the children, but it has helped me as a parent to interact with them. This programme has really helped with motivation so I think having a reason to get dressed and get out of the house with my children and attending a weekly session is really helpful. I prefer coming to these sessions over the other playgroups we attend during the week as we are getting involved and encouraged to play together. The support in these sessions make me want to continue attending.

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(Parent)

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I have 3 children and I'm also a foster carer, therefore it was very difficult for me to afford a membership for myself and my family. The FEP has enabled us to use all the facilities at the sport centres, and even attend all together which has never happened before. The FEP has certainly helped the positive relationship between myself and my foster child due to attending the sports centres together. I have seen many improvements in not only myself but in my children also. I believe we're more active, more supportive to each other, have greater confidence from taking part in different activities due to what the sport centres have to offer, and able to positively socialise with others at the sport centre. My daughter visits the gym with her friend, so the FEP has increased her confidence in attending the sport centre where she's recently said, she would rather go to the gym than go out with peers in the cold and the dark. Since the FEP began, the staff at the sports centres have been very friendly and are always very approachable. Due to the positive environment where staff are always on hand, I feel confident in my children attending the sport centres independently. The FEP has enabled me to feel younger, fitter and much healthier. I've also had a knee injury in the past where I feel this has also helped with the recovery process.

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(Parent)





As a single mum, affording a family membership was out of the picture for me. However, being involved with the FEP has enabled me with a diverse range of opportunities that I wasn't able to have before. I'm also suffering from a personal illness which also made me enquire about the FEP along with support for my mental health. Being able to use all the facilities that the sport centres have to offer is amazing. I'm able to take my son to some classes which is great for me, and he actually enjoys going too. All the staff at the sport centre are really friendly and always on hand to help with any questions or queries. On occasions, I attend the sport centre with a friend where sometimes it's also quite nice to socialise with others and get some of my own free time. Overall, I've seen a great improvement in my mental health, weight management and actually my personal illness. I feel happier, healthier and fitter all thanks to having the chance to attend such amazing opportunities the FEP has given me.

(Parent)



We would like to highlight a parent from (primary school). She has attended both summer and the autumn family engagement program with her partner and two children. She attended almost every session without fail and we had several conversations with her and why she enjoys coming. She said she lost her son a few years back due to suicide and since that happened her mental health has been all over the place. She said some days she doesn't want to leave the house but since hearing about the FEP she really wanted to push herself out of her comfort zone and do it for her children as well as herself. She said she likes engaging in other conversations with other families when she attends the sessions as some days, she doesn't speak to anyone other than her partner or children. Moving forward she said she would like the school to do more with families and she has been pointed in the right direction for other sessions that we offer as a charity outside of school hours in the community. It is positive examples like this that show projects like the Family Engagement Project and LTOs are the key ingredients to not just engaging the people that most need it the most but to inspire that fundamental behaviour change.

(LTO)



SECTOR CHANGES

These successful approaches delivered by LTOs have also resulted in organisational changes to assign longer-term resources to what is working well. Although specific age range and stage-based opportunities are still catered for, family-focussed opportunities are now more widespread and embedded in organisational strategies. For example, one LTO partner reported that family engagement work now features in their organisational business plan. A new Community Engagement Officer role has been developed, where the job specification has been changed to include family engagement work as a key responsibility. Another LTO referenced that core funding has been allocated via social services to commit resources for a staff member to continue with the FEP approach as part of wrap-around support for families. Partnership boards developed through FEP continue to work together.

Outside of the programme itself, national governing bodies have drawn on some of the learning and challenges identified by the FEP, and are offering support to help people who can't access their offer because of a lack of disposable income for equipment and kit. The Football Association of Wales has launched the PAWB¹¹ fund to support and assist young players with accessing football opportunities and/or equipment. Wales Netball has launched a cost-of-living support fund¹².

While we have evidence to suggest the sport sector is better meeting the needs of families in poverty, as a result of the pandemic, it has been more difficult for HAF partners to work with the health sector as they had intended. However, there are now clear connections in place with the recently established Sport Wales Children and Families project being developed in Merthyr, Cardiff and Anglesey, in collaboration with Public Health Wales and local authority services. With StreetGames as a lead partner, this project directly builds on the experience of the FEP and the insight gained over the last four years.



Learning from Family Engagement Project

The aim of this final report was to reflect back on learning gained during programme to identify effective approaches for family engagement. How did successful outcomes occur across the partnership? What are the activities and enablers that could be transferable to other locations or situations? We reviewed project case studies; progress reports and monitoring data captured throughout the four years and supplemented this with programme and project staff interviews and group discussions. We looked at ways of working that enabled or hindered the intended outcomes, and explored the adaptations that were made when the local and national context changed. Below we highlight the elements of FEP that worked well and provide examples of how StreetGames and LTOs have put these into practice.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Key to the Healthy and Active Fund overall and the StreetGames FEP is the principle of partnership and collaboration at every stage of the process, from planning phase onwards. This is an integral way of working for StreetGames. Some of the specific actions taken included:

StreetGames organising in-person partnership and engagement events to test initial ideas for FEP with the network. The concept and plans drew on learning from programmes of work, primary research¹³ and conversations with LTOs and young people.

This approach was mirrored at a local level. Local Partnership Boards were established at the outset and continue to work together to plan and steer area-based delivery and providing a mechanism to connect FEP with wider local services and stakeholders interested in supporting community health and wellbeing.

Partners involved included a wider range of local authority service areas such as Sports Development, Families First, Healthy Schools, Social Services and Wellbeing. Local Housing Associations, schools, sports clubs and community councils were all involved in the process.

Partnership working is critical to connect services, avoid duplication and work towards an 'ecosystem' of local signposting and referral and raise awareness of the range of support and opportunities that families and children can access. The FEP has helped StreetGames grow the network of connected partners and community groups providing family engagement solutions. FEP connects with existing work programmes, allowing partners to understand each other's objectives, pool resources to add value, and avoid duplication. It enables partners to share expertise and with a wider network of partners working toward shared goals, it mitigates some of the risk of staff turnover, lost momentum and knowledge.

AVOIDS
DUPLICATION

SHARES
EXPERTISE

SUPPORTS
INSTITUTIONAL
MEMORY

LEADS TO A WIDER
NETWORK WORKING
TOWARDS SHARED
GOALS



Organisations can offer different opportunities and different skill sets and it works when you get together. Delivering together opens up the extent of the exit routes available.

(Parent)



Keep communicating with local partners to get their input on how money and staff time can best be used to have a positive impact on beneficiaries. Shared decision making can provide a more seamless support system where organisations are working closely enough to be able to signpost and refer families to opportunities that meet their particular needs.

(LTO)



The signposting element of the FEP has become an integral part of helping to create a holistic menu of opportunities and services. Where staff and participants have that all-round knowledge and awareness of the local landscape, it helps to maximise the chances of increasing overall family health and wellbeing and provides exit routes for participants to sustain their activities.



FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION

One of the strengths of FEP has been the resilience of LTOs and the innovations they made in the face of the pandemic, dealing with furlough and social distancing regulations along with the loss of facilities and spaces for delivery. StreetGames and LTOs adapted quickly to respond to the crisis and help families in need of immediate support. Over time, delivery approaches continued to adapt and flex to bring back social opportunities, fun and enjoyment for communities while at the same time supporting families to participate in healthy activities independently and at home.

The adaptations made include:

Doorstep opportunities in action – In response to the pandemic, LTOs delivered equipment and resource packs direct to people's homes during lockdowns, providing families with the resources to take part independently and for the long term. Many LTO staff were also involved in the emergency response, delivering foods and medicines.

Digital solutions. Adopting virtual approaches to delivery, building digital literacy for both the workforce and families. Digital content was created, widening reach and allowing families to access content in their own time and space and leaving a legacy of free resources and ideas for getting active as a family.

Providing healthy nutritious food as well as physical activity opportunities at sessions wherever possible, and linking FEP sessions closely with the established Fit and Fed programme. On the ground insight and conversations with families raised the prevalence of food poverty. The provision of refreshments also helps to market FEP sessions and bring people together over food, providing a better experience with the incidental benefit of creating an informal social opportunity that could increase community cohesion.

At programme and project level, giving projects autonomy to use the grant flexibly was considered an important enabler and something that has encouraged innovative solutions. It has allowed project staff to try new approaches and ideas to overcome the barriers that prevented families from getting active. The flexibility to do this reduced the risk involved which in 'normal' circumstances may never have arisen. Funding was used to purchase equipment to distribute to people's homes, with several national governing bodies of sport linking with StreetGames to provide tennis sets, footballs and rugby balls and so on.



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If someone gives you something you might have a go at it. So we had skipping ropes, hula hoops, footballs, rugby balls... All over the summer, my whole job became about delivering food and prescriptions – and when dropping these things off you could see the equipment in the gardens and being used everywhere.

(LTO)

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StreetGames money has given me the chance to try some things, because it is so broad...I like the fact that it is for removing barriers - it makes you think outside the box... the benefit of this funding is that it allows the money to be used as pilots and see what works, to test things for future core delivery.

(LTO)

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Covid has been seen as an opportunity rather than a threat with the FEP, despite there being many challenges over the past couple of years.

(Healthy and Active Fund national partner)

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A SKILLED AND HIGHLY MOTIVATED WORKFORCE

Having the right people involved is one of the key success factors for the project. Staff at both national and local level understand the communities where FEP is operating. Often staff members live in or nearby the community and are trusted by families and have the ability to develop good relationships. They get involved with the project as participants as well as being 'providers' of services. They can identify 'community champions' and the movers and shakers that encourage others to get involved.

A key skill is building relationships with community members and with other partner organisations. This can mean communicating with colleagues at all levels of seniority. LTOs identified that it was important to consider the following things when building relationships with other service providers and meeting new partners:

Having evidence of need to make the case for collaboration, using local and national insight – StreetGames has a key role in capturing and sharing this information and supporting LTOs with appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes.

Being informed and prepared, by developing an understanding of the strategic aims of partner organisations and different service areas, to identify where FEP can contribute to shared goals.

Demonstrating the impact that can be achieved through FEP approaches by showcasing case studies, stories, and highlighting successes.

LISTENING AND CONSULTING TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE CITIZEN-LED SOLUTIONS

Learning about workforce skills in community engagement work has been one of the major strands in the HAF and FEP. What is clear is that consulting, listening and adapting to provide appropriate solutions for different places and communities is a continual way of working rather than something that takes place at a specific stage in a project. Throughout the project, LTO staff members from across the network have emphasised the importance of listening to what families need and being as participant-led as possible in shaping the project rather than too prescriptive.

It's gone great. The kids loved it... the best part wasn't handing out the equipment...you were just there on the doorstep delivering equipment, but you were there for 25 or 30 mins, just having a chat with them, seeing how they're going, how they were finding it. It is that communication element that we thought was really, really important.
(LTO distributing equipment nt (and children's homework!) in 2020 lockdown)

We would have lost families if we had sat there and spoken at them. Implementing that (listening) approach would be one bit of advice. And being adaptable – that is important. (LTO)

In order for it to work, you need to have those community conversations with people before you start creating something, not the other way round. It doesn't have the same value otherwise... Ask people and be prepared to change. Don't have set ideas. (LTO)

Specific actions included:

When visiting new areas, one project team went with a local volunteer who lived in the area and had that relationship with the community – they could be introduced to families by a trusted individual.

Commissioning the services of a regularly used activity provider who does one to one work with potential participants. The member of staff contacts the families and arranges to chat to them to get to know them and help them participate.

Providing bespoke one to one support or advice for families where required. The approach can be resource intensive but the positive impact that can be achieved for a family can be considerable.

Going to places where families are, such as Fit and Fed sessions, community hubs and other community groups that aren't necessarily about physical activity. This gives staff a safe place to meet people and raise awareness of FEP opportunities and other offers in the community.

That is where you will have the most success, it gives opportunities for conversations and you can see the same kids two or three times in the week and chat with parents and see what families want to get out of it. (LTO)

Leading by example: Project teams wanted to be authentic and demonstrate their own commitment to being active. They got involved as participants as well as being 'providers' of services, for example going on family walks in all weathers and posting their pictures and experiences on social media. This helped to highlight easy and inspiring ways to go out and be active.

We have families who would like to do some of these activity clubs but haven't got the confidence to come along...so beginning at the home is a start and can keep people a little bit engaged during the winter months – the barrier may be mindset. (LTO)

The increased visibility of LTO staff members in communities during the pandemic also meant that when families returned to face to face sessions and events, there was often someone they knew there, helping with potential confidence barriers.

LISTENING AND CONSULTING TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE CITIZEN-LED SOLUTIONS

The Healthy and Active Fund has had a focus on sustainability from the outset, and what sustainability means for the participant, for partners and for the approach overall. We viewed our family engagement work as a long-term approach of five years plus, and a key enabler in the success of the project has been the national HAF providing a grant over four years. Having this commitment in place has been vital to ensure the workforce can build relationships with communities and partners to start embedding the approach in working practices. Having the resources 'up front' to plan, develop and test approaches collaboratively and then monitor, evaluate and adapt takes time. For families themselves, developing activity know-how, the confidence and removal of barriers to being active for the long-term is no quick fix. There needs to be continuity of resources allocated over a substantial period of time to raise awareness of local projects and gather momentum.

As a reward and recognition of all the activities the families have taken part in this year (2022), during October half term families were taken on a day trip rock climbing at the Summit Centre, Merthyr Tydfil. This gave parents the opportunity to visit sports provision outside of their local area and try something new and different together. This was a real success and helped them develop 'activity know-how. (LTO)

We have been loving the sessions and everyone is so friendly. The sessions have helped us as a family to take that step to come out of our anxiety controlled bubble. We have started to play games together that we haven't played before or even heard of before. It also helps that we have learnt how to play games with low cost or no equipment. (Parent)

Some families reported attending the sessions gave them a purpose and a reason to get out of bed. It helped some families get more physical activity ideas. (LTO)

We will keep building on what we've done...when we get to the end of this, even if it's not funding and it's partnership working – it isn't always all about the money, I think we should remember that...You can do an awful lot by working in partnership that actually you can't do with just being given a pot of money on your own and that does happen a lot. I think this way of working going forward is much better. (LTO)

Often, LTOs report that finding resources to free up the workforce to dedicate the time to build the project will support sustainability, rather than a need for substantial additional funding.

The use of the funding to kick-start independent activity also leaves a legacy by supplying families directly with kit, equipment, activity packs and digital resources to enable them to participate in their own time. Several of the LTOs now have sports lockers, libraries and community kit rooms and boot rooms in place through FEP. These initiatives are being celebrated, with LTOs sharing ideas on how to establish them across the wider network. This is helping to remove a substantial barrier that families have been facing with the increased cost of living and potential stigma of not having the 'right' clothing and equipment to participate in sport and physical activity. We have previously highlighted research on leisure spending patterns where in 2019, low income households had £3.75 per week to spend on sport¹⁴. Since then, the amount of disposable income available to families to spend is considerably less. Support on financial management has also been incorporated in local delivery plans.



Since the launch of the Community Kit Room (CKR) on 17th of February, the initiative has been a huge success. The CKR, operated by the Aneurin Leisure Trust Sports Development Team, funded through StreetGames Wales, has supplied 96 different sportswear items to 51 individuals within our communities of Blaenau Gwent.



My daughter is now participating more confidently in PE lessons thanks to the kit she's received.

Throughout the 3-month period, the team has worked in collaboration with local schools, sports clubs and organisations, to support members of the community access appropriate sports clothing and footwear to maintain their health, sport and fitness journey. The team has been able to work closely with 5 sports clubs, who currently identify as 'CKR Hubs' within Blaenau Gwent. The CKR Hubs allow greater access points for members of the community to receive and donate sportswear to and from the CKR. The CKR is also proud to have recently supported Blaenau Gwent's Ukrainian Celebration Event at Ebbw Vale Sport Centre. There were fun and engaging activities for all the families to enjoy with the CKR showcased and numerous items of sportswear were provided for the families to take away and utilise. There were lots of happy families leaving the event in their new sports kit. The CKR has been a great success so far, receiving positive feedback from every supportive service.¹⁵



LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Having a lead national partner as the HAF funding recipient alongside a local network of LTOs has been a model that has worked well. StreetGames takes a strategic overview of FEP while LTOs take responsibility for operational delivery and place-based solutions, with greater connectivity with local partners and communities. This means that StreetGames can take a role in:

- Administration of the fund and related monitoring and reporting requirements for the Welsh Government.
- Working with other national partners and agencies to secure resources, kit and equipment to distribute to LTOs.
- Facilitating learning and celebration events for the network to enable the cross pollination of ideas and conversations. A lead partner to bring local projects together to share, learn and inform.
- Providing resources to support local evaluation and creating appropriate monitoring tools that families and staff were comfortable to use.
- Liaising with projects on a one to one basis, holding regular conversations and check-ins to provide the support required.
- Focusing on options for sustainability at an early stage in the process to maintain successful family engagement approaches, supporting projects to develop sustainability plans and providing fundraising support.
- Providing training courses and considering bespoke CPD at no or low cost for LTOs.
- Importantly, leading on communication about FEP with national partners and Ministers to celebrate success and raise the profile of LTOs and the impact of family engagement projects.

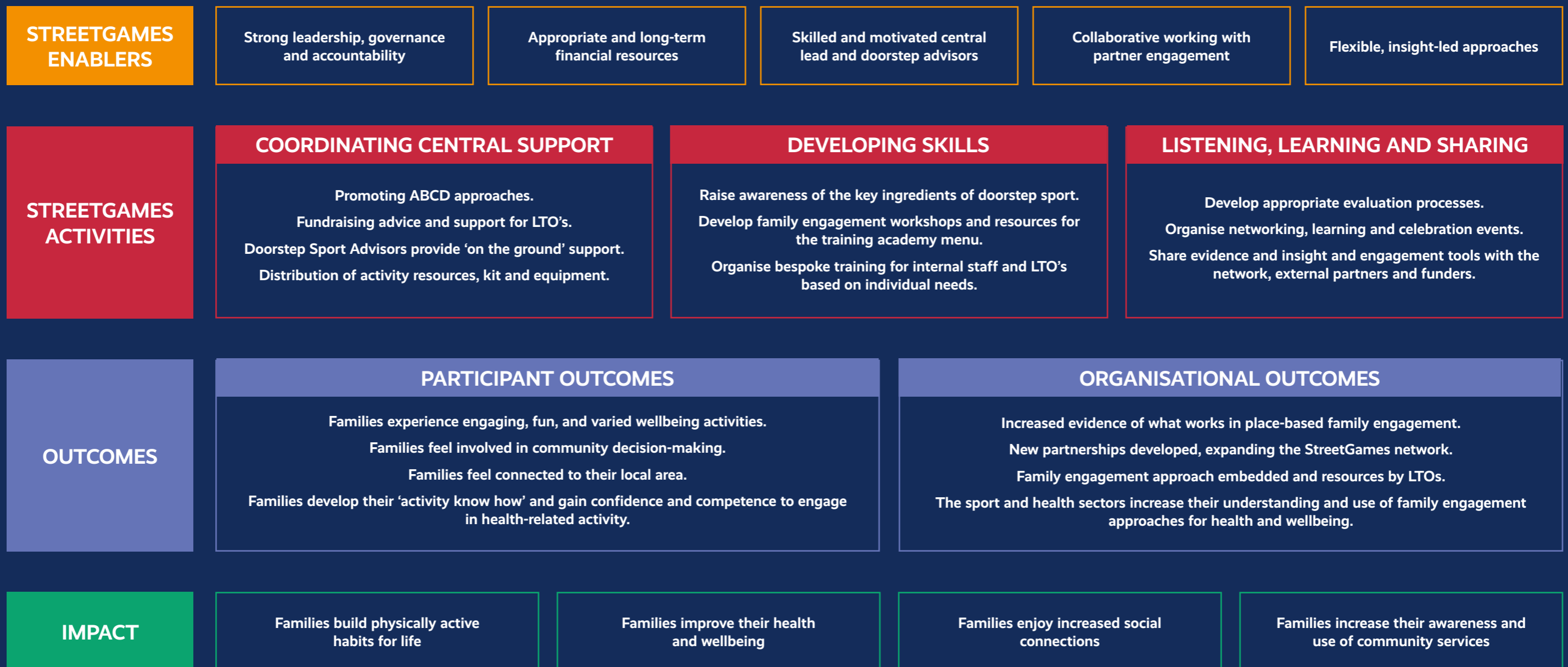


A THEORY OF CHANGE FOR 2023 ONWARDS

The innovations made by FEP over the last four years to adapt to working in an ever-changing context have helped the project have a far greater reach than expected and have generated considerable learning. It is likely that demand for FEP approaches is greater than ever. As a result of our learning, two revised theory of change models have been drafted. The first model focusses on the role of StreetGames as the national partner managing FEP, and the second focusses on the role of locally trusted organisations (LTOs) responsible for delivery of the intervention.

These models can be used to shape future delivery, and provide a checklist of ingredients for a successful family engagement approach.

StreetGames Model For Successful Family Engagement



LTO Model For Successful Family Engagement



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-  www.streetgames.org
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