



THE EXPERIENCE OF THE  
**CORONAVIRUS**  
LOCKDOWN

IN LOW-INCOME AREAS OF  
ENGLAND AND WALES



During April and May 2020, some 270 Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs)<sup>1</sup> and 188 young people shared their experiences, worries and opinions about life in their neighbourhoods during and after the Covid lockdown.

The LTOs and young people came from all over England and Wales. Most were aged between 16 and 19 and some younger people also completed the survey.

The LTOs provide fun-sport on the doorstep of disadvantaged communities. This sport is all about 'fun, fitness and friendship'. It usually takes place in community space (rather than a sports club) and tends to be run by local people with sports leadership, community development and youth work skills. Because participants live on a low income, there is little or no cost to joining in the fun-sport. We call this approach, 'Doorstep Sport'<sup>2</sup>.

Most Doorstep Sport is a multi-sport offer without the intention of preparing teams for competition. LTOs offer more than sport- by providing somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to. They play a vital role in supporting some of the most vulnerable young people in the country.

## The Survey

LTOs' voices were heard through one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with StreetGames Regional staff, through virtual discussion groups and via two virtual round tables which were chaired by journalist Charlie Webster. Adrian Chiles and Brendon Batson attended these round tables.

188 young people, who live in LSEG neighbourhoods and are involved with LTOs, were interviewed by staff at the LTOs or completed an online survey which was created and managed by StreetGames. A further 60 joined in virtual round tables. Again, these conversations were free flowing, exploring themes rather than sticking to pre-formed questions. All these young people participate in Doorstep Sport.

All conversations covered the challenges disadvantaged individuals and communities face in the current crisis, particularly the challenges faced by young people and by the LTOs that support them. LTOs and young people also told us how communities struggle to keep active now that the activity sessions provided by the LTOs are suspended. Appendix A shows the views of the LTOs, in their own words.



## Context

The lived experience of the crisis is recognized as harsher in low-income areas than in more affluent places. This is true both economically and in terms of physical and mental wellbeing. A recent report from the Resolution Foundation found that nearly one-third of lower-paid employees have lost jobs or been furloughed as a result of the crisis. Only one-in-ten top earners have been similarly affected<sup>3</sup>. In deprived areas, Covid-19 death rates are currently more than double the rates in the most affluent areas. More children and young people from these communities will know people who have died as a result of the virus.

LTOs are doing their best to support their communities through these challenges, but the cost in time and resources is high. Those LTOs that traditionally focus on young people continue to do so, but many now find themselves also working with whole families. Place-based community projects comprise a quiet front line in the fight to support communities through the current crisis.

The young people rely on their LTOs for activity based social opportunities. Surveys show that about 70% of participants in LTO-run Doorstep Sport do not attend any other sports sessions (except in an education setting). LTOs are uniquely adept at activating those who are not naturally inclined towards sport, and are vital to the wellbeing of disadvantaged young people.

The LTOs in our survey are worried that their communities will be left on their own to pick up the pieces when lockdown is over. The landscape in their neighbourhoods has been changed by the pandemic. There will be more unemployment, especially amongst the youth, and there will be many more people struggling with their wellbeing and mental health. There will also be more family debt, breakdown, and stress. These LTOs are struggling to plan medium term help for their neighbourhoods because sources of money for the post-lockdown period seem to have dried up.



# WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE GROUND?

## The young people's experience of lockdown life

Home conditions during lockdown are often challenging for low income households, with young people trapped in overcrowded housing, with limited private space, and reduced access to normal support structures. A lack of space and privacy was cited by several participants as a barrier to staying active through online workouts. In one virtual roundtable, young people cited the difficulty of being stuck indoors for long periods of time, and those who had returned from university faced the additional challenge of struggling to adapt to being back in the family house with other people and with no personal space.

Young people often have no access to online devices that would allow them to engage with peers, and depending on their position in the family hierarchy, young people can struggle to access their family's few devices.

Some young people are more affected by lockdown than others, but all said they find lockdown life difficult because of the absence of 'something to do'. Lockdown has damaged their social lives with 77% of them citing their inability to socialize with friends and family as their biggest concern. They miss their friends and having someone to talk to and somewhere to go.

Following on from that concern are these worries:

- Education, they can't get their school/college work done to their satisfaction because they have no quiet and personal space.
- They lack access to adequate technology.
- They worry about themselves because their sleeping patterns are messed up and they have become lethargic.
- There are increased family stresses.
- 17% have lost jobs or have taken pay cuts.



## Young people and activities during lockdown

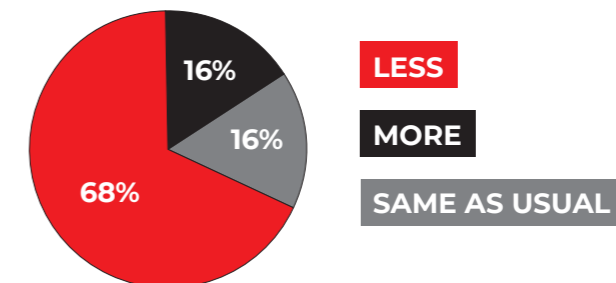
*"I've been finding it hard to be confined in one space because I usually go out a lot and do quite a lot of sport"*

Young people do not find it easy to stay or get active during the lockdown. More than two-thirds say their activity rates have dropped, while just 16% say they are now more active. Still, 45% say they are missing taking part in sport and 20% say they are missing competition.<sup>4</sup> Activity habits have changed, and for many, online physical activity sessions are not for them.

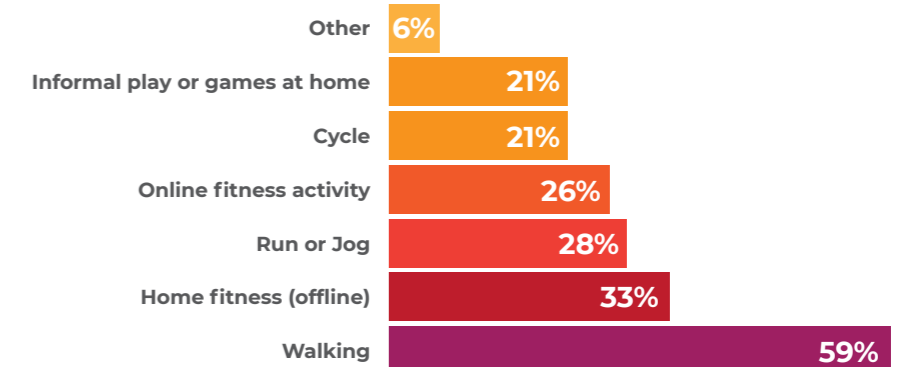
80% said the aspect of their LTO's Doorstep Sport which they like best is, 'socializing with friends' and that is what they miss. Exercising in isolation does not provide the same social benefits and so there was a generally negative attitude to walking and running, but they are tolerated activities in the absence of anything better. The Doorstep Sport provided by LTOs meets young people's needs to be active and socialize with their friends.

Young people said they want their LTO's sessions to resume as soon as it is safe to do so, and they would welcome opportunities to take part in other activities too, providing they are within budget and involve their friends.

Physical activity levels of young people during lockdown



How young people report they are keeping active during lockdown





## LTOs have changed their priorities and their way of working.

***“It’s not about the young people anymore, it’s about the young people and their families, and the older people and grandparents who have nobody.”***

The needs of low-income neighbourhoods have changed during the pandemic and therefore the role and function of LTOs has changed too. In many instances, LTOs have expanded from supporting young people to supporting entire families. They respond to their neighbourhood’s needs.

This shift towards a more holistic approach has taken place at a time when ways of working also have required rapid innovation. All LTOs specialise in bringing people together in communal gatherings, for Doorstep Sport or for other activities. This method is ruled out during lockdown. LTOs gradually changed the way they work as restrictions tightened and lockdown was brought into full force. When lockdown encroached, they moved to outreach work, working with young people out on the street.

Most LTOs have now locked their doors to the public, but LTOs’ staff and volunteers have found new ways to support their neighbourhoods. All neighbourhood support is provided remotely or via ‘knock and drop’ where goods are left on doorsteps.<sup>5</sup>

LTOs are playing a major role in supporting parents and families to navigate the authorities through lockdown: phoning schools to organize laptops/meal vouchers; phoning social services and delivering food parcels and other supplies. Families are getting very frustrated by not getting anywhere when they try to contact these services for support, so the LTOs are stepping in on their behalf. They also try to keep people physically active. Link4Life in Rochdale described how they have been redeployed within the council into a social work type role, directly supporting people with housing, food and safety needs.

***“[Pythian] are doing a volunteer service helping the elderly and vulnerable access food and essentials. They’ve got a FB support page where people and get in touch and Ben uses his staff and volunteers to deliver resources. Young people help out too”***

Most work is online, via WhatsApp and over the phone. The reason for maintaining this contact was summed up by June from Abraham Moss Warriors, Manchester who said her priorities for their 300+ young members were to ‘keep them safe, engaged with the outside world, and active’. Now that their young participants are confined to their homes, many LTOs monitor them remotely, calling the young people once a week, but the most vulnerable 2 or 3 times a week. Many have also been providing online mentoring, either one-on-one or in groups – providing support, advice and someone to talk to.

There has also been a shift to providing online activities, with LTOs coming up with a wide range of interactive online workouts, fitness activities, quizzes, and general social events. Burgess Sports, in London, created Burgess Got Talent – an online talent competition for their young participants. Providing online activities (or signposts) to help young people to be physically active at home is a frequent activity for LTOs.

Some LTOs support families with internet devices such as phones or laptops to help them with online learning and access to services.

***“We’ve gone to Argos and bought a number of cheap phones and given them to our young people so that they can keep in touch because not all of them have devices.”***

LTOs are also part of the networks that deliver food to vulnerable families. For example, North Paddington Youth Club, London has linked up with a local community kitchen and a Michelin star restaurant to provide 300 meals a day, delivered to households via the club’s minibus. Burgess Sport in London used their facilities to support a food programme offering 500 meals per week. Many LTOs report difficulties in bulk-buying where supermarkets restrict the number of goods that can be purchased.

Many LTOs provide games and activities to keep families occupied.



***“A lot of our families lack even basic resources like a football to play with.”***

Many LTOs have given out activity packs and sports kit. The Lawn Tennis Association has donated 5000 rackets to LTOs via StreetGames and many LTOs say table tennis kits are popular with families because it can be played indoors by any family that has a kitchen table. Heaton Norris Community Centre have been producing care/food and arts & crafts bags for young people and their families in the area. Some Active Partnerships and StreetGames have provided activity packs for LTOs to distribute. Most LTOs report that demand for sports kit exceeds supply. They do not have enough money to meet the need.

A smaller number of LTOs are providing one-to-one mentoring – mainly over the phone. Some mentoring has been commissioned by the local authority with named young people and this predates lockdown. LTOs report they often know which young people need considerable support before the young people are known to social services. LTOs now mentor many more young people than pre-lockdown.

Other LTOs’ staff are providing physical activity sessions in schools that are open for children of key workers and children known to social services. Aneurin Leisure in Wales have shifted from basing classes in a community centre to supporting school hubs.

As a result of this work, LTOs have concerns about the young people and their communities. Their most cited worries are mental health, family breakdown, financial pressures and the consequences of 6 months without structure or direction.



## Mental Health and Wellbeing

***“There are huge implications for when this is over, young people may have lost all their boundaries, lost all their behavior control, mental health is huge.”***

- Both lockdown and fears around the virus are driving forces for deteriorating mental health and wellbeing amongst young people and their families. LTOs report that in some cases, where young people's parents are frontline workers, their mental health is deteriorating quickly because they are terrified that their parents are going to die or bring illness home. Young people often didn't want to articulate those fears to their own parents who, 'already have enough to worry about', but they express it to the trusted adults at the LTO.
- LTOs also have to deal with young people who have lost friends or loved ones to Coronavirus. At Abraham Moss Warriors, they got a call at 3:00am from one young person in distress because a relative in Bradford had just died of Covid and they were afraid they were going to lose their family. Many LTOs report that younger children in general (5 and over) have been 'really scared' by lockdown.
- LTOs report that parents and carers say they need help controlling and supporting their teenagers who are suffering during lockdown. They can see the young people are behaving badly because they are distressed, but this does not always make it easier to live with.
- Social isolation and loneliness are taking a serious toll on mental health and this is not restricted to young people but to the whole community.
- Overcrowding is a particular problem in multi-generational households, where up to 10 people might live in a 3-bedroom house.
- The pressure to shield the older members of the household added to the fears and distress of the young people.



## Family Breakdown

***“The closed space has brought out some very nasty sides of people and in ways children might have been shielded from when they are at school. That's a challenging one to deal with because you can't go and knock on the door, it all has to be on the phone, and you go to bed thinking, “God, is that child safe?”***

- Concerns around isolated females – particularly some that are known to be in violent relationships and being able to stay in contact with them.
- Concerns that the increased tensions and hardships of lockdown are creating a toxic home environment for young people and exacerbating problems around domestic abuse. Some LTOs expressed fears that young people are seeing their parents and siblings in a new and negative light, some reporting verbal (and sometimes physical) aggression. In some cases, young people themselves have engaged in difficult or threatening behaviour. LTOs felt strongly that things are escalating because people are trapped in such small spaces.
- At Reestablish in Yorkshire, many of the families they work with are suffering with drug or alcohol abuse and a degree of 'emotional illiteracy' which makes it difficult for them to cope with the isolation and tensions of lockdown.
- Concerns that young people who are newly vulnerable are hidden and not known to social services, schools, or LTOs.





## Lack of structure for young people and loss of mojo

*“Older kids have been told they won’t be going back to school until September, they’re without any structure until then. Some of them were planning for their GCSEs and now that’s out the window”*

The lack of structure has had a negative impact on young lives. All projects reported that they could often not contact young people in the morning because their sleeping patterns had completely changed, they were sleeping in bed all day and staying up at night. LTO staff had to speak to the parents to explain that this wasn’t good and they needed some structure and routine. Abraham Moss Warriors said that following this guidance, most of them are now getting up in the morning and having a walk and getting some work done.

LTOs reported that young people who previously talked about going to college or their futures in a positive light are now not talking so cheerily. They seem to have forgotten.

- Concerns about the wellbeing of the young people they usually engage and how they will rediscover the confidence to mix in community settings.
- Concerns around some of the young people they usually engage with missing out on the positive role models they know at the LTO.
- Concerns about some of the young people not abiding by the lockdown restrictions and continuing to congregate in outdoor areas.



## Financial pressure on families

*“Those who are normally on the breadline are actually doing better, those who have lost their jobs or been furloughed and never had to navigate the system are having an even harder time. Those are the families that are struggling the most.”*

- A lot of families are struggling financially. Not every LTO found that the free school meal voucher system works well. Prior to lockdown many LTOs themselves were part of a breakfast club network. Now, due to lockdown that service is unavailable.
- Many LTOs reported that for families who are newly furloughed or laid off, a lack of knowledge about support structures and benefits has made life harder and created additional stress. Several LTOs reported that these families are often struggling more than the long-term unemployed due to their inability to navigate the system and because built in delays in the Universal Credit system often leave them without cash for an extended period of time.<sup>6</sup>
- LTOs report concern about families not understanding how to navigate the system. Some of the hardest hit are those who had previously been doing OK and have worked all their lives now found themselves furloughed or unemployed. Problems with applying for Universal Credit (UC) is a commonly noted problem. Those without ready internet access, those whose first language is not English, those who have no experience of applying for benefits need considerable help to register their claim. An LTO reported filling in the forms for people over the phone, then printing out the form, taking it to the claimant’s house for signing and then posting it. Even when a UC application has been logged, the weeks of waiting for payment is causing considerable hardship and distress.
- LTOs are worried about the summer holidays when there will be no free school meals vouchers and they hope lockdown will be lifted enough for them to be able to run holiday activity programmes, with food. LTOs expect more parents to be active with their children over the summer than is usually the case. This is because many parents may not feel comfortable letting the child out of sight.
- Many LTOs do not know how they will fund their summer activities. This situation is different for LTOs which are experienced in providing summer activities with food, often with the StreetGames Fit and Fed campaign and have established routes to funding. Some LTOs are part of local authority wide consortia that have successfully secured Department for Education (DfE) funding for summer activities with food provided or free school meals families.





## Pressures on LTOs through the crisis and beyond

*“Our reserves should be able to keep us going for another month and a half which is not what we want to do, because we want to be able to open straight back up again as soon as we can.”*

Place-based community projects comprise a quiet front line in the fight to support communities through the current crisis. LTOs report that their whole structure, finances and the activities they provide, are hurt by the pandemic. Paradoxically, these challenges run simultaneously with confirmation that they play a positive role in their neighbourhood's response to lockdown. The LTOs' local knowledge and strong relationships mean they are uniquely well-placed to reach out to young people and their families to offer support. This pre-existing credibility within the community also means they are often the first place people turn to, and this has put immense pressure on their resources. The extension of responsibility from young people themselves to whole families has added additional burdens on LTOs who are striving to support their communities.

*“Our biggest challenge at the moment is staying in touch with our young people when we're spread so thin, all our staff except me have been furloughed”*

Funding is a major source of concern. There are many small grant opportunities (with £500 ceilings) but it is very hard to secure the larger sums needed to guarantee long-term survival. Abraham Moss Warriors are funded by the lottery but most of their money comes from subscriptions; they do general fundraising such as bag packing at the supermarket. Unfortunately, a recent bid for additional Government support was unsuccessful. Other projects, like Ping Pong 4U in Leeds, have benefited from Sport England funding.

Aneurin Leisure in Wales said that they have been fortunate due to ongoing support from Sport Wales, but reported that smaller, less established organisations in their area were struggling to secure the necessary funds to deliver for young people in the locality.

*“We do benefit from Sport Wales funding but we are a small team. The biggest challenge is [how to] support other local community groups in terms of funding and assets. Ours is a very deprived local authority and the biggest fear is that this trend will continue and positive inroads are being undone by the crisis. It's very difficult to plan because of all the uncertainty.”*

For many LTOs, the amounts required to maintain operations are relatively small – two projects confirmed that £10,000 would cover everything they are doing for the foreseeable future. Despite this, that funding simply isn't there.

Several LTOs raised concerns that financial support is being focused almost exclusively on projects to assist with the Covid 19 crisis in the short term, with funders less willing to discuss support for the medium to long-term. This makes it difficult for organisations to prepare for the future even where they are currently getting funding for Coronavirus related activity.







## The support LTOs want

*“More funding would allow us to continue with our gift cards and food deliveries for local families. We’ve got a lot of young people suffering from stress and anxiety in lockdown and it would be good to have the resources to enhance the support we can give to those kids. We currently provide around 12 hours’ staff time each week focused on mental health support for those young people.”*

These organisations are doing incredible work up and down the country, but they cannot do it alone. The support these vital organisations need during the crisis and in the post lockdown phase is fivefold. Meeting these is key not only to their survival but to the lives of the many young people and families they are helping to steer their way through the added trauma that the pandemic has added to their lives. The needs/demands are set out below and include StreetGames’ response to date.



### 1. Direct investment and help to fundraise.

To date, StreetGames has helped 40 LTOs to bring in a total of £300k. There are other applications awaiting decision. Between a quarter and one third of LTOs within the StreetGames network have had to cease operations through the crisis, so securing funding to reopen and rebuild attendance for the medium-term is a high priority.

Hosting fundraising support webinars to raise awareness amongst LTOs of the Sport England Emergency Funding available and support LTOs to apply. Over 200 LTOs attended these webinars. Similar support is also planned in relation to the recently announced Sport Wales Resilience Fund.

### 2. Opportunities to share ideas and approaches to supporting LSEG youth, families, and communities through the lockdown.

Sharing ideas and activities via the StreetGames Facebook Network page and weekly spotlight focuses by Region on Instagram.

LTOs are also invited to use the #SportHelps hashtag across their social media platforms to highlight their work, activities or challenges which can be shared across the sector.

### 3. Space to be listened to, to be informed and provided with practical and personal support. StreetGames’ #SportHelps campaign is sharing out donated sports kit so LTOs can distribute to families.

This has included the distribution of 5,000 tennis activity kits to young people in low socio-economic groups across the country through our partnership with the LTA.

We have also partnered with Jaguar Land Rover to support projects in the Midlands with vehicles to distribute activity packs and food parcels to young people across the region, and worked with the WRU to distribute a donation of 100+ Rugby balls.

### 4. National and local level advocacy to enhance the appreciation of the power of these organisations to reactivate neighbourhoods and harvest multiple social values.

StreetGames is helping Sport England and Sport Wales to reach those LTOs that can re-activate their neighbourhoods.

### 5. Training and support for staff and volunteers. New skills are needed to respond to the new crisis – such as MHFA and strategies to encourage families to leave their house and trust exercising in public space.

StreetGames has created new on-line webinars, training and bite size learning materials. These resources are available to all organisations within the StreetGames network, a total of more than 1,400 LTOs operating across the England and Wales.

This new suite of online engagement tools is available to the StreetGames network online:

<https://network.streetgames.org/sites/default/files/Keeping%20Young%20People%20Active%20-%20Virtual%20Engagement%20Tools.pdf>





## Appendix A: Examples of LTO engagement and support

### LTO Examples - Engagement & Support for young people & Communities

- 'Doing some **virtual activities** across the day, using video/Instagram, press up challenge & quiz's etc. - some staff posting videos, messages, exercise opportunities'. [Toxteth Fire Fit Hub, Liverpool]
- 'The Hive have a **virtual club night** across the week with Arts and challenges, cooking and quizzes' [The Hive, The Wirral]
- '**Youth clubs are still running virtually - led by the young people**' [Ellesmere Youth Project, Sheffield]
- 'Using **TikTok to share funny ways of staying active** at home e.g. using a frying pan to practice tennis skills #SERVES' [London Sports Trust]
- '**Distributing equipment and creating various resources** including offline printed packs that encourage young people with a disability to remain active at home. Local authority support and a Just Giving page for donations to reach more vulnerable young people with a disability' [Disability Sports, London]
- 'Maintaining **one to one work with most vulnerable young people** and have made contact with local church, estate office and UR4Meals to see how their minibus service and staffing can support vulnerable community members' [North Paddington Youth Club, London]
- '**Online training** (boxing). Daily challenges. Desire to create a shared network challenge bank. Virtual conversation. Maintaining 1-1 mentoring support for young people – but need to explore and understand how and what this looks like'. [In Power, Black Country]
- 'All activities suspended until further notice – but June is **keeping in touch with families and members by WhatsApp** (a lot of families do not have access to the internet) using different quizzes, challenges'. [Abraham Moss Warriors, Manchester]
- 'Planning to run **Fit & Fed Fridays – the lockdown edition. This will involve two online sessions run via Facebook live**. The first will be an exercise session and the second will be a cooking class. The project will target circa 50 families that are known to usually receive free school meals but will also be open to all families living on the estate. The project has funding for a **free bag of ingredients** to be delivered to the families on the morning of the sessions'. [Cherry Tree Project, Stockport]
- 'Redeployed within the council into a social work type role, directly **supporting people with housing, food and safety needs**' [Link4Life, Rochdale]
- '**Producing care/food and arts & crafts bags** for young people and their families in the area - next one is a sports bag'. [Heaton Norris Community Centre]
- 'Weekly **food packages** via fareshare' [West View Project, Hartlepool]
- 'We will be **delivering food** to those families who need the most. This a project we are working with Creation Trust Franco will prepare healthy food that can be delivered door to door' [Burgess Sports, London]
- '**Delivering food parcels** all across the black country. Looking at doing some online fitness/boxing videos for Instagram and may use the live feature on social media'. [Black Country Wellbeing Hub]
- 'Pythian are **doing a volunteer service** helping the elderly and vulnerable access food and essentials. They've got a FB support page where people and get in touch and Ben uses his staff and volunteers to deliver resources. Young people help out too'. [Pythian, Nottingham]
- '**Social media plan daily - online competitions and some staff helping some school hubs**. Delivering homework packs and free school meals. Dialogue with fit and fed partners to still have school meals delivered and still ongoing. [Aneurin Leisure, Wales]
- 'Taking **support services online** - homework Club and **phone counselling service**, Food Bank referrals, WhatsApp Group to keep connectivity' [Zest Community Centre, Sheffield]

## Appendix B: Play in Newcastle on Radio 5 Live

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000j304> (Interview begins 1hr 22)

### References

<sup>1</sup>Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs) are place-based community organisations which use sport as a tool to support young people. Each is a self-determining organisation that is independently managed and funded. Most are charities, legally constituted community groups or Community Interest Companies. All are embedded in their 'hard to reach' neighbourhood. LTOs have multiple primary purposes: they might be community safety or health projects; they might be community development agencies or faith bodies.

<sup>2</sup>Doorstep Sport is an innovative sporting offer that bypasses many of the traditional barriers to activity amongst young people in poverty. Doorstep Sport projects are fun, informal sports clubs that operate at the right time, in the right place, for the right price and in the right style. Most LTOs that deliver Doorstep Sport are not affiliated to a sports governing body.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-effects-of-the-coronavirus-crisis-on-workers/>

<sup>4</sup>Previous StreetGames surveys confirm these figures: it is generally about 20% of participants who are motivated to compete and it is always the vast majority who say 'being with friends' is the most attractive part of taking part in Doorstep Sport - <https://network.streetgames.org/sites/default/files/DSC-Lessons-A4-Full-Report-web-version.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>Some LTOs have temporarily closed. This seems most common where the LTO operates out of a youth centre, community centre or leisure centre and that centre has been closed and all staff furloughed. It seems that many of the furloughed staff are volunteering on Covid 19 related support programmes run by another community group, a Council or the NHS.

<sup>6</sup>These observations mirror the findings of a new survey by the Resolution Foundation, which found that amongst new UC claimants, 36 per cent are having trouble keeping up with bill payments, 42 per cent have cut back on spending to prioritise housing costs, and over half have already dipped into their savings. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/this-time-is-different-universal-credits-first-recession/>

