

# CHURCH OF ENGLAND NATIONAL SPORT AND WELLBEING PROJECT

## INTRODUCTION

As the Established Church in England, the Church of England (CoE) is for people from all backgrounds regardless of faith or not. With 12,300 parishes and 15,496 churches<sup>1</sup> alongside 4,644 church schools educating around 1 million children and young people<sup>2</sup>, the church is present in every community in the country. It also has both national and local leaders, volunteers<sup>3</sup> and an inherent desire to help people and build stronger communities<sup>4</sup>. It is exploring whether an enhanced sport and wellbeing provision could provide a critical mission within its desire to be *'A growing Church for all people in all places'*. There is a growing desire for the Church to better engage the local community, create stronger links between church schools, parishes and the local community, and enhance the spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing of the nation. Based on the emerging experience in a number of Dioceses, it is working on the premise that the Church could play a significant role in helping policy makers tackle a wide range of social issues including inactivity, loneliness and isolation, mental health, holiday hunger, community integration and youth leadership, whilst also helping to tackle poverty and inequality.



<sup>1</sup> CoE Statistics for Mission 2019

<sup>2</sup> Of these a quarter of primary schools and over 200 secondary schools are CoE and clergy dedicate a million hours every year to working with children and young people in schools, often providing holiday and after-school activities - <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies>

<sup>3</sup> Regular worshippers at Church of England churches in 2019 was 1.11 million people, of whom 20% were aged under 18, 47% were aged 18-69, and 33% were aged 70 or over. This is against a trend which shows that in most key measures of attendance fell by between 15% and 20% from 2009 to 2019 - [CoE Statistics for Mission 2019](#). Census data from 2011 shows 68% of the population of England and Wales reporting that they belong to a religion indicating religious belief does not necessarily represent active belonging.

<sup>4</sup> 77% of churches were involved in one or more forms of social action social action and community outreach including 35,000 social action projects of which 15,000 social action projects themselves, with other projects being hosted by churches, carried out in partnership, or supported with volunteers or donations. Churches were particularly involved in running or supporting food banks, hospitality for older people, and parent and toddler groups - [CoE Statistics for Mission 2019](#).

## CONTEXT

A conservative estimate of the value of the time given by churches and other faith groups to their communities is that it is worth more than £3 billion each year<sup>5</sup>. However, as advocates for a fairer society, faith communities and faith-based organisations is often undervalued, as is their importance as builders of social capital and their impact of on public health<sup>6</sup>. There are a great number of health-related activities taking place in and around churches, that are so well 'embedded' that they are never thought of as interventions or evaluated as such. This was highlighted in research commissioned by Sport England and the Diocese of London in 2015. An audit of the stock of places and opportunities for sport provided by churches and church schools within the Diocese, concluded that an average weekly throughput attendance at sport and physical activity sessions was between 40,000 and 50,000 people<sup>7</sup>. The church community in London was already offering a diverse range of sport and physical activities to wide group of people from age groups across the life spectrum, including older people and women and girls, from a variety of facility types both within and beyond the church estate, without distinct interventions. The research revealed that there was considerable potential and enthusiasm for the expansion of the sporting offer and opportunities to engage with new communities.

## CoE'S NATIONAL SPORT AND WELLBEING PROJECT

In 2019, Dave Male, Director of Evangelism and Discipleship for the Church of England, consulted with various individuals and bodies and from this worked with a small group of people to create a national project. The project would explore how to develop strategically sport and wellbeing as a key area for the Church to engage in evangelism. At the same time, Libby Lane, Bishop of Derby, was appointed as lead Bishop for Sport by the Archbishop of Canterbury<sup>8,9</sup>. In June 2020, Natalie Andrews was appointed to lead the project as part of the Church of England's Evangelism and Discipleship Team. The small group of people was reconstituted to become the Sport and Wellbeing Project Advisory Group to offer support and strategic advice to the project.



<sup>5</sup> The Audit also estimated that two million people from faith groups give at least 384 million hours (288 million unpaid) a year to projects to support 48 million people. Many of those they support are some of the most vulnerable in society - Cinnamon Network Faith Action Audit (2016) quoted in [Belief in Communities: bridging the divide](#) - MHCLG - November 2018

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.faithaction.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FaithAction-Public-Health-Report.pdf> p51

<sup>7</sup> <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/20150129-sport-and-the-church-in-london-research-summary-final-se.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/news/church-england-backs-sports-ministry>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/13-march/news/uk/the-bishop-of-derby-speaks-of-sport-s-opportunity-for-church>

The approach for the next three years is to:

- a) **Mainstream** sport and wellbeing approaches by moving away from one off or stand-alone projects to ensuring that sport and wellbeing is an important strategic component of CoE and Diocesan life.
- b) **Model and evaluate** sound strategic thinking by working together in close cooperation to share learning, good practice and adoptable and adaptable models
- c) **Multiply** the best of what is already happening in some Dioceses, churches or organisations
- d) **Resource** this area of work more effectively to ensure growing development and future sustainability.

## THE CURRENT STRATEGY

The initial strategy for the project consists of a number of key strands including:

### 1. **SEVEN PILOT DIOCESES PROJECT**

The significant aspect of the strategy is the **Seven Pilot Dioceses Project**. Launched in July 2020, with funding from the Laing Trust, the project aims to inform and create a stronger evidence base about how Dioceses use sport and wellbeing provision as a significant tool to reach, engage and build local communities and transform health and wellbeing locally. Taking a place-based approach, the chosen pilots (with many more wanting to be involved) comprise: Birmingham, Blackburn, Gloucester, Guildford, London (Kensington Area), Norwich, Rochester. Each Diocese is at a different stage in the development of their pilots yet united in the belief that the Church can play a significant role through sport and wellbeing in their local community.

2. The creation of new **working partnerships** with parachurch and community sport organisations to ensure it is serving the community using insight gained and theories of change to achieve a range of relevant outcomes.
3. The development of **national partnerships** with key organisations to better understand public policy and funding objectives and frameworks.
4. Planning The development of its **insight and evidence-base** to help determine what models are replicable and scalable in reaching, engaging and transforming how the Church successfully engage and deliver this agenda.
5. Working with Ridley Hall College, Cambridge, and other organisations to develop a relevant **sports and wellbeing ministry training and leadership pathway** for both ordained and lay leaders. This pathway will recognise the value of sport, wellbeing and faith within a community context, as well as developing understanding in project management, and high-quality engagement models with social and faith outcomes.

# WORK ALREADY UNDERWAY

Three of the pilot Dioceses are already experienced in using sport and wellbeing in community contexts:



The Diocese of London has numerous small to mid-scale provisions in a range of settings and local charity *Kick London* delivers PE and Sport alongside mentoring, and afterschool and holiday clubs in 77 schools. The London Diocese has also invested in two pilot projects, Hoxton Sport and Wellbeing Hub (youth sport and adult wellbeing) and the new Activate project in Hampton and Teddington (currently developing social prescribing and mental health offers), to prove significant new models of community engagement, innovating how the church can tackle inactivity and deliver social outcomes.



The Diocese of Gloucester, building on many years of community sport and school delivery by a local charity *PSALMS*, have recently approved a significant funded strategy to create a network of sport and physical activity centres primarily engaging with children, young people, their families and young adults. These centres will deliver increased activity, social outcomes and provide leadership pathways for young people. There is scope to work with councils and developers in creating stronger community around sporting activity within new housing developments.



The Diocese of Norwich has been engaging through sport and wellbeing through a local charity. *The Sports Factory* delivers school coaching sessions, ASC, PE lessons, lunch clubs, holiday clubs, Pilates and Prayer, Fab and Fit (over 50's fitness), online stretch and as well as social Netball and Football. They successfully target people from within the community from all ages and stages including: adults, children, over 50's, students, youth, SEN and disability. With a significant grant from the Church Commissioners, the Diocese is replicating this model in four new areas across Norfolk.

If you are interested in knowing more about this work please contact:

**The Revd. Natalie Andrews, National Sport and Wellbeing Project Lead,**  
Archbishops' Council on **07435 917066** or **[Natalie.andrews@churchofengland.org](mailto:Natalie.andrews@churchofengland.org)**