

The Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project

Summer 2024



INTRODUCTION

The Birmingham Community Paddle Sport hubs are an innovation driven by Olympic canoeist Andy Train and supported by Paddle UK in partnership with the Canal & River Trust and StreetGames. The project attempts to reach into the most underserved communities, increase access and encourage participation in paddle sport across Birmingham's canal network. June 2022 to July 2023 was about capacity building. 2024 is about community reach and repeating the opportunity for another cohort of young people to participate via the summer holiday programme. So, the opportunity to carry out more research to assess reach, impact and wellbeing is timely.

Amongst the 1.1 million population of Birmingham, only a small proportion of residents have historically taken part in paddle sport activities based on the city's extensive canal network. The reasons are complex but include concerns for personal safety and fear of criminal activity in the inner city. But more significantly, a lack of role models, ownership and sense of belonging that local people are entitled to use those green and blue spaces has resulted in limited access and an underrepresentation in paddle sport on Birmingham's canals.

Supported by Paddle UK, Canal and River Trust and StreetGames, the project received £100k in funding during 2023. This collaboration, or system change approach, has enabled the rapid development of eight community organisations to build capacity and add paddle sport to their local youth, community and family offerings.

By taking this approach, paddle sport is now reaching deep into local communities with a wide range of ethnic and social diversity. So, people who otherwise would not be accessing the water are now taking up paddling for the first time and being coached, helmed and organised by local people in locally trusted organisations (LTOs) within their own community. A truly place-based approach.

Paddle UK sought to evaluate the impact of this initiative and recognised that StreetGames possesses significant expertise in research and insight. Consequently, the two organisations joined forces, with StreetGames taking the lead in formulating research questions, survey formats, and subsequent report generation. Paddle UK provided funding for local coordination to facilitate the survey implementation once again in 2024, with the primary objective of optimizing response rates by ensuring that participants and project leaders completed the surveys promptly.

In this way StreetGames plugged the Birmingham paddle sport initiative into the city-wide Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme that reaches 10's of thousands of children annually via more than 350 local HAF providers. Building on the success of last year, this summer another 29 HAF providers attempted to introduce over 1,000 young people to the sport across the eight hubs by offering more than 50 bell boat paddle sessions.

It should be noted that the summer 2024 delivery in the city was impacted by two significant events. The social unrest following the Southport incident, which as expected, resulted in some parents and organisations choosing to temporarily not send their children to holiday clubs. The second disruption was a major chemical spill in the canal system near Walsall, which led to the temporary closure of some hubs as a precautionary measure. Every effort was made to mitigate these circumstances in a timely way, to prevent escalation and harm. Sessions were relocated where possible to ensure safety and retain as many participation opportunities as possible. It was great partnership work by all involved. Only three sessions were lost.

HAF 2024 BELLBOATING IN NUMBERS



6

Delivery Locations



29

Organisations Engaged



43

Sessions Delivered



667

Young People Participated

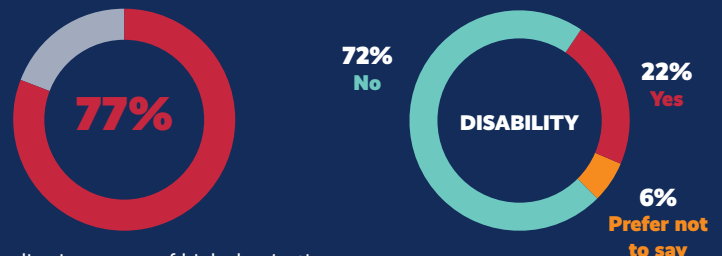
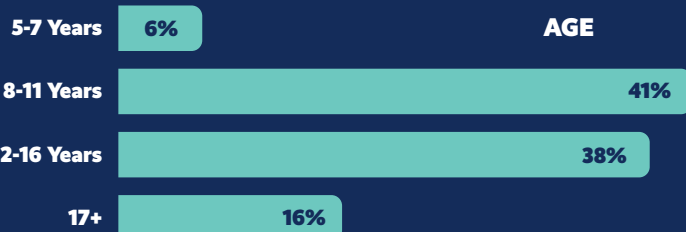
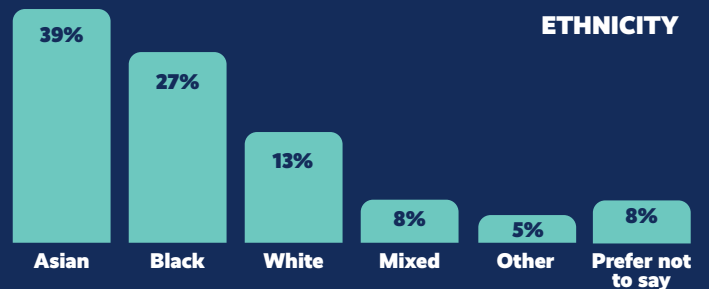
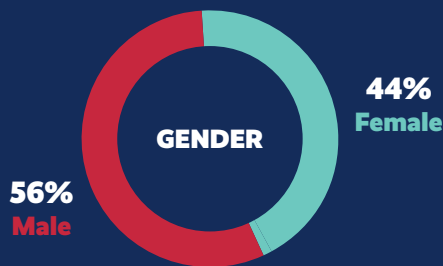


104

Adult Supervisors Attended



ATTENDEE PROFILE

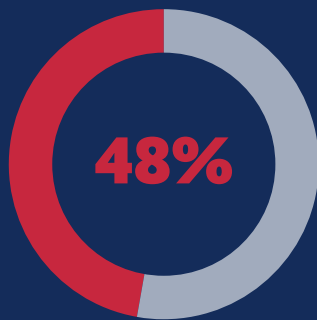


Of attendees live in an area of high deprivation. (Top 3 most deprived deciles according to IMD)

IMPACT

After attending their bell boating session, the attendees were asked to complete a short survey which explored their experience of being on the water, and what the impact of this experience had been.

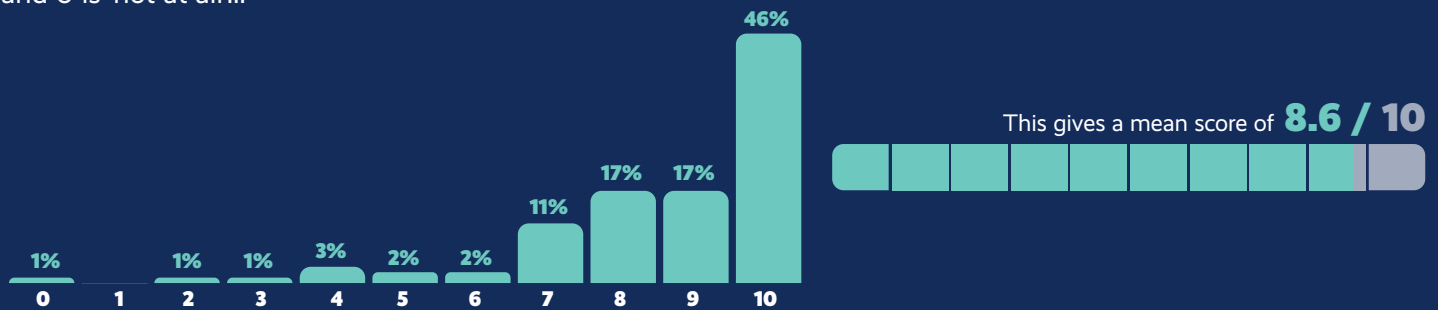
In total, 101 young people completed the survey, a summary of the responses is shown below.



48% of respondents had **never taken part** in paddling before and this was their first experience of taking part in paddle sports.

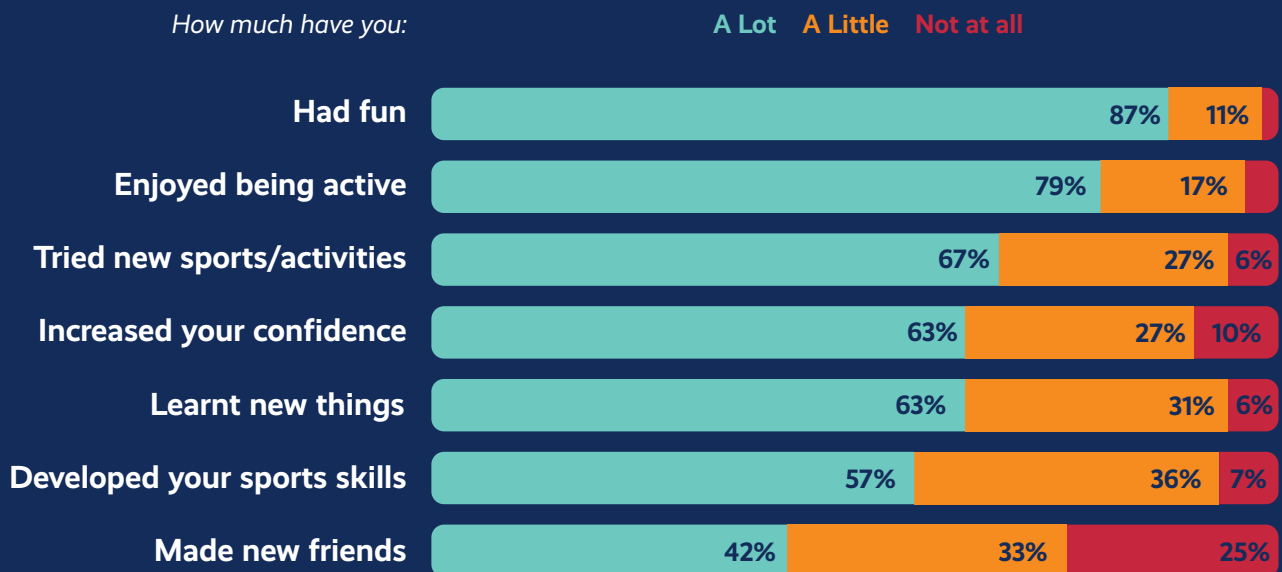
(Paddling includes bell boating, kayaking, canoeing and stand up paddle boarding)

We asked participants, how much they enjoyed taking part in the session, on a scale of 0-10, with 10 being 'A lot' and 0 is 'not at all'...



The results above showcase the overwhelmingly positive response from the attendees with regards to their bell boating experience, reflected in the average score of 8.6 / 10 reported by respondents.

Attendees were also asked to reflect on their experience at the session and feedback on how much they felt they had developed across a range of aspects:



The results above demonstrate that the respondents felt they developed 'A lot' as the majority response across all but one of the aspects. This shows that young people really took a lot from their time on the water and is testament to the enriching environment that was fostered by instructors as part of the sessions.

It is worth noting that the majority of organisations brought existing groups of young people who will have already known each other, but 42% of respondents still felt they had made new friends as part of their experience which is again a positive reflection of the sessions.

Attendees were also asked what they had enjoyed most about the sessions, with a selection of responses shown below:

"It was relaxing, quiet and I felt safe in the boat with my brother."

"It was fun. We worked in a team everyone, was nice."

"Being out on the water with a little independence."

"Trying something new with my friends."

"It was a new experience and I enjoyed being able to join together alongside my peers to take part in a group activity."

"Because its nice and calming to travel in a boat."



Attendees were also asked what emotions they felt after taking part in the activity and to expand on why they answered the way they did:



I was scared first then I loved it

My team wasn't working together and kept getting splashed.



The venue and activity. Outside using energy working together makes those emotions

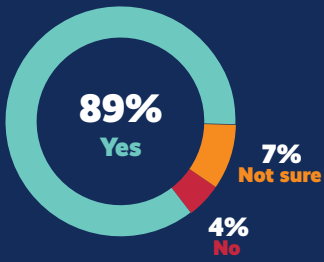


Proud! I was scared as i didnt know what to expect but it was such good fun.

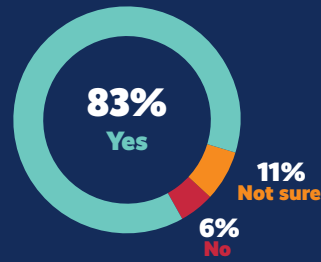
being wet and splashed made me angry

The results again highlight that the large majority of participants reported to feeling positive emotions as a result of their time on the water.

Looking ahead, we asked attendees whether they would be keen to continue paddling in the future;



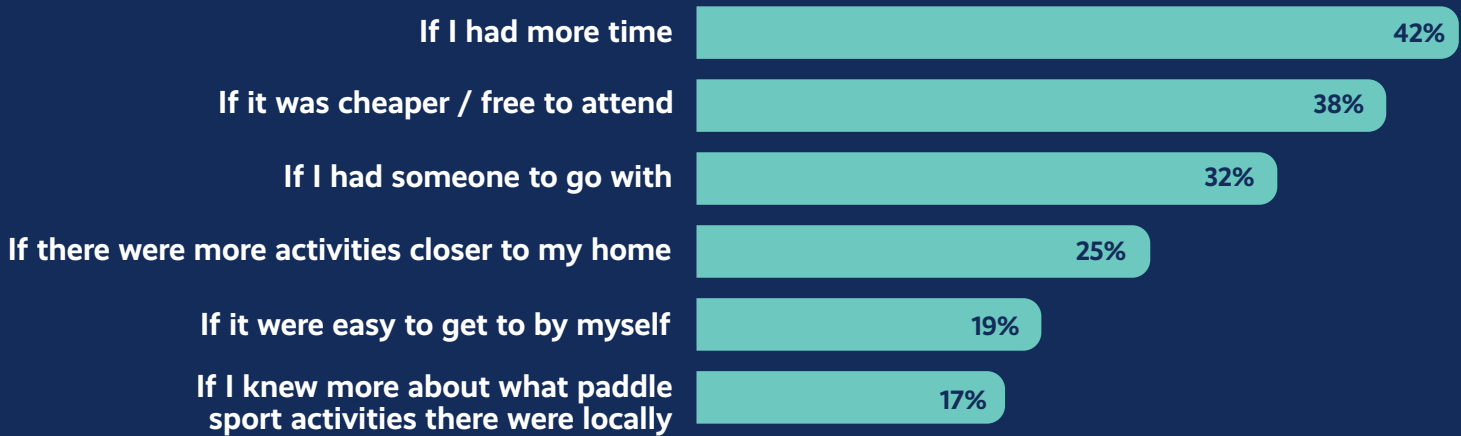
89% of respondents stated that they **would like to come back again** to this hub during other school holidays.



83% of respondents stated that they **would like to take part in paddling again** in the future.

The overwhelmingly positive responses show that the young people's experience this summer has encouraged them to want to continue participating in paddle sports in the future.

For those respondents who answered that they would like to take part in paddling activities again in the future, we asked if there were any particular aspects that would likely encourage them to do so, responses are shown below:



Attendees were also asked to feedback on whether there was anything they disliked or whether they had any improvements or suggestions for the sessions, the most common themes within responses were: less splashing, extend the session length and cleaner canals.

Make them longer

Just toilet facilities for the children

Extend them and Do them more often.

Segregate kids that's want to do it and are the right age from ones that arent

It wasn't long enough felt cut short

(I didn't like) getting my clothes wet!



HIGHLIGHT OF THE SUMMER

Esme Booth - British Rowing Silver medallist in Paris came to Ackers Adventure to support the young people from BLESST CIC on the canals only days after coming back from the Games. She said *"I feel truly inspired by all the work everyone has been doing to get people out of the water"* and has offered her further support to generate more interest in water sports across the City.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Building on this success, the 3-way local agreement between Paddle UK, StreetGames and Canal and River Trust will be reviewed after the initial two-year period to underpin the further development of this Birmingham-based project. Plans are in place to determine how best to further support the growing capability of the eight paddle hubs in the coming year and sustain their development via doorstep sport club networks.

Further research and insight are being planned to examine community impact including well-being. This base line information from 2023 will be built on with both HAF and community research findings until the end of 2024 and support the case to scale up this approach.

Building on the success of this project to reach into the most underserved communities, increase access and encourage participation in paddle sport across Birmingham's canal network, bellboating is now being recognised by many as an entry level activity to support the development of water sports more generally across the city.

An inaugural city-wide water sports festival to bring together bellboating, canoeing, sailing and rowing is planned for October 2024. The potential here is set up the foundation for multi water sport collaboration in 2025 and do even more for community sport in place.



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