



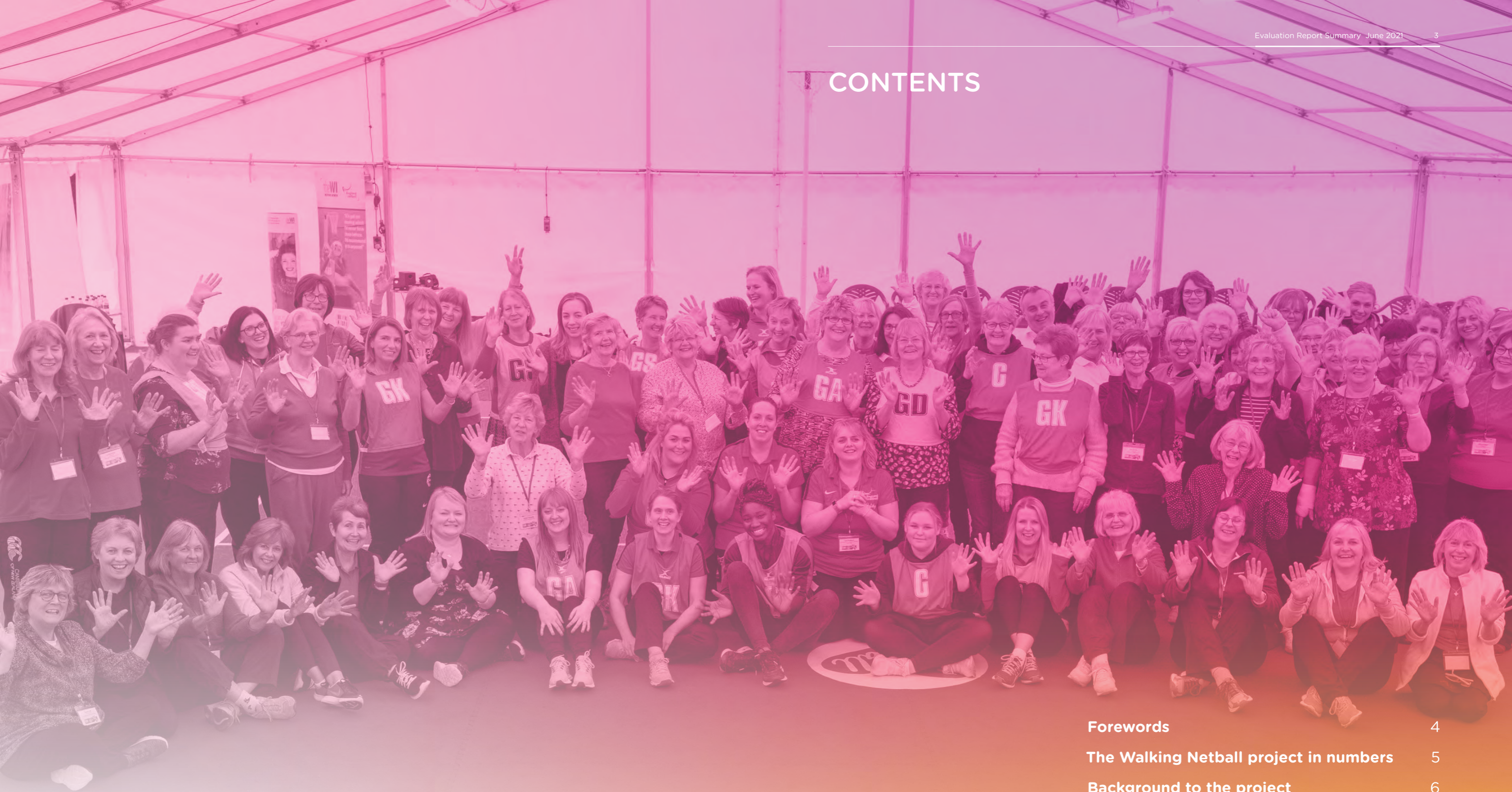
# WALKING NETBALL

## ENGLAND NETBALL AND THE WI WALKING NETBALL PROJECT

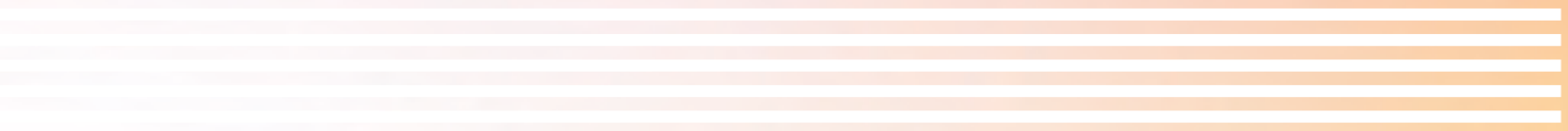
EVALUATION REPORT SUMMARY  
JUNE 2021



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# FOREWORDS



“This project and innovative partnership with the WI has enabled more women to enjoy all the benefits of being active through netball in the familiar surrounding of their WI. The project that engages members of the WI to participate when they otherwise wouldn’t have, has been a huge success. The approach we have taken to empowering members of the WI to become Walking Netball Hosts, not only ensures women can continue to participate in Walking Netball, but also ensures the sessions are perfect for their peers within the WI. Welcoming both the NFWI as well as individual members of WI has been a real pleasure and we look forward to continuing to collectively impacting the lives of women.”

**Fran Connolly**  
Chief Executive Officer  
England Netball

“This initiative has been hugely popular with members of all ages and during lockdown, the online fun sessions have provided a welcome chance to keep in touch whilst keeping active.”

**ANN JONES, NFWI CHAIR**



“The Walking Netball project has brought together two nationally recognised and trusted women’s organisations and has exceeded expectations making the project, to date, the most successful sporting partnership seen in the WI.

“Members of all ages and abilities across the country, have taken to Walking Netball with enthusiasm and passion and have been a leading force in demonstrating the sport can be inclusive to all women, regardless of age or ability. Not only has the project brought together women by building their confidence, reducing loneliness, enhancing social interaction and celebrating achievements, it has also given members the opportunity to develop and sustain personal skills whilst improving physical ability in a safe, friendly and fun environment.”

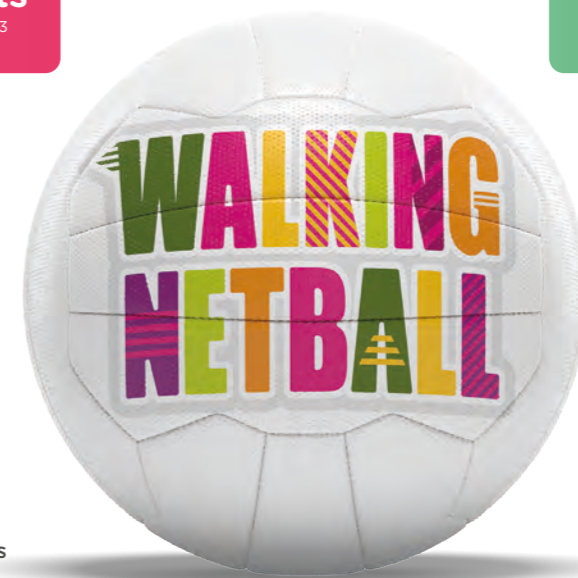
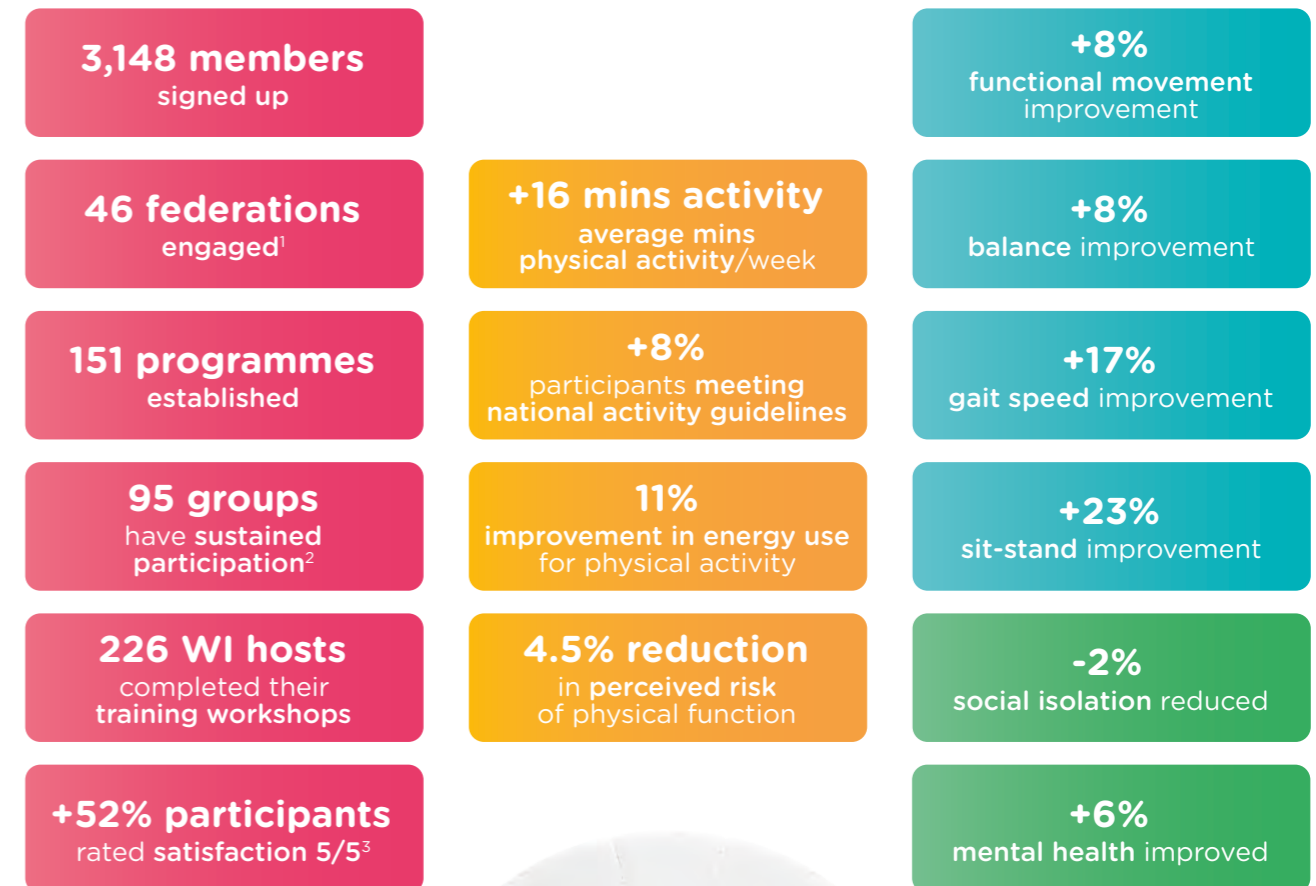
**Ann Jones**  
Chair  
National Federation of Women’s Institutes

**The WI:  
Bold and Inspiring,  
Growing and Relevant,  
Inclusive and Flexible**

# THE WALKING NETBALL PROJECT IN NUMBERS

In March 2018, England Netball and the National Federation of Women’s Institutes (NFWI) joined forces to engage women in activity through netball, so they too could experience the physical, social and mental

benefits enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of women across the country. This is just a snapshot of the positive impact Walking Netball has had on these women’s lives so far:



- Key**
- Programme engagement
  - Activity level improvements
  - Functional improvements<sup>4</sup>
  - Mental and social health improvements

<sup>1</sup> 82% of the federations in England  
<sup>2</sup> Participation defined as continued beyond initial 20-session Walking Netball host delivery  
<sup>3</sup> Satisfaction rated after 12-months in the programme  
<sup>4</sup> The mean age of the sample taking part in functional improvement testing was 66.77±7.22 years)



# BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT



Whether it's to keep fit, feel good mentally or simply to have a giggle with friends, taking part in physical activity is important for wellbeing. As we go through life, it can become harder to stay active and women are especially impacted: raising a family, work commitments, age, lack of confidence, illness or injury are all reasons as to why women are less likely to participate and sustain a regular programme of physical activity.

That's why England Netball and the WI teamed up, with the aim of offering WI members a different means of meeting women within their communities, forming strong bonds of friendship and companionship, whilst encouraging them to increase activity levels, and reduce loneliness.

Our vision was for two nationally recognised and trusted female organisations to come together to empower women through a more accessible version of netball.

Following an early survey with WI members, it was recognised that almost 70% of the respondees (sample = 859) were not meeting physical activity participation guidelines.<sup>1</sup> The project also set out to meet the UK Government's five key outcomes for sport: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.<sup>2</sup>

The project was funded for two years by Sport England (March 2018 - March 2020).

<sup>1</sup> Kinnafick, F. E., Brinkley, A. J., Bailey, S., Adams, E. J. Is Walking Netball an Effective, Acceptable and Feasible Method to increase physical activity and improve Health in middle- to older age women?: A RE-AIM Evaluation. Under review

<sup>2</sup> HM Government. (2015). Sporting future: A new strategy for an active nation.





“We couldn’t play in the full game, the running game; people are perhaps recovering from illness, operations or whatever, or even just having age on their side and not being able to do as much and haven’t got as much mobility. And I just thought Walking Netball just lends itself to anybody and everybody with or without ability. You can just get out there and just do it.”

SUE, WI HOST



**What is Walking Netball?**

Walking Netball is a slower version of the game we know; it is netball, but at a walking pace. Women the length of the country have started playing Walking Netball for the fun, laughter and camaraderie the social session brings, as much as the health benefits on offer.

Walking Netball has been designed so that anyone can play it regardless of age or fitness level. From those who have dropped out of the sport they love due to serious injury, to those who believed they had hung up their netball trainers many years ago, Walking Netball really is for everyone.

**What is the WI?**

With approximately 200,000 members across 69 federations and over 6,000 local institutes, the WI is the largest women’s organisation in the UK and prides itself on being a trusted place for women of all generations and diversities to share experiences and learn from each other.

For some, being part of the WI is a chance to meet people and catch up with friends. For others, it’s a chance to learn new skills, take part in a wide variety of activities promoting physical and mental wellbeing and to make a difference in their communities through campaigns.

**How the project worked**

Following on from a successful pilot with WI members in Nottinghamshire Federation, England Netball and the NFWI launched a carefully planned national campaign, fronted by WI members involved in the pilot, with the aim of introducing Walking Netball across WIs in England and encouraging members to get involved. To ensure members felt supported and informed, we attended WI meetings to present and promote the partnership and the benefits of Walking Netball, engage with members and alleviate any concerns. Once everything was in place to run a Walking Netball ‘programme’, 20 fully equipped weekly or fortnightly sessions were delivered by an England Netball Walking Netball Host (EN Host) in venues that the WI’s were familiar with. These sessions were flexible, and England Netball responded to the needs of the groups. To encourage WI members to stay active beyond these first sessions and leave a positive legacy for the project, WI members were also empowered and trained to host their own future sessions (WI Hosts).



**A typical session included:**

**A warm-up activity** - a chance for members to warm up, get to know each other and get ready to play Walking Netball.

**Activities** - combination of fun activities and games providing a chance to develop skills such as passing, ball handling, reactions and shooting.

**Gameplay** - similar to traditional netball but participants are walking and some rules have been adapted to minimise injury and aid balance.

**The role of Hosts**

The first 20 sessions of each programme was delivered by an England Netball Walking Netball Host (EN Host) whose role was to lead these sessions as well as help identify, recruit, mentor, give confidence to, and support one or more potential WI Hosts from within the group. The Netball Development Officer/Netball Development Community Coach was key to supporting this alongside the EN Host.

After completing an England Netball Walking Netball Host workshop, WI Hosts were able to lead their own sessions with ongoing support from England Netball through resources including workshops and activity resource booklets.



**How the programme rolled out**

**Promotion**

**National campaign** fronted by WI members

**Recruitment**

WI submits an **expression of interest** to be involved in the project and selection is made. Selection was based on a number of **criteria** including **readiness to get involved, availability of venue** and **host availability**

**Contact**

**England Netball Development Officer** visits WI to provide an **insight** into the project

**Delivery**

Up to **20 sessions** for each WI delivered by **England Netball Walking Netball Hosts** (EN Hosts, equipment provided)

**Identify and train WI hosts**

**Providing leadership opportunities** and **promoting sustainable delivery** of Walking Netball sessions

**Legacy**

**WI Host** leads ongoing sessions



# RESEARCHING THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT



The Walking Netball project was evaluated by researchers at Loughborough University and the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine, East Midlands, using data collected between April 2018 and December 2019, with further work undertaken early in 2021 to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent impact on WI members returning to the sport. The evaluation used the RE-AIM (reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation and maintenance) framework.<sup>3</sup>

The aim was to evaluate:

- The effectiveness of Walking Netball, and its social context, in reaching women, particularly those who had initially shown an inactive level of sport participation, and helping them transition into maintainable levels of activity
- The impact of the project on mental and physical health outcomes
- The factors influencing implementation of the project and participation by women, particularly those aged 55yrs and over.

To achieve these aims, the following were assessed:

- Uptake of the project by WI members and the characteristics of participants
- Changes in physical activity levels over a 12-month period
- The impact of the sources of social support on motivation and perceived loneliness of those participating in the programme
- Changes in perceived mental and physical health outcomes, and objective physical performance function
- Uptake of the project by WIs or federations and the factors influencing uptake at the individual and organisational level
- Key barriers and facilitators for implementing the project and how these impact on programme fidelity and adaptation
- Barriers and facilitators for engagement, participation and adherence
- Participant satisfaction
- Factors influencing the long-term sustainability of the project
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the future of the Walking Netball project.



The research undertaken used both quantitative and qualitative methods:

## Quantitative research methods

**A longitudinal survey study<sup>4</sup>** to understand the physical, psychological and social benefits of participation, with data collected prior to the start of the programme, and at three months, six months and 12 months after the programme started.

**A (quasi) experimental study** comparing physical function (eg gait function, mobility and muscular strength) of participants to a control group of non-participants after six months.

**Programme monitoring data** recording number of programmes, number of participants and WI Host training (data collected by England Netball).

## Qualitative methods

**Interviews and focus groups with 37 WI members** who were regularly participating, sporadically participating or had dropped out of the programme, to understand the effectiveness of the programme.

**Focus groups with EN Hosts** in three different regions of England to understand how or if the programme was being implemented differently across differing areas of the country.

**Telephone interviews** with WI Hosts to provide insight into how the programme was delivered and individual differences in delivery style.

<sup>3</sup> Glasgow RE, Vogt TM, Boles SM. Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *Am J Publ Health.* 1999; 89:1322-1327.

<sup>4</sup> Survey completions: pre-baseline survey, available to all members (859), registration survey, baseline/start of programme (828), 308 members 3-month follow-up, 226 members 6-month follow-up, 158 members 12-month follow-up

Survey measures: **Physical activity behaviour** (International Physical Activity Questionnaire 'Short Form' (IPAQ)) **Mental health and wellbeing** (Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)) **Loneliness and social isolation** (UCLA loneliness scale-V3) **Quality of life** (Dartmouth COOP Functional Assessment Chart (COOP) Motivation (Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire-3) **Support of autonomy, competence and relatedness** (Care Climate Questionnaire-Short Form adapted for exercise settings) **Participant demographics** were assessed with questions relating to age, ethnicity, disability status, education, household income, marital status and living status, **programme satisfaction** was assessed with a single item. Higher scores represent higher satisfaction.



# RESEARCH FINDINGS

Understanding the effectiveness of the project, its impact on the WI members involved and recommendations for the future.

**3,148** WI members signed up to Walking Netball

**46** Federations of the WI were engaged (82%)



“We had a message down from our national federation, and they were saying about how they wanted to get England Netball and WI to get together and, well it wasn't just fitness, it was to get people together, different groups of people but all WIs together, and see if we could get back to netball.”

JUDITH, WI MEMBER

## Reach

The total number of people the programme had the potential to contact and engage, and their personal and social demographics.

Fronted by WI members, a national campaign effectively engaged 46 federations in England (82%) in the project. Designed to connect with members on an emotional level, the campaign creatively resonated with WI members by promoting the social support and friendship benefits associated with Walking Netball, as well as the chance to improve fitness, wellbeing and health. A total of 3,148 WI members<sup>5</sup> have participated in the programme so far, inspired by the campaign and communications from England Netball, the NFWI, federations and WIs.

Insight from the first year of the project showed that speaking directly to WIs had the greatest impact on sign up and participation in the programme. This was delivered through presentations at WI meetings and meeting the WI WN contacts which introduced the project and partnership, explained the differences between Walking Netball and full-paced netball and answered questions.

<sup>5</sup> This value is consistent with previous population level sport-based health programmes such as Walking Football. This value is estimated based upon 'actual' sign ups rather than those who tried or trialled the programme, or indeed those who did not formally register their participation. It is plausible these members may have participated, and the reach of the programme is greater than reported.

## Hitting the headlines

In January 2018, the project enjoyed national media coverage when BBC Breakfast presenter John Maguire joined a Walking Netball session in Nottingham, alongside (then) England Netball CEO Joanna Adams.

## Participant demographics

Understanding who takes part in the project and who doesn't is important to help identify how involvement might be encouraged in the future.

Those who registered to a programme were compared to those who just completed the pre-baseline survey but then did not go on to take part. Those who did do the project were shown to:

- Do significantly less (3.2 days) physical activity than those who don't take part in Walking Netball (4.4 days)
- Sit between 20-40 minutes less than those who don't take part

Reaching individuals who participate less in physical activity and who are less healthy is the purpose of the Walking Netball project.

**+16** Increase in average mins/week of physical activity

**+11%** Increase in physical activity intensity/week

**17→9%** Decline in inactive participants over 12-months\*

\*'Inactivity' is defined as less than 30 minutes of moderate activity a week.

## Effectiveness

The impact of the programme on health and wellbeing.

### Changes in physical activity levels

Following participation in the programme, the proportion of WI members meeting national physical activity guidelines increased.

- Pre-baseline: 45%
- Baseline: 47%
- 3-months: 49%
- 6-months: 48%
- 12-months: 53%

Over the course of the project, members transitioned from inactive (less than 30 minutes of raised heartbeat activity a week) to fairly active and active (see Fig. 1) providing good evidence the project is effective at

influencing physical activity behaviour over time and that Walking Netball may provide a maintainable mode of physical activity, particularly for women aged 55 yrs and over.

The average number of minutes per week of physical activity increased by 16 minutes, with physical activity intensity increasing by 11% (measured as MET minutes per week. See Fig. 2).

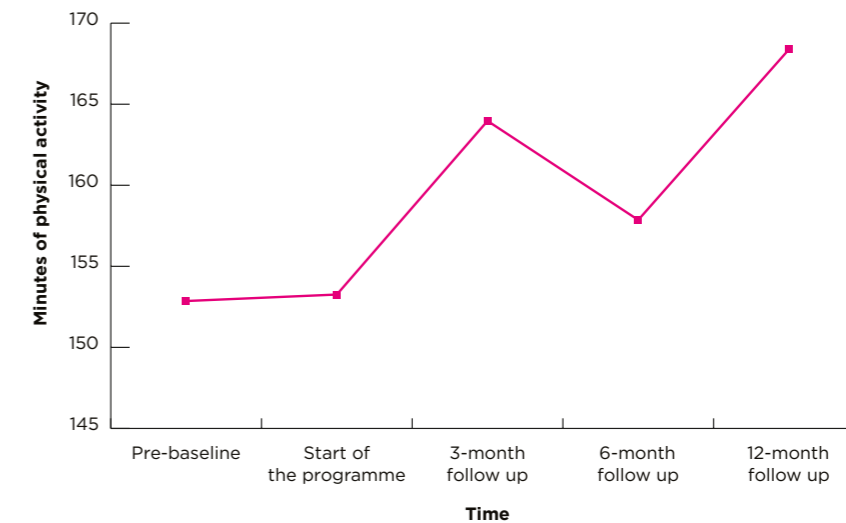
### Physical activity guidelines for women aged 55 yrs and over:

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week or
- 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity per week
- Plus an activity which promotes muscular strength twice a week

Fig. 1 Physical activity participation over time

	PRE-BASELINE	BASELINE	3-MONTHS	6-MONTHS	12-MONTHS
INACTIVE	17%	15%	10%	9%	9%
FAIRLY ACTIVE	38%	38%	41%	43%	38%
ACTIVE	45%	47%	49%	48%	53%

Fig. 2 The impact of Walking Netball on minutes of physical activity over time



MET is the metabolic intensity grading of an activity. A vigorous activity such as running would have a greater MET value than a light mode of physical activity such as walking

We examined the number of days per week members take part in physical activity for at least 30 minutes (SIPA). Secondly we examine the minutes per week a member participates in physical activity. This includes walking, moderate and vigorous intensities of activity (IPAQ Short). Finally, we examine metabolic equivalent of task (MET). METs are an expression of the intensity of activity. A MET is a ratio of working metabolic rate relative to resting metabolic rate. One MET is considered as sitting quietly and is equivalent to a caloric consumption of 1kcal/kg/hour. By multiplying MET by minutes we are able to examine intensity per week (IPAQ Short).



**Improving mental health and wellbeing**

Interviews and focus groups with WI members, WN Hosts and WI Hosts indicated the programme has the potential to positively impact mental health and wellbeing, which improved by 6% over the course of the programme (see Fig. 3). WI members and Hosts described how Walking Netball provided **a skill to master** and achieve, **reduced stress**, and **improved confidence, friendship, teamwork, social connections, happiness and enjoyment**. Importantly, Walking Netball members looked forward to an enjoyable activity, cohesion and friendship.

*“It does alleviate that stress, worry and provides friendship and togetherness... you feel part of a team.”*

SHEILA, WI MEMBER

**6%** improvement in mental health and wellbeing over the programme

**2%** reduction in social isolation

**Reducing loneliness**

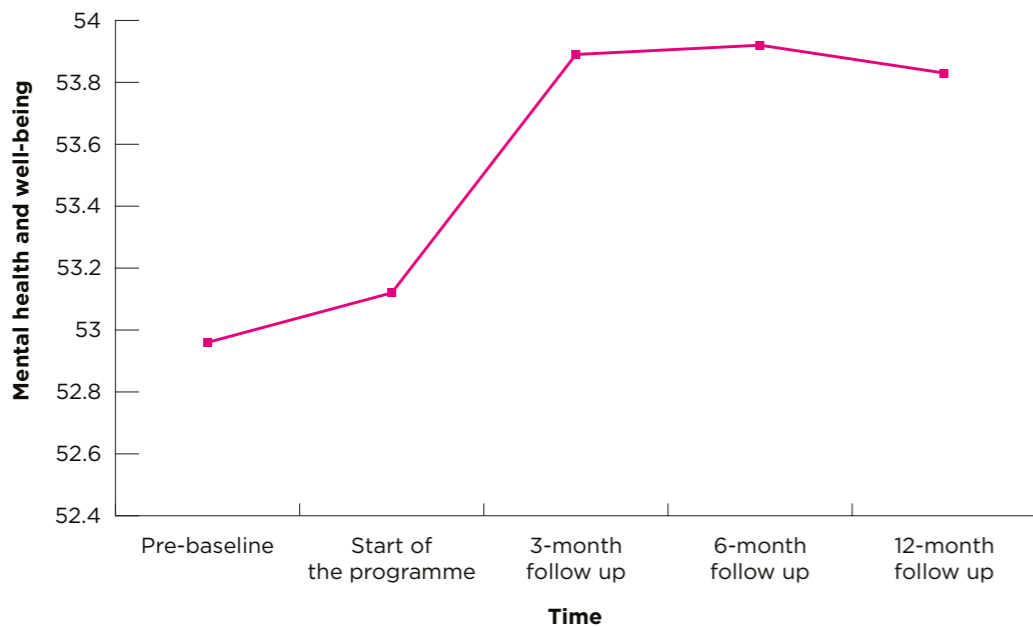
Loneliness is known to be prevalent in older adults, but participation in a regular community group is known to help reduce feelings of social isolation.<sup>6</sup> The WI is in a unique position to offer opportunities for women of all ages and diversities to socialise and meet other women within their community, form friendships and take part in a range of activities.

The programme research showed perceived social isolation reduced by 2% over the 12-month programme period. Along with previous research<sup>7</sup> and data collected from focus groups and interviews, this suggests participation in Walking Netball provides a setting to maintain friendship, social connections, identity and relatedness.

*“You’re actually getting a bit more from people (by seeing them), and they’ll start talking, mostly during the warm-up! We usually all get there at least 20 minutes before we’re due to start, just to catch up!”*

CATHERINE, WI MEMBER

Fig. 3 The impact of Walking Netball on mental health and wellbeing over time



Note: Y-axis is measured using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. It ranges from 14 to 70 as a total score. The mid point is 42. Scores higher than this value reflect good mental health and wellbeing.

<sup>6</sup> Luo, H., Newton, R. U., Ma'ayaj, F., Galvão, D. A., et al. (2020). Recreational soccer as sport medicine for middle-aged and older adults: A systematic review. *BMJ Open Sport Exercise Medicine*.

<sup>7</sup> White, S. M., Wójcicki, T. R., & McAuley, E. (2009). Physical activity and quality of life in community dwelling older adults. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 7(1), 10.

**Improving motivation to participate in physical activity**

Participation in Walking Netball was shown to have a meaningful effect on motivation to participate in physical activity:

- Positive forms of self-endorsed motivation (staying healthy and happy) appear to increase or maintain at a high level over the course of the programme
- Negative motivations such as guilt, fear and anxiety appear to decline over time or at least not increase

Declines in amotivation after six months indicate members see some value in doing physical activity whilst declines in motivation through guilt, fear and anxiety may be explained by the supportive nature of EN Hosts and WI Hosts.

*“It’s not about winning in sport. I think mostly it’s about just having fun together. We’re not bothered about winning or whether we’ve scored. It doesn’t matter at the end of the day. We’ve all had a good afternoon.”*

BRIDGET, WI MEMBER

**Improving quality of life**

People’s perceived ‘quality of life’ is affected by their overall perception of their health, which is influenced by physical function, psychosocial wellbeing and living conditions.<sup>6</sup> As we age, risk to these factors increases, but there is evidence to suggest that Walking Netball has a meaningful impact on some of these aspects, including:

- 4.5% reduction in risk to perceptions of physical function
- Low risk to perceptions of feelings, daily activities, pain, health, social support are maintained over time
- Risk to overall quality of life reducing over time

These findings suggest participating in the Walking Netball programme is effective at protecting against reduction in quality of life.

*“You don’t even really realise you’re exercising. You’ve had a good work out at the end of it, your heart’s been pumping, and your joints have been stretched. So the exercise is brilliant. And the fact that it’s with friends is a bonus.”*

BETH, WI MEMBER AND WALKING NETBALL HOST





### Improving physical function

Participation in the Walking Netball programme was shown to be effective at improving markers of physical function – gait, extremity function, mobility, muscular strength and physical fitness – when compared with a control group who continued with their normal lifestyle over a six-month period.<sup>8</sup>

- 8% improvement in Functional movement
- 23% improvement in Sit-stand ability
- 8% improvement in Balance
- 17% improvement in Gait speed



<sup>8</sup> The mean age of the sample taking part in functional improvement testing was 66.77±7.22 years)



# ADOPTION

Understanding enablers and barriers to participation, who continues to participate and who drops out.



**To investigate the adoption of the project, the research sought to understand the uptake of Walking Netball by WI members, WIs and federations.**

## What enables and challenges participation in the programme?

Qualitative data collected from EN Hosts, WI Hosts, and WI members indicates a variety of enablers and barriers to encourage or challenge participation in Walking Netball across intrapersonal, interpersonal, environmental, policy and global factors.

“Some of the groups have now really bought into netball and especially after the Commonwealth Games. They wanted to talk about that, and we spent the majority of the time talking about playing netball and all of the stuff that comes with that, before actually playing it!”

**LAURA, ENGLAND NETBALL  
WALKING NETBALL HOST**

## Global-level enablers and barriers shaping participation

### Awareness, experiences and knowledge of netball

Every member involved in the project had some understanding and experience of netball and while it isn't known if this historical experience was positive in each case, every member had an awareness of the 'basics' of the sport. An awareness of basic rules may improve self-efficacy and perceptions of competence.<sup>7</sup> With this said, if this experience had been less positive, or indeed negative a member may have been less likely to sign up to netball. Experiences such as this may reduce self-efficacy, competence and subsequently willingness to participate.<sup>9</sup>

### Inspirational events

In recent years, netball has seen an unprecedented rise in profile, enjoying national media coverage thanks to England's Commonwealth Games gold medal capturing the hearts of the nation in 2018, and a home Netball World Cup in Liverpool in 2019. Connection to sport in this way can motivate participation through a sense of identity and belonging. In many cases, members described these events as inspiring, interesting, and engaging, which may have contributed to participation in the project.

**151** Walking Netball sessions have been established

**11** avg. no. of sessions participated in across 20 wks, (across 3,148 members)



## The growth of walking sports

Walking sports are a growing and popular alternative to traditional versions of sport for adults. In recent years, walking sports have been demonstrated, shown and published widely by both governmental bodies, charities, national governing bodies and national media. This exposure certainly has the capacity to promote participation. Promoting sport in an accessible style can reduce challenges related to self-efficacy, perceptions of competence and improve participation.<sup>10</sup>

## Culture of the WI

The WI culture provided support, encouragement and investment for members who engaged in Walking Netball. Feeling supported by an organisation is linked to feelings of integration and belonging, which is known to maintain participation.<sup>11</sup>

## Policy-level enablers and barriers

Access to funded, free or publicly available facilities were some of the greatest enablers and barriers to participation in the Walking Netball project:

- Some WI groups negotiated with their respective county sports partnership, leisure centre provider or council to either subsidise or fund the use of a sports hall. The support of these bodies provided consistent support and availability and therefore opportunity to participate.
- Some WI groups worked with local schools or played on a free-to-use outdoor court. Access to these facilities promoted participation during warmer months, however challenged engagement during winter.
- Facilities which were expensive, inflexible (eg cannot cancel or move a session) or oversubscribed (eg school block bookings) challenged regular participation.

<sup>9</sup> Bauman, A. E., Reis, R. S., Sallis, J. F., et al. (2012). Correlates of physical activity: Why are some people physically active and others not? *Lancet*. 380. 258-71.

<sup>10</sup> Pedersen, M. T., Vorup, J., Nistrup, A., Wikman, J. M., et al. (2017). Effect of team sports and resistance training on physical function, quality of life, and motivation in older adults. *Scandinavian Journal Medicine and Science in Sport*. 28. 852-64.

<sup>11</sup> Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55. 68.





### Social and environmental-level enablers and barriers

#### Access to facilities

Where a facility was easy to access logistically (eg a short drive, walk or journey via public transport) participation was encouraged. In contrast, where a facility was too far, or perceived inaccessible, participation was challenged.

#### The design and appropriateness of the facility

In the early phases of the project some sessions were delivered in church or village halls, or WI buildings. While accessible, these buildings often challenged participation due to not being set up for netball, eg not having court markings, goals, low ceilings which reduced game play. A number of facility options were often explored before starting delivery. Unsuitable facilities could cause confusion, reduce competence and exacerbate injury. Outdoor facilities have been highlighted as a positive alternative but also pose challenges, particularly during the winter months, with unsuitable surfaces risking injuries in wet conditions.

#### Seeing peers participate

Both EN Hosts and WI Hosts reported new members attending sessions had often observed sessions for weeks prior to participation. Supporting participation in a progressive observational style could be a means to promote the programme to those who are apprehensive to take part.

In some cases, EN Hosts used videos to demonstrate the project in meetings prior to participation. These videos were also shown on the England Netball website and MyWI (WI members-only website) to encourage participation. Research shows that positive vicarious experiences like these may encourage self-efficacy, normalise participation and promote perceptions of competence.<sup>12</sup>

*“I think she’s just a natural people person. She’s really warm, friendly...and she just keeps it flowing as well...the hour just goes really quickly.”*

HELEN, WI HOST



*“At one point I almost stopped because I did feel it was getting too competitive. We have to make sure we cater for the whole range of abilities, not just the ones that are good or the ones that are quick. It’s got to be enjoyable for everybody.”*

ANN, WI MEMBER

### Interpersonal-level enablers and barriers

#### The influence of EN Hosts and WI Hosts

The EN Hosts and WI Hosts who supported autonomy, competence and relatedness through tailoring sessions to individual members in a friendly and encouraging style, enabled participation. For example, hosts offered choice and control to members, progressed Walking Netball with the needs of the group and created a supportive culture.

#### Support from family and friends

A supportive partner, friends, children and grandchildren could encourage participation. A member commented on family members building a back-garden netball post and playing in bubbles during the COVID-19 lockdown.

WI members could likewise offer social support and help members deal with challenges associated with playing Walking Netball such as self-efficacy. Importantly, cohesion and social support during sessions promoted participation.

Balancing family, work and social commitments such as caring for children, grandchildren or dependents could prevent members participating in the programme. This occurred to the greatest extent when Walking Netball sessions were planned during the working day so to prevent this challenge some WIs adopted session times in the evening.

#### Introducing competition

The influence of competition is a factor which must be carefully balanced when delivering Walking Netball. Some members thrived with competition promoting their perceptions of competence, providing a goal to strive for and improving engagement. Others, however, felt dejected and that their competence was challenged. So in some participants competition could increase fear of failure, reduce self-efficacy and prevent engagement with the programme.

<sup>12</sup> Pedersen, M. T., Vorup, J., Nistrup, A., Wikman, J. M., et al. (2017). Effect of team sports and resistance training on physical function, quality of life, and motivation in older adults. *Scandinavian Journal Medicine and Science in Sport*. 28. 852-64.





### Intrapersonal-level enablers and barriers

**Individual enablers and barriers to participation include both physical and psychological factors.**

#### Injury

Many WI members discussed balancing the risk and reward of participation in activities and their reluctance to participate due to age, lack of physical ability or confidence. Injury, when it occurred, could dramatically reduce participation. A reduction in participation was not only limited to the injured member, but dropout occurred within the group.

Managing injuries was important in continuing participation with the following having a positive effect:

- A plan to deal with injuries
- Following up with injured members
- Adapting practice to prevent injury (progressive warm-up, prompting walking, and correct patterns of movement)

#### Motivation

Findings from the multiple baseline study suggests WI members are motivated by enjoyment, finding value in the activity (eg, improved mental health) and personal goals, which progress over the course of the programme or are maintained at a high level.

#### Self-efficacy and confidence

Confidence in life and self-efficacy in physical activity could enable or challenge participation. Members commented on how their state of health, shaped through previous or current participation in physical activity, encouraged self-efficacy and likewise participation in Walking Netball.

In contrast, reduced perceptions of physical function, health status and fitness could reduce self-efficacy and confidence and subsequently participation in the programme. However, these challenges to self-efficacy could be reduced by the support of the group.



“I was very conscious of the fact I’m one of those people who had avoided sport all their lives and was well known for getting out of sport at school. As I hit middle life, with menopause and things, I was starting to feel quite depressed ... So I started doing a bit of walking, realised actually it made me feel better, so when walking netball came up I thought how hard could that be?”

**SHIRLEY, WI MEMBER**

“If you haven’t done sport for a long, long time you think ‘Oh, I can’t do that,’ but when you actually get into it and get the enthusiasm and the encouragement from everybody else...to be actually able to go and do that and feel part of it, it’s brilliant.”

**PATRICIA, WI MEMBER**



# IMPLEMENTATION

Understanding the delivery of the project and any adaptations made

This part of the research looked at key enablers and barriers for implementing the project and how this changed delivery. This included enablers and barriers for engagement and participation, reasons for dropouts and how coaches, volunteers and peer-led physical activity delivery can impact on inactive adults.

## Setting up Walking Netball programmes

Feedback from EN Hosts showed that the characteristics of individual WI groups were an important factor when setting up a programme. This included personal characteristics, such as the age, ability and health of members, and group characteristics, such as the organisation structure and leadership.

Agreeing that the delivery model worked well, and through their experience of setting up programmes in different WI groups, EN Hosts were able to identify what worked well, what didn't work well and provide recommendations for the future.

## Identifying hosts for the future

The project delivery model was designed to leave a legacy for future participation by identifying and training WI Hosts who would take on leadership of their group's programme after the initial 20 sessions.

EN Hosts identified characteristics which contributed to being a good WI Host:

- Friendly and welcoming
- Committed to delivering Walking Netball
- Outgoing and extroverted
- Being a leader within the group and a good communicator
- Previous experience of leading activities could potentially increase confidence of Hosts

In some cases, identifying WI members willing to take on the role of being a WI Host was challenging, with some lacking the confidence to lead sessions and others feeling unsure about the time commitment and their ability to commit regularly. To address this, many WI groups trained multiple Hosts to manage their programme, helping to spread the responsibility.

In their feedback on the project, WI members and WI Hosts frequently commented on the quality, support and engaging exercises their EN Host offered and, in many cases, this support encouraged long-term participation and gave WI Hosts the confidence to lead future sessions.

**226** WI Hosts have completed a Walking Netball Host Training workshop

**52%** of participants rated their satisfaction 5/5 12 months into the programme

✓ WHAT WORKS	✗ WHAT DOESN'T WORK	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE
Flexible and tailored approach to meet individual WI's needs	One-size-fits-all approach to working with WIs	Be adaptable to individual needs of WI members, eg age, ability and health status
Setting out clear goals, expectations and outcomes to WI	Unsuitable facilities (eg, too small, too costly)	Helping to identify characteristics of venues that are conducive to play - eg, having high ceilings, appropriate space, flooring, etc
Proactive and supportive president, committee or member of the WI (often a WI Host)	Lack of WI members able to train as WI Hosts and enable the sport to continue in the WI, past the 20-week programme	Engage WI leadership (eg president and committee)
Sessions with 14-16 participants	Relying on modern methods of communication (eg, email)	Continued face-to-face meetings to explain project and answer questions from WI, provide FAQs



## Training WI Hosts

Face-to-face theory and practical training was delivered by England Netball and covered rules, health and safety, adapting activities, umpiring and leading sessions to develop confidence and communication. WI members found the course to be accessible and detailed and welcomed that it was funded.

Whilst initially concerned that they would lack the experience to contribute within a training workshop taught alongside experienced coaches, WI Hosts were pleased to learn they shared the same motivation to help others.

The Host training appeared to be effective at influencing the long-term delivery and hosting of Walking Netball sessions. In many cases, WI Hosts started to deliver alongside their EN Hosts, and developed confidence to lead warm ups, cool-downs or elements of the session. After training, WI Hosts reported feeling better able to:

- Engage their peers and promote Walking Netball within their WI
- Tailor and adapt activities and games according to WI group
- Prevent injury and accidents within their sessions
- Deliver with confidence in their own ability and knowledge.

## Programme satisfaction

Members reported enjoying playing Walking Netball due to the skills involved to play, engaging activities, having a supportive host and the social experience. The majority of participants were completely satisfied with their experience of the programme (rated it 5 out of 5) at 3-months (59%), 6-months (56%) and 12-months (52%).

Challenges to programme satisfaction included injury, poor perceptions of competence and reluctance towards competition. These could be addressed with tailoring sessions, promoting correct technique and utilising different activities.

“The majority of the people training as hosts belonged to a netball club, were umpires or were previous players at quite a high level. I think that was what was important, is how flexible it was to the needs of the group we were serving. I felt the games we played, the skills, the exercises, were all adaptable and we could do it at our pace.”

JUDITH, WI HOST



# MAINTENANCE

Understanding how Walking Netball programmes can become part of routine practice within the WI



To understand the long-term future of the WI Walking Netball project, the research examined factors that could influence its sustainability within the WI and considered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviews conducted with WI Hosts highlighted several effective methods and strategies that could help to maintain and grow Walking Netball within the WI community.

**Recommendation:** WI Hosts suggested further online resources, face-to-face courses, videos, booklets to continue their development would be valuable. These suggestions are being considered by EN and the NFWI as part of our future development planning.

- Promoting sessions to people outside the WI group (members of other WI groups or people from within the local community)
- Creating a sustainable funding structure to support the programme
- Having multiple Hosts (beyond those trained through the programme) to help with organisation, reducing pressure on individual hosts and allowing them to participate in sessions themselves
- Taking part in local inter-WI competitions and England Netball Walking Netball Festivals
- Hosts continuing their development through online and written resources, watching YouTube videos, using social media and learning from other hosts.

**3,700** views of the 'Biggest Wiggle and Giggle' virtual WN event



## Wiggling and giggling through a global pandemic

When COVID-19 struck in early 2020, the world as we knew it changed unrecognisably. As a result of national restrictions imposed in March 2020, all community sport programmes and groups were forced to stop. It was time to turn Walking Netball virtual.

## Creating a virtual Walking Netball world

Just like in many other walks of life, Walking Netball moved online during the pandemic, keeping members engaged and connected to one another through netball.

Virtual Walking Netball began in April 2020 with weekly (increased to twice weekly sessions following demand from members wanting an option of attending an evening session alongside the morning session.) sessions streamed live on Zoom and pre-

recorded sessions and activities posted on the England Netball YouTube channel. Members also enjoyed special standalone events like the 'Biggest Wiggle and Giggle', Pass the Ball Challenge and a Christmas party.

Sessions were designed to maintain health and wellbeing, encourage social interaction and support as well as the maintenance in Walking Netball skills gained during the programme.

Virtual sessions were delivered via Zoom, helping to keep a sense of community, enabling WI members to meet other members from across the country (virtually) and stay active whilst at home. Sessions also included quizzes, bingo and virtual 'cuppa and a chat' afterwards. These sessions have the capacity to improve and maintain mental health and wellbeing, prevent loneliness and maintain quality of life.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Townsend, N., Wickramasighe, K., Williams, J., et al. (2015). Physical Activity Statistics 2015. British Heart Foundation.



## CONCLUSION

**This project has certainly proven to be a productive way to take netball to a new audience and for members of the WI, the project is proving to be a great way to improve physical and mental health.**

In conclusion, to build from this now 'tried and tested' model, the following will be considered and look to be activated:

- England Netball and the NFWI will continue to work together as two leading organisations for women. The Walking Netball project will remain at the heart of the strong partnership but we will explore ways in which we can work together beyond this to empower women.
- The Covid pandemic, like in so many aspects of life has had a real impact on the project stopping the momentum that had been built in it's tracks. We will dedicate time to rebuild participation in Walking Netball as well as encouraging members of the WI to integrate back into WI life through Walking Netball. The network of trained Hosts is crucial to this so time will be spent supporting them through activities such as 'Confidence to Court' webinars, monthly drop-in virtual sessions, provision of digital activity cards and other resources to give confidence and encouragement to return their sessions. We will also look to fully understand the landscape and the mood of the nation as we begin to come out of the pandemic. This will help us really understand any changes, support or resources so that many members can enjoy and benefit from Walking Netball again.
- The findings of this study along with the anecdotal and case studies really do suggest there is still demand from more local WI's to get involved in the programme given it's success in improving and maintaining the physical and mental health of participants, this is something that we are looking forward to doing. Whilst it is important to restart and rebuild WIs who were already involved in

WN, the impact this project could have on more WI's is significant. So we will 'relaunch' the project to grow the number of members participating in WN, to enable WI members to benefit from the partnership.

- Explore growing the network of peer:peer support for those involved in organising the activity or those members of the WI who train as Walking Netball Hosts. The WI Hosts are crucial for the longer term success and sustainability of Walking Netball and the delivery of brilliant, safe and fun sessions that ensure all the benefits continue to be seen. They are a group that we want to ensure are fully supported and those from within the WI are most likely to understand the challenges they face and are argueably well placed to help. We will explore how this could be facilitated through new volunteer roles.
- The impact of the project is great and given the basis of the strong partnership between England Netball and the NFWI, it is important to explore the sustainability of the activity and project so it doesn't come to end in the short term. The generous funding from Sport England has enabled the project to date and both organisations remain committed to working together beyond the grant funding. We do however need to explore ways in which this becomes financially sustainable and is integrated into both the Netball Family as well as the regular programme of activities within local WI's.





# THANKS

England Netball and the WI Walking Netball Programme and its evaluation would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the team behind it.

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Finally, we wish to thank **every single member of the WI** for their participation, both within the programme and our evaluation research. We hope that your experience of the project and our incredible sport continues to bring you joy.

Walking Netball Celebration photography: Edmund Blok  
Other photography: Walking Netball participants







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