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Maximising the Value: Securing the Legacy Sustainability and Learning in the Healthy and Active Fund

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Maximising the Value: Securing the Legacy Sustainability and Learning in the Healthy and Active Fund

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Figure 1 **Paths to Sustainability Source: RCS (2024)**

Figure 2 **Sustainability anticipated by Projects**

Glossary

Eoi Expression of Interest

HAF Healthy and Active Fund

IPAQ International Physical Activity Questionnaire

LA Local Authority

LTO Locally Trusted Organisation

MET MET is a measure used for the IPA. It involves weighting each type of activity by its energy requirements (METs are multiples of the resting metabolic rate) to yield a score in MET-minutes. Further technical information available [here](#).

PAQ-C Physical Activity Questionnaire for Children

PHW Public Health Wales

RCS UK Research & Consultancy Services Ltd

SRO Senior Responsible Owner

SROI Social Return on Investment

SW Sport Wales

WAO Wales Audit Office

WCVA Wales Council for Voluntary Action

WEMWBS Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

WG Welsh Government

1. Introduction: the HAF sustainability evaluation framework

- 1.1 The Healthy and Active Fund ('HAF') was a £5.9m Programme which funded 17¹ diverse and largely community-based Projects across Wales between 2019 and 2023. It aimed to explore different ways to help people in key target groups to improve mental and physical health and wellbeing by enabling healthy and active lifestyles. Founded in two Manifesto commitments and part of the Programme for Government, the HAF was an innovative collaboration between four² national partners: two Welsh Government policy teams, Public Health Wales and Sport Wales. It was extensively evaluated at Programme and Project levels, and found for the most part to have been developed and implemented effectively (RCS, 2024).
- 1.2 At the conclusion of the HAF, RCS were commissioned to evaluate its 'sustainability.' Undertaken at both Programme and Project level, in both cases this sustainability evaluation drew on conceptual frameworks built from extensive reviews of the relevant literature. 'Sustainability' for Projects was assessed against a series of categories including behaviour change in beneficiaries, continuation of volunteer efforts, and policy changes at local level. For the Programme level, 'sustainability' focussed on the extent and character of policy learning and transfer.

Sustainability and the HAF

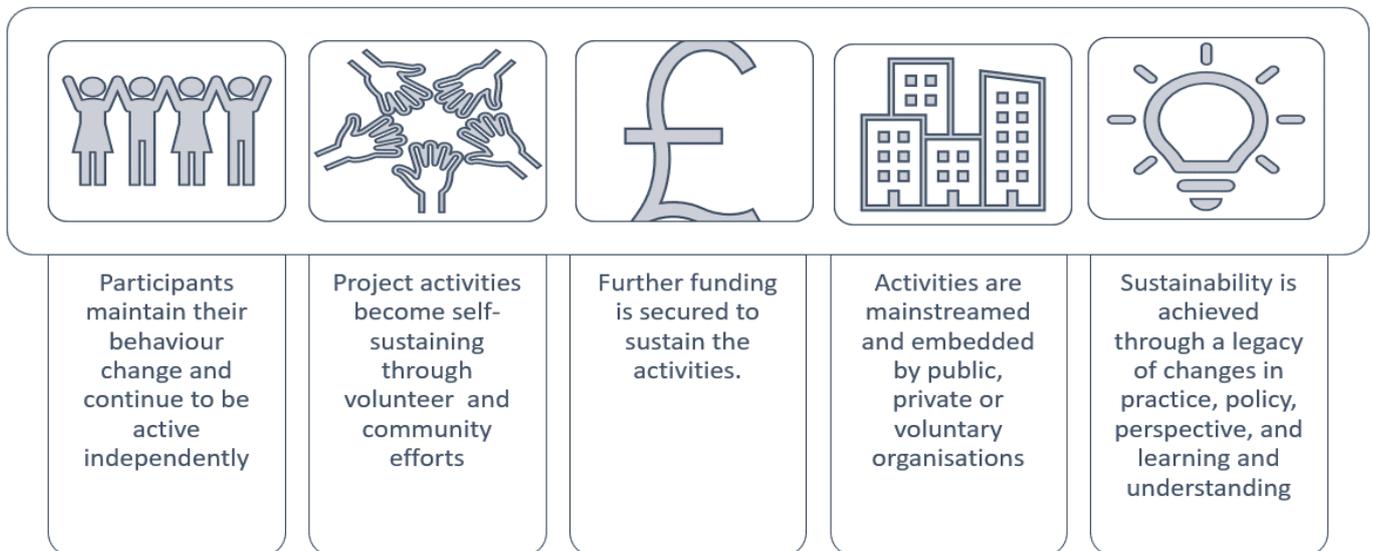
- 1.3 The value of the HAF in terms of long-term benefits at the participant, organisational and policy levels has depended partly on the sustainability of the Projects and the application of learning from the HAF to the policy sphere.
- 1.4 Sustainability was an early consideration for the Programme and was referenced in the Programme documentation. Only Projects demonstrating funding continuity or an ability to leave a legacy were funded. A funding taper in the final year was designed to encourage early consideration of exit routes and Project closure, and the consequences for ongoing activities and sustainability was a recurring theme in the HAF Programme design and implementation.

¹ See our main Evaluation Report, RCS, 2024. There were originally 17.

² There were three partners in the sense that two were within Welsh Government. In practice, though, they acted as four, including budget sharing across boundaries within Welsh Government.

1.5 We focussed on sustainability as an explicit theme in our evaluation. We found surprisingly little material in the UK academic or policy literature on the issue in this kind of context. Much of the existing literature relates to overseas aid projects. One key author said that ensuring sustainability really means making sure that the goals of the project continue to be met through activities that are consistent with the current conditions and resources that are available (Riggs 2012). For another, it is continuing to perform and deliver project benefits to the primary target group after the funding from a donor terminates (fundsforNGOs 2025). It may be possible to achieve lasting impacts by instilling new norms that become ‘mainstream’ or to effect irreversible change – for example by changing structures or legal frameworks. Based on the literature, a number of layers or paths to sustainability were identified in our HAF programme evaluation report, as shown below.

Figure 1: Paths to sustainability



Source: RCS (2024)

Our approach and methods

1.6 This report provides an assessment of the sustainability and legacy of Projects, as well as the sustainability of Project outcomes, more than 12 months after the end of HAF funding, including whether and how the Fund influenced their sustainability.

We thoroughly assessed the legacy and sustainability of the benefits resulting from the HAF.

- 1.7 There had already been some focus on sustainability in the evaluation thus far, and this was a strong platform on which to build this post-HAF sustainability assessment. As set out in the [Final Report](#) of the main evaluation (RCS, 2024), this included analysis of the original applications, the results of two rounds of interviews in which sustainability was a focus during the main Programme Evaluation, and relevant Project documentation. We included a summary of Projects' sustainability intentions in the Project Summaries appended to the Final Report.
- 1.8 For this follow-on sustainability evaluation, we conducted additional interviews at Project and Programme level, and documentary review at Project level (there being no relevant Programme level documentation since the Final Report). The interviews and documentary review were all conducted between a group of three of the original research team who had been involved in the evaluation from the outset and throughout, and who had very high familiarity with the materials. A fourth member of the team, again who had been involved throughout, conducted challenge and quality assurance on both the methodology we applied and the draft reports which were produced. The methodology and approach were submitted to the Welsh Government evaluation lead and members of the HAF team in Welsh Government for review and approval before being finalised.

Project level

- 1.9 We looked at 'sustainability' in its many guises, as expressed in the categories above. We reviewed sustainability at Project level through a 'life cycle' lens, from project inception to post-project legacy, exploring how the Project initially conceived sustainability, how that may have changed and developed over time (and especially through COVID-19), and how it has turned out post-funding. We conducted intensive interviews (mainly online) across autumn 2024 with key actors in all 16 Projects³, and also reviewed relevant documentation, especially where Projects had completed their own post-funding sustainability report (which some did). We did not

³ Including Bridgend CBC which ended a year earlier than the rest because they did not take extension funding

interview partners, partly for reasons of time, resource and availability, but also because we had sufficient confidence in the interview and documentary evidence to form judgements, especially given the broad and deep evidence base already in place both generally and in relation to sustainability in particular.

- 1.10 As well as the overall analysis presented here, we include an additional section to append to each of the individual Project Summaries we created for the Final Evaluation Report to include a fuller account of their sustainability journey (see Annex).

Programme level

- 1.11 At Programme level we focussed on policy learning and transfer. This was partly about Project learning with wider applicability or implications, but also about aspects of the Programme process itself. We conducted interviews with seven senior actors from all four of the national partners which jointly developed and led the HAF. We drew out four enablers of policy learning and transfer:
- There has to be learning which is worth harvesting and transferring
 - An appropriate cadre of learners/transferors must be present
 - There must be pathways of transfer through which learning can be transmitted, applied, and amplified
 - Mechanisms to enable 'organisational memory' at Project and policy level need to be in place.
- 1.12 The focus in relation to policy learning was mainly on Welsh Government processes and mechanisms because the HAF's key purpose was to generate lessons and learning in response to Manifesto Commitments and the Programme of the Welsh Government.
- 1.13 Evaluation is partly about ensuring accountability for public spending and partly about learning lessons that enable projects/programmes to be fine-tuned over time. However, the most valuable potential impact is often learning that can be incorporated into future policy development, and opportunities for this are frequently missed. Therefore, we welcome the opportunity to reflect on sustainability,

particularly because HAF was explicitly designed to be an innovative/experimental Programme.

This report

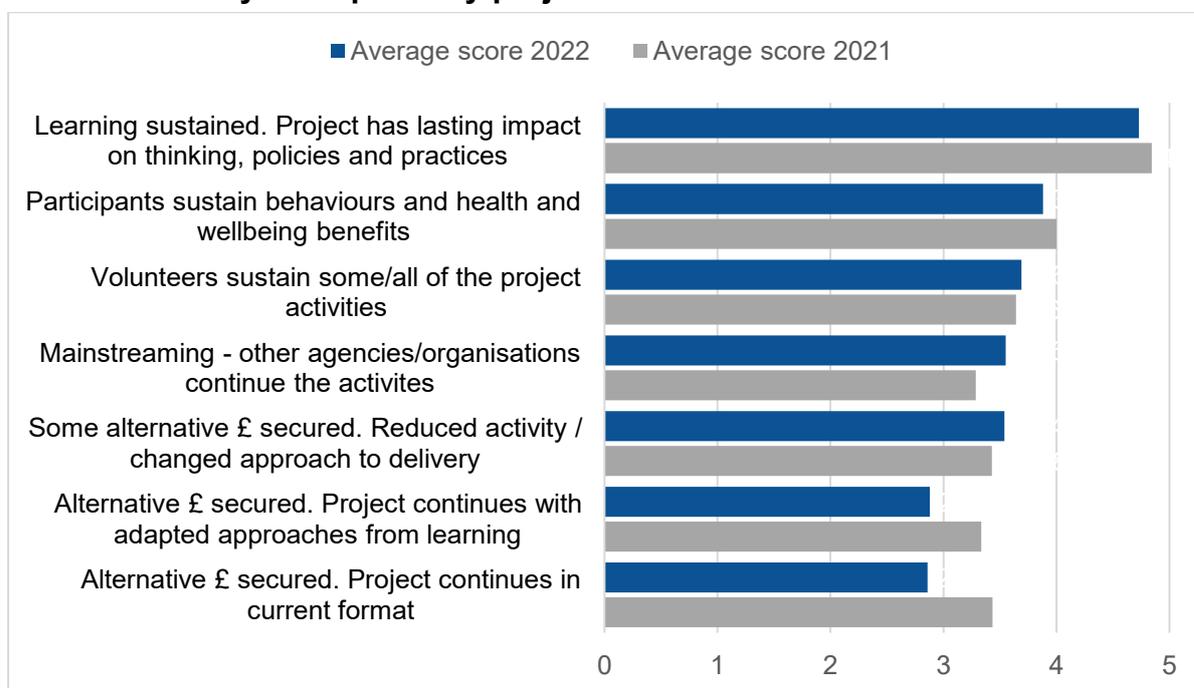
- 1.14 Section 2 of this Report looks at issues and findings at Project level, and Section 3 at Programme level. Then in Section 4 we consider how sustainability might have been strengthened at both levels and provide recommendations. The Annex provides a summary of each Project's sustainability journey. There may also be learning not just for future policy in Wales but insights from HAF that Wales can share with other nations in both the UK and beyond.

2. Project level issues and findings

Sustainability and the project level during HAF funding

2.1 We explored Project views on sustainability in 2021 and revisited this in 2022. The Table below was generated from evidence collected and analysed in the main Programme Evaluation (see RCS, 2024). It shows the ‘Likelihood of Project activity being sustained in different ways’. Project ratings were 1 = not at all likely to 5 = very likely.

Figure 2: Sustainability anticipated by projects



2.2 As can be seen, the Projects were fairly optimistic about possible lines of sustainability in 2021 and in 2022, by which time many of them had begun to develop explicit plans for legacy and sustainability. They expected to have lasting impact on policies and practice, whilst also sustaining activity at participant and volunteer levels. Achieving sustainability by embedding activities in wider work programmes, or securing alternative funding, were also considered to be reasonably likely.

2.3 At Programme level during the HAF, Project learning was harvested in a summary paper⁴ for the Project Board compiled from regular Project Highlight Reports. In October 2022, a Project Sustainability Summary Report⁵ was produced, drawing on submissions from Project Annual Progress reports.

Project sustainability post HAF

2.4 There was substantial evidence of sustainability through both interviews and documentation across the Projects as a whole, and across all of the major categories of sustainability, including:

- Sustained behavioural change by participants
- Continuation of volunteer led activities
- COVID-19 resulted in more online/physical material being produced which has supported sustainability of many activities
- Certified and non-certified training developed and remains in place for both participants and practitioners
- Securing continuation of funding
- Skill development and behaviour change by the workforce of sponsor organisations
- Organisational behaviour change which embedded learning and contributed to sustainability
- Policy change and mainstreaming within the sponsor organisations and also in partner organisations
- Embedding HAF activities in wider service delivery, or where HAF experiences were a key factor in the shape and direction of future service development by sponsor organisations
- Contributions to wider policy development, especially the National Social Prescribing Framework.

⁴ Project Board Paper: 2022.03.28 - DOC 4 - Healthy & Active Fund Project Board - Summary of HAF project highlight reports February 2022

⁵ Project Board Paper: 2022.10.10 - DOC 4 - Healthy and Active Fund - Project Sustainability Summary Report

2.5 Project representatives attributed some benefits uniquely to the HAF amongst the many other funded programmes which they had experienced. In particular, they considered that the HAF had:

- Enabled existing projects to grow and gather data on need to inform further applications for grant funding
- Provided stimulus and a catalyst for growth of existing organisations
- Provided the capacity to meet known demand
- Enabled the development of stronger relationships with Sport Wales and Public Health Wales
- Enabled the building of stronger relationships and trust at local level with different partners and to an extent that often went beyond 'partnerships-as-usual'.

2.6 These are all amply evidenced in the extended Project summaries, the interviews, and in the post-HAF sustainability reports which some Projects prepared. Some of them also warrant further exemplification here.

Sustained behaviour changes among beneficiaries

2.7 At an overall level there is insufficient data to speak with any precision about the extent and character of sustained beneficiary behaviour change. End of project evaluations suggest improved wellbeing and some increases in physical activity levels, but Projects have not had the capacity and resources to continue monitoring this, even putting aside the challenges of data collection and quality. Projects have seen some participants continue to participate over several years. They have produced a range of case studies, videos and stories that highlight such successes. In some cases, participants have moved onto volunteering and leading sessions independently. Social connections and benefits were one of the key participant outcomes, with participants forming social connections and WhatsApp groups, meeting up for activities without Project support, and attending alternative paid sessions.

2.8 There were examples of unintended employment benefits for participants, and additional training being undertaken beyond that expected, groups of associated

trainers being maintained, and of a legacy of well-trained leaders and accredited qualifications across partners.

Sustained delivery of HAF project activities

- 2.9 This has been a notable success. Almost all of the Projects continue to deliver at least some of the activities they implemented through the HAF. There are examples of activity groups and communities that have become self-sustaining and entirely volunteer led, such as walking football, walking groups, wild swimming, outdoor activities and constituted clubs and groups forming.
- 2.10 Other 'HAF' sessions continue to be supported by the HAF Project organisations or partner organisations which were involved in the Programme, including weekly yoga, health walks, swimming sessions and training sessions. There is also evidence of HAF Projects' staff starting new, related activities such as wellbeing afternoons, and offering wider ranges of taster sessions to inspire new interest and support retention among current participants. A number of training courses continue, some with a view to generating income through partner participation. In addition, many Projects developed and published training and information materials which are informing and helping to sustain activities.
- 2.11 Both the evidence of Project respondents and our own analysis suggest that a base level of funding will almost always be required for the coordination, collaboration, training and supporting volunteers, and general administration needed to sustain activities. Several Projects have gained funding to sustain their delivery of HAF activities. However, such grants have mainly been short term. In consequence, the stop-start nature of delivery, potential staff turnover, and the loss of continuity, all weaken sustainability, especially in working with hard-to-reach groups.

Organisational and workforce behaviour change

- 2.12 A number of Projects demonstrated sustained use of the workforce skills that were developed during the HAF programme. They continued to use the learning in their day-to-day work. Examples included having better skills to negotiate partnership working, and developing inter-referral pathways across communities of providers and services to signpost participants to the right opportunities. Projects reported

that many staff developed a greater understanding about community engagement and how to work with different types of organisations to reach new target audiences. Soft skills, dealing with different types of personality, negotiating how best to work together when organisations have different systems and levels of resources, were all identified.

- 2.13 There were also new digital skills in navigating online meetings, speeding up data collection with online forms, and the ability to have more frequent contact with partners in different regions. Many Projects moved to digital delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic and kept the benefit post-COVID-19 and also post-HAF. Remote physical activity and wellbeing offers have been developed, which reached a far wider audience than envisaged, and some of the materials to support getting active remain as an online resource for anyone to access.
- 2.14 Aspects of the Programme also engendered change. The emphasis on sustainability through the evaluation process prompted more reflection and thought about sustainability than might have been the case. In one case, the HAF inspired a ‘theory of change’ to become part of all strategic programmes for one organisation, along with regular shared learning sessions.

Embedding HAF activities in wider service delivery

- 2.15 Some Projects have found that some of their partners and even other providers have made changes to their services as a result of HAF-related experiences, and have embedded delivery of sessions into their services and incorporated parts of the Project’s activities into their own mainstream offers. Some Projects have created or maintained a permanent full-time post to continue HAF activities, and others have maintained posts temporarily to ensure learning was not lost.
- 2.16 Projects have shared learning by using evaluation findings at network events and publishing their own evaluation reports. Partnerships, working groups and networks developed through HAF have also been sustained to a certain extent, and enabled wider collaborations and sharing of insight.

Policy influence

2.17 A number of the Projects have been 'sustained' through policy learning and transfer either to other parts of their own organisation, or to other organisations. This has included the development of much wider strategies for national organisations from a local HAF Project. It also includes contribution at national level into the Social Prescribing Framework. Influencing has extended to focussed working with national bodies, feeding into Senedd sessions, and also influencing local authority partners to adopt HAF-generated activities post HAF funding. Extended partnership working with a range of public bodies has been established in some cases, including the transfer of training resources. HAF Projects have also helped to stimulate new thinking, backed by practical examples, such as in the use of the outdoors as a key instrument for community health.

What fuelled these wide-ranging legacies?

- 2.18 In our assessment, and in the light of the interview evidence, the factors enabling this level and range of sustainability included:
- The early HAF requirement for Projects to consider and declare their approach to sustainability
 - The determination of the Projects to leave a positive and enduring legacy
 - The HAF was strongly outcome-focussed rather than fixed only on specific activities. Projects were therefore able to adjust their aspirations during their sustainability 'journeys' as they gained experience, and, especially, as they adjusted to COVID-19 conditions to create different ways of delivering against their outcome-based objectives
 - Projects which established systematic internal learning arrangements benefited from them considerably. Having specific roles and responsibilities for learning was a key enabler
 - The focus on sustainability in HAF Programme evaluation evidence collection and thematic studies.
- 2.19 From the Projects' perspective, what was absent was any substantial assistance from Programme level to support sustainability.

2.20 Nonetheless, there was a considerable range and degree of sustainability. The extent of potential learning which Projects generated, made it very important for there to be significant channels through which to convey that learning as effective pathways for it to be transmitted, refined and amplified. As will be seen in Section 3, they were not as strong as they could and should have been.

3. Programme level issues and findings

Learning and the programme level during HAF

- 3.1 At the Programme level we approached ‘sustainability’ in terms of policy learning and transfer, and there were two major aspects of this. First, there were the lessons emerging from the HAF Projects, and their relevance to any wider policy issues and/or the desirability of drawing on them to inform other similar interventions. There was a summary report prepared⁶ for the Project Board on lessons from the work of the Projects, and some learning was shared at events held during the first half of the Programme for cross Project learning, for example on approaches to evaluation and sustainability. There were also evaluation reports published on the HAF process and the HAF theory of change, and there were interim reports on progress in the intermediate years of the Programme. However, they did not provide a springboard to any wider dissemination during the Programme that has been identified, although options to further support sustainability and learning were regularly discussed at those Project Board meetings which did take place, and which were considered against resource availability.
- 3.2 Secondly, there were lessons to be gleaned from the Programme structure and process itself. In the early days of the Programme, learning on some of these aspects was systematically explored, principally through two initial pieces of Programme evaluation work into the HAF Process (RCS, 2021b) and the HAF Theory of Change (RCS, 2021a). These were considered by the HAF Project Board, and certainly both the reports and the experiences they inquired of were informative for Programme level actors, particularly around the theme of collaboration between national partners. The HAF was seen – and continues by many of them still to be seen – as practically unique in the depth and character of that collaboration. There was however no systematic or structured exploitation of this learning, or transmission elsewhere.

⁶ Based on Highlight Reports. See Footnote 4.

- 3.3 The net result was that policy learning and transfer during the Programme was passive and underpowered, and this was reflected in the views of Programme level actors. Some questioned whether there had been very much, and others saw only as yet unrealised potential, and recognised that the approach taken even to thinking about 'sustainability' had been relatively under-developed during the early days of the Programme itself. They could see that not very much effort had gone into either of the two aspects of sustainability as described above. Others felt that Projects had demonstrated scalability, replicability, and sustainability, but without that evidence being harnessed and transmitted in any systematic way (RCS, 2024).
- 3.4 The important context is that the HAF was specifically designed as a pilot and as experimental, and with learning as one of its key objectives. This means that it needed to have a focus on sustainability and learning both from the outset and throughout. In an ideal world, Programme actors would have reported back to Projects about how the learning they generated was being used and transferred to other areas, or involved them in the process. In this case, Projects would have felt more valued at Programme level. This might have equipped them with further examples of the wider impact that they could use in their local reporting and partnership working and given them an incentive to contribute further learning/connections in policy areas beyond the HAF timeline.

Policy learning and transfer post-HAF

- 3.5 We explored the issue in interviews with Programme level actors by first discussing the role of learning and research within the policy development process, and then the principal enabling conditions for successful policy learning and transfer – valuable learning worth transferring, a cadre of actors to convey it, and pathways for it to be transmitted along.
- 3.6 At Programme level the findings were strong and consistent:
- All Programme level actors considered that the HAF had produced significant learning. They differed as to the areas they identified
 - There were important areas of learning identified by Programme level actors about aspects of Programme Management, including:

- The process of collaboration between the four national partners
- The role of theory of change approaches in crystallising and focussing programme structure and delivery
- The importance of planning the whole of the programme life cycle, and in particular the close down phase
- The importance of continuity of Programme governance through to Programme conclusion
- The role of the Case Officer, and how to optimise that
- Programme management and leadership, and the importance of a Project/Programme Manager/Director alongside the Senior Responsible Officer
- Issues about the role of experimental programmes and their connectedness to other instruments of policy and government
- Issues of data collection and requirements
- The relationship between Programme and Projects, and how best to deliver both sustainability and valuable learning.
- They also identified learning from the Projects, including:
 - Ways in which community assets can help deliver social prescribing
 - A variety of delivery models
 - Ways of accessing hard-to-reach target groups
 - Better understanding of the challenges of data collection, especially seeking information from vulnerable participants or in one-off activities
 - The resilience of community-based interventions despite the challenges of COVID-19
 - Well established and resilient organisations were more likely to support sustainability. Conversely, frequent changes in staff/champions impacted momentum and knowledge sharing
 - Partnerships structured around common objectives were found to be most effective in terms of sustainability
 - Some of the difficulties of collaboration at local level in 'joining' across boundaries to support common target groups

- The value of a centrally trained data officer who disseminated methods and support to those on the ground, enabling credible and sustained data collection and adding assurance to key partner 'buy in'
- Volunteer-led programmes involving beneficiaries with complex needs require a combination of paid and unpaid support to ensure safeguarding and capability
- How to combine nature and technology effectively in reaching out and delivering to target groups
- The creation of new and different partnerships, and how to make them effective.

3.7 Two of the three major conditions for successful policy learning and transfer were met. There was learning worth sharing from Projects and a cadre of continuing Programme level actors who were willing and, in some cases, keen to convey that learning. There was, however, a marked absence of the third condition, namely effective pathways through which learning could be transmitted and applied.

Learning to be drawn on

- 3.8 The clear evidence from the interviews at Project and Programme levels is that there was learning to be had, and that it ranged across a number of different areas.
- The Projects produced significant learning in relation to their individual activities and programmes and especially around topics such as community engagement and the pivot towards digital in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on their activities
 - The importance of a focus on outcomes, irrespective of variations in delivery models, which allowed flexibility to adapt to circumstances such as COVID-19
 - The Projects also demonstrated significant resilience and sustainability across the range of sustainability categories such as leaving a legacy of learning materials, enhanced organisational and workforce capacity, and ongoing and residual activity of volunteers and beneficiaries. This in itself was potentially a significant lesson to draw on

- Some of the policy learning and practical examples from the Projects also had relevance for national policy, and specifically in relation to social prescribing and the identification and role of community assets in giving prescribers destinations for those in need
- The Programme process contained significant learning both in terms of what worked and what did not work very well
- There was also wider learning about the broad and developing relationship between physical activity and better public health and well-being outcomes.

A cadre of actors to convey the learning

- 3.9 Although the HAF eventually spanned some four years, there was a significant degree of continuity amongst the key actors, all of whom considered that there was learning to be had from the Programme, albeit that they emphasised different aspects. There was continuity amongst all four of the national partners and this included both senior actors and those at a more operational level. This was both unusual and potentially very helpful from the perspective of capturing and conveying the learning.
- 3.10 Moreover, those actors largely remained in contact with one another to a considerable degree and shared a positive view of the Programme and in particular the work they had done together in the early phases. This was reflected very visibly when part of the group of actors reconvened to put forward aspects of the Programme for awards given within the Welsh Government for best practice and innovation. Indeed, they were shortlisted for one of these in what was a highly competitive process⁷. There is little doubt that the second requirement of successful policy learning and transfer was in place.

⁷ Awards can themselves be a useful way to raise awareness of learning and more could potentially have been done in relation to the HAF. This particular Award bid may yet generate wider interest in the learning to be had from HAF. The team also put a submission forward for the UK Civil Service Award and although not shortlisted they have been asked to present their experiences at the Civil Service Live event in Cardiff in June 2025.

What was transferred, and through which pathways?

- 3.11 Overall, the amount of learning actually transferred both in the Welsh Government and in the other national partners was very limited in comparison to the extent and value of what had been generated and evidenced. Certain aspects of the Programme did transfer by way of informing the development of the National Social Prescribing Framework. It did so by way of providing successful and practical examples of how those seeking to improve mental and physical health and wellbeing via healthy and active lifestyles could be reached and engaged successfully. Those leading the work to develop the Framework also involved some actors from HAF Projects to help shape, for example, the approach to the role of community assets. This transfer was due to two main factors. First, that a number of the HAF Projects were in or closely adjacent to the social prescribing space. Secondly, the actors leading the work had been key actors in the HAF itself. They deployed their own experience and learning through the HAF to the wider policy. This was an important contribution. Whilst social prescribing was already firmly on the Welsh Government agenda, the experience of the relevant Projects was closely aligned with the broad approach being pursued, providing significant practical illustrative examples.
- 3.12 The Programme Evaluation findings were presented to the national partner organisations. The findings were discussed and used by Programme actors. The findings were also presented to the Projects. Programme evaluation reports were published and made accessible to others through GSR channels. GSR does have internal learning mechanisms. However, the evidence suggests that, beyond making the reports available, sharing of the findings with wider policy areas has been very limited and not strong enough to guarantee learning transfer to the wider policy front line. There is no evidence of them being actively communicated beyond their general availability. There is a need to develop more systematic ways and appropriate formats for disseminating key learning points to wider policy areas.
- 3.13 A specific report was commissioned by the Project Board which drew out some of the early lessons and learning, and made available to the Project Board for reflection and discussion. There is no evidence that it had any reach beyond that.

- 3.14 The collaborative aspects of the development and implementation of the HAF, and some of its more detailed processes, continued to reside as key learning in the memories of the cadre of key actors. Some five years later it was still being described as ‘unique’ by senior actors. There is however no evidence that the uniqueness of the HAF collaboration had any significant reach beyond that, although the Welsh Government Awards referred to above may give it fresh currency.
- 3.15 The opportunity of the HAF for key actors to work together across health and sport contributed to the general development of that relationship, which continues to be a focus of some attention amongst the relevant actors. Here again, the experience was carried by the relevant actors, who continued to play similar roles in their organisations some years later.
- 3.16 Taken overall, in our assessment there was limited learning transfer, principally for two reasons:
- There were few active pathways through which the learning could be channelled and amplified. Those which were available were used only to a limited extent, principally because of a lack of focussed resources to make that happen and an absence of any plan to make it happen.
 - It was not anyone’s ‘day job’ to ensure learning, and those who might do so are managing multiple other and changing priorities. As a result, there were no dedicated staff or financial resources to apply to this task.
- 3.17 If the situation were summed up in two phrases, it would probably be that the HAF ‘asset’ was shared but not ‘sweated’ and was ‘passive’ rather than ‘active’. The learning was available through the various Reports, and these were potentially accessible to interested actors. It was not however actively made known to others to any significant degree or projected for organisational learning within Welsh Government or the other national partners or externally. The pathways which were potentially available appear to have been used only lightly, or not at all⁸. The

⁸ The Grants Centre of Excellence was mentioned in interviews in this context, and from our own knowledge the Policy Profession networks were another potential Pathway. We requested interviews with both to clarify and confirm our initial assessment, but none took place.

learning was made available but there has not been much/any thought given to how it can be 'mobilised'⁹.

- 3.18 To a degree in relation to the HAF, COVID-19 was a mitigating factor, because it crowded out time and 'bandwidth' for learning. Nonetheless, the structural factors were much more relevant overall. Whilst interviewees referenced the importance of learning, they demonstrated limited understanding of how to animate that learning.
- 3.19 The lack of churn in the HAF cadre of Programme leaders was exceptional, and a really promising soil for learning to grow in. Despite these fortuitous circumstances, it has been hard to retain and embed institutional memory other than in relation to social prescribing. It is instructive to recall that specific resources were allocated for evaluation of the Programme and of the Projects, and for research by Public Health Wales on the Project Evaluation process. There was no specific budget or programme of work to retain and transmit the learning at Programme or Project level, albeit that Projects were expected to pursue sustainability and were able to draw on their HAF grant funding in doing so.
- 3.20 Learning requires the capacity and capability to adapt learning to show how it applies in the current context. It needs to be translated to the context so that policy makers can see how the lessons from HAF are relevant to their current preoccupations and priorities. This needs people with the skills, time, inclination and remit to think through how learning from past interventions can be applied to the 'now'. It is not enough to make lessons available. The question is 'so what does that mean for us, now?'. That takes time and intellectual effort. It is not a 'normal' feature of policy making at present, including but by no means limited to the HAF. Time and resource constraints, and immediate pressures to 'deliver' are not conducive to it.

⁹ A similar point can be made in relation to Public Health Wales and Sport Wales. However, the HAF was Welsh Government led, and it bore most responsibility for optimising the learning assets from the HAF.

4. Sweating the asset and delivering value

- 4.1 As has been seen in Sections 2 and 3, there was considerable progress with sustainability on the part of the Projects, and some very important learning transfer at national level in relation to social prescribing.
- 4.2 In reflecting on that and also on our wider findings, it is clear that by the time policy and sustainability learning was available from the HAF, it had not become old-hat or past its sell or use-by date. The underlying policy challenges which prompted the HAF remain the same, as are the programme management lessons to be had from it. In Wales, medium term Ministerial priorities have also been consistent over time, associated with always having Labour-led governments. There has been a consistent focus on the needs of disadvantaged groups and marginalised communities. Physical inactivity and the mental and physical consequences of this, as well the costs of it for the NHS, are all live issues and will remain. So how could the sustainability of Projects have been optimised, and how might the learning from both Project and Programme levels have been harnessed to maximum effect?

Sustainability and the projects

- 4.3 There were several ways in which sustainability at Project level might have been strengthened:
- The initial understanding of possible 'sustainability' in the HAF was limited, although Projects were required to indicate their approach to sustainability at the application stage
 - Sustainability did form part of the Programme's focus. It was chosen as a topic for special attention in Years 2 and 3 of the HAF programme level evaluation, and it was referred to in Guidance on Project Closure. However, the evidence of the interviews at Project and Programme level shows that this did not result in any significant action being taken in relation to sustainability. Case Officers did not treat it as a major consideration, for example
 - Opportunities were missed to explore and interrogate sustainability possibilities. One which in retrospect would have potentially had great value

was to ask Projects whether, having had the initial investment through HAF to trigger and deliver activities, those activities could then be maintained at a far lower level of continued resourcing. This was a crucial question which would have significantly informed a value for money assessment, especially in the context of the social prescribing framework

- The Programme did not give sufficient attention to the close down of the Programme life cycle, at which point sustainability considerations should have been of high priority. Discussion of these issues at Project Board did not result in action on the ground, partly as a result of limited resources, and of course the Project Board met very rarely from 2022 onwards
- The potential value of Project sustainability, and especially in capturing and communicating Project level learning, could have been strengthened through more systematic effort at Programme level.

Learning transfer from the programme

4.4 Similarly, there were a number of ways in which learning transfer could have been strengthened:

- A plan of the full life cycle of the Programme – develop, implement, maintain, and close down – would have included a greater focus on sustainability. The vast majority of the effort went into developing and implementing the HAF, and much less to maintenance and less again to close down. Partly this was a function of COVID-19, and the extraordinary demands made on many of the key HAF Programme-level actors. It was also an initial weakness, and one which was not remedied during the course of the Programme
- There was no specific resource allocated to policy learning and transfer, and no one had the role or responsibility to make optimising the value of the outputs from HAF. The early parts of the Programme Evaluation highlighted the desirability of a Project Manager or Director role to provide a focus for leadership and coordination quite different from the responsibilities allocated to the designated SRO. Such a Project Manager could have had the responsibility not only to ensure that learning was harvested, but also communicated and projected along any appropriate Pathway

- Even without such a Project Manager role, there could have been a dedicated resource of a part time person for a period towards the end and after the Programme funding ceased. The key actors appropriately invested in evaluation at both Programme and Project level, and even in an evaluation of how the Projects had experienced self-commissioned evaluation, that being the approach taken within the HAF. While there was investment devoted specifically to evaluation, there was relatively very little to delivering either sustainability or policy learning and transfer
- The Pathways for policy learning and transfer within the Welsh Government from Programmes such as the HAF are not strong or well developed, or at least are not perceived to be by a range of seasoned and senior actors from across the Government. Any objective and detailed assessment of this lies well beyond the scope of this Report, but the evidence is consistent and clear. It is also the case that neither Public Health Wales or Sport Wales had strong Pathways for policy learning and transfer. Given that the HAF formed part of the Programme for Government, and given the overall responsibility of the Welsh Government for public policy in Wales, it was their potential Pathways which are paramount here
- The relative weight of political and media narratives in shaping policy dialogue underlines the need to be better at using research, evaluation, and learning to shape and inform both the policy dialogue and the political/media narratives. That calls for an approach to knowledge use and evidence mobilisation that perhaps goes beyond the core strategy of publishing research reports and inviting others to take notice. Reports are needed with other forms of output and dissemination, and with direct contact with wider policy makers
- Integrating HAF into the learning lab is one very interesting suggestion from one of the Programme level actors, with the potential to create learning resources from HAF and other programmes which could be used in a variety of in-house training. This could even inform a partnership with universities to create teaching materials based on this work and the lessons gleaned.

Recommendations

4.5 Our recommendations are:

- Programmes such as the HAF which are geared to learning and experimentation through short to medium term funding of multiple Projects should:
 - Develop a clear and thorough approach to sustainability in relation to both Programme and Project levels, ideally as part of a comprehensive MEALS Plan (Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Learning and Sustainability)
 - Build sustainability considerations into their overall Project Plan, including how sustainability will be monitored and actively optimised at all stages of the Programme life cycle, and following Programme closure if appropriate
 - Identify a specific and appropriate technical and people resource to have responsibility for actively harvesting and optimising sustainability in all its aspects
 - Identify from the outset the possible categories of sustainability at both Programme and Project levels, and tailor monitoring and support to optimising those categories
 - Give specific consideration as to how pilot and experimental projects might be continued post-programme through much lower funding and/or tapered support to reflect ongoing and established activities rather than experimental activities which require much greater up-front investment.
- More generally:
 - The Welsh Government and its HAF partners should put in place systems and processes to provide effective pathways through which learning can be transmitted, amplified, retained, shared, and applied
 - The Welsh Government and its HAF partners should review whether they optimise the value from programmes with strong learning outcomes as part of a wider consideration of their arrangements for building and sharing institutional memory

- The apparent lack of in-built policy learning processes, and over reliance on individuals to ‘carry’ organisational memory, is something that the Welsh Government policy profession should perhaps address. The Welsh Government needs to think about how it can retain organisational and institutional memory by committing specific resources to securing the legacy of programmes like the HAF, and give the role of ensuring this to specific staff and hold them accountable for doing it. Every experimental/pilot project and programme like HAF should have a ‘legacy plan’ backed by a theory of change from the outset
- Key actors in all the national partners should give further thought to how they can create greater awareness of and appetite for the learning from HAF (and other policies/programmes). Learning and actively sharing learning could be built into the job or task descriptions of the relevant public servants, as well as the terms and conditions for grants recipients¹⁰.

Spring 2025

¹⁰ It is clear from materials we have seen that this does happen to some extent for grant recipients. The pathways within Welsh Government for using that learning appears to be the major areas for development.

References

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Annex – Projects’ sustainability journeys

Annex 1 of the [HAF programme evaluation final report](#) contains summaries of the 16 Projects. The summaries were prepared by the RCS team according to a standard template, with sections on Project objectives and deliverables; actual delivery and impact; innovative aspects and lessons learned; and sustainability intention.

This report provides an additional final section on ‘**Sustainability in 2024**’¹¹ to append each Project summary. The section includes a fuller account of their sustainability journey, including the journey post the HAF funding coming to an end. These summaries are listed by Project name in alphabetical order as set out in the Table below.

The ‘Sustainability in 2024’ summaries have been compiled from the same material used for this report overall (see ‘Our approach and methods’, 1.6–1.10). As with the other sections of the Project summaries, the content is consistent with the insight built up by the RCS team over multiple encounters with Project staff and multiple documentary reviews of Project materials throughout the evaluation. However, we did not have a role in overseeing or quality assuring Project evaluations, so the individual data references presented have not been independently verified, and qualitative judgements have that status and no more than that.

HAF Projects

Project name, location, description and lead body

Actif Woods Wales (National): Social Prescribing the Woodland Way. Woodland based activities/training for volunteers, groups and partners: Coed Lleol – Smallwoods

Babi Actif (Northwest Wales): Support to parents to be active outdoors with their babies during the period from conception to age 2: Eryri-Bywiol Cyf

Balanced Lives for Care Homes (Southwest Wales): Improving health and wellbeing through physical and social activity in care homes: Action for Elders Trust

BeActive RCT (Rhondda Cynon Taf): Involving people and communities to improve wellbeing. Multi-agency programme of accessible, person-centred sporting and physical activities in 6 communities with severe health inequalities: Interlink RCT

Cyfeillion Cerdded Cymru (South/Southeast Wales): Intense small walking group activity for older people: Living Streets

Family Engagement Project (South/Southeast Wales & Valleys): Community / partner activities for families in low-income areas: StreetGames UK Ltd

Five Ways to Wellbeing¹² (Flint/Wrexham): Physical Activity to Promote Mental Wellbeing. CAMHS based service to deliver activity for young people with or at risk of mental health difficulty (community service): Betsi Cadwaladr UHB

¹¹ The Project name given by the host/sponsor organisation; the actual grant received (rounded to the nearest £000; and the opening paragraph stating the purpose and geographical location of the Project from the final report are repeated in this report for ease of reference.

¹² This is the Project which ended prematurely as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. No summary is included because in practice it never fully got off the ground.

Growing Together (South/Southeast Wales): Food growing based inter-generational activities: Keep Wales Tidy

HAPPy (Newport): Tredegar House based activities for the young and those in poverty or disadvantage: Tredegar House National Trust

Healthy & Active Newport (Newport): Alliance of statutory and other bodies in Newport to engage in schools and communities: Newport Live

Healthy Body - Healthy Mind (Cardiff): Physical fitness and family activities for Black and Minority Ethnic women and their families: Women Connect First

Opening Doors to the Outdoors (Northwest Wales): Community based walking and outdoor group physical activity to tackle mental ill health: The Outdoor Partnership

Play Ambassadors (Cardiff and Vale): Increasing play in 10 communities by 60 recruited and trained Play Ambassadors: Play Wales

Sporting Memories (South Wales): Wellbeing through sporting reminiscence and activity: Sporting Memories Network CIC

Super-Agers (Cwm Taf Partnership): Community based physical activity for older people and those with disability or long-term illness: Bridgend County Borough Council

Welsh Active Early Years Programme: (National) Intensive community-based play and physical activity for young people: Early Years Wales (and Welsh Gymnastics)

West Wales Walking for Wellbeing (West and Mid Wales): Walking Groups linked to GP Practices: Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

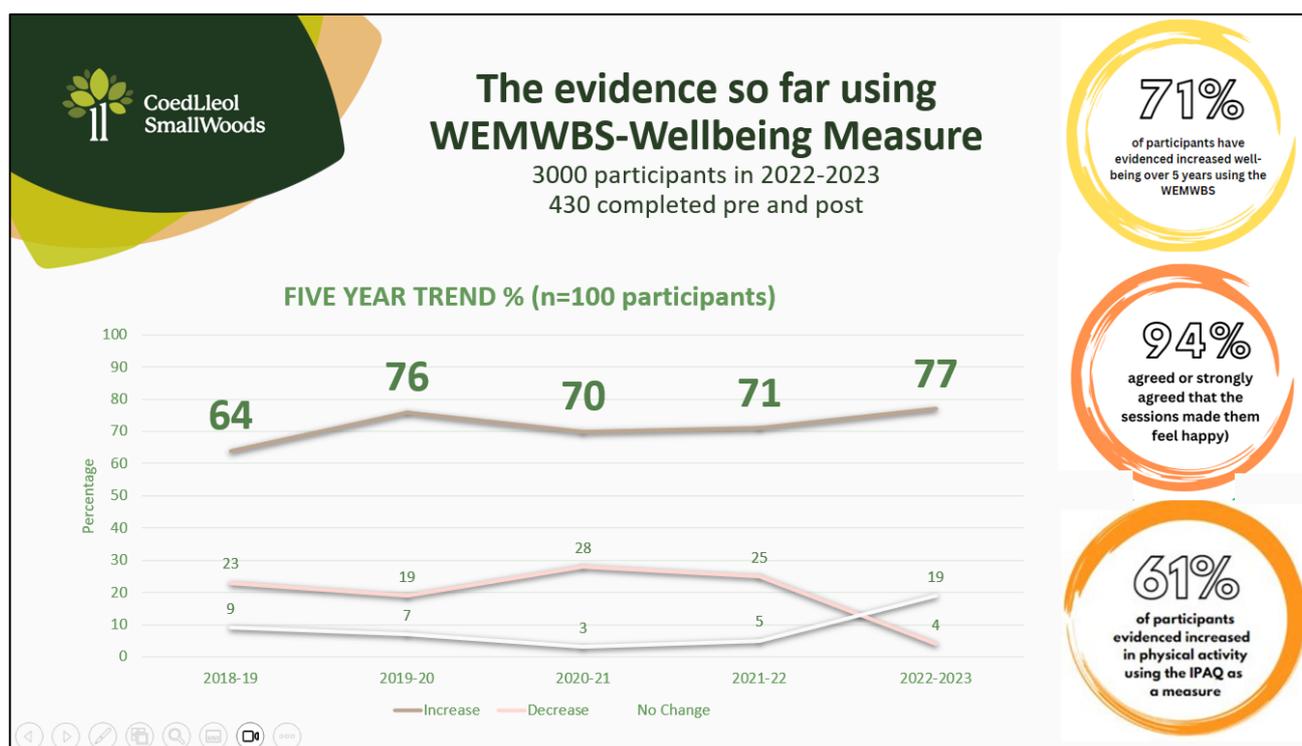
Actif Woods Wales: Social Prescribing the Woodland Way Grant funding received £459,000

The Project engaged adults and children to participate in ‘Actif Woods’ sessions where they experienced and learned woodland skills, knowledge of the natural environment, and healthy eating, and also participated in woodland-based exercise. The Project was national, and participants were typically those from areas with high health needs, low employment rates, and limited access to services.

Sustainability in 2024

The lead body, Coed Lleol – Smallwoods, describes itself as being involved in sustainability business generally, having a ‘level of complementarity’ given its reliance on nature and its value. It was therefore a natural default to consider sustainability from the start of the Project and is part of each of their Project evaluations.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) data has been collected over 5 years, which is directly attributable to the HAF Programme. Coed Lleol now support other organisations with monitoring and evaluation of health in the outdoors.



Source: Coed Lleol Smallwoods Wales Evaluation 2023

Key activities to support the legacy of the Project include:

- Best Practice workshops available to leaders and partners and also offered externally (to secure income). Online accredited training courses continue
- Programmes promoted to health and social care through GP surgeries, health centres, etc.
- Immersive experiences for health professionals - more requests and a partnership with Natural Resources Wales
- A developed set of minimum standards is in place with support provided to all leaders to achieve them. These include outdoor first aid, mental health awareness, Disclosure & Barring Service

(DBS) check, relevant training for the activities they run, monitoring and evaluation, putting the 5 ways to wellbeing into practise

- A national network of improved woodland sites with better access and infrastructure
- Three woodland hubs and ten significantly improved accessible sites.

The Project secured alternative funding in 2024 which enabled the continuation of activities and whilst changes were made, delivery was not reduced.

Mainstreaming was successful in Coed Lleol becoming a social prescribing destination through health boards and its contribution to mental health strategies. The Project was asked to contribute to the national social prescribing framework. Coed Lleol describes itself as a pathway to implementation of the social prescribing framework and has been actively engaging directly with Welsh ministers to this end.

Combining nature and technology had not previously been done by the organisation. This increased accessibility alongside developing additional woodland sites. The online learning legacy was sparked by the HAF funds' flexibility to enable online delivery.

Babi Actif **Grant funding received £232,000**

The Babi Actif Project took place across Conwy, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, led by Eryri-Bywiol Cyf. The Project supported parents and children to get active outdoors during babies' first 1000 days.

Sustainability in 2024

Babi Actif's sustainability report showed that between April 2023 and March 2024, the Project delivered 224 sessions with nearly 2,000 attendances from 750 individual adult participants and registered 400 completely new participants. Regular groups continued to take place at the end of 2024. Participants throughout the programme have started their own WhatsApp groups and some groups find their own funding.

Participants have also continued being physically active independently of Babi Actif, by attending additional paid sessions with trainers and group leaders they have met through the Project. Parents have also returned to Babi Actif sessions when new babies are born, suggesting a long-term behaviour change and recognition of the value of the outdoors and physical activity. The Project's sustainability report shows evidence of this: recent session surveys showed that *“65% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they are now taking more regular physical activity since joining Babi Actif sessions, and 88% of respondents who no longer come to sessions are still in touch with other participants.”*

With the model requiring a certain level of funding to support sustainability, throughout the latter half of the HAF Programme, the Project sought funding from alternative sources and continues to do so. The experience of the organisation in making grant applications, and the use of evidence from the Babi Actif evaluation that demonstrated the value of the intervention, has led to considerable success. In December 2024, the Project was awarded £300k from the National Lottery Community Award¹³. This will enable sessions to develop across the three counties of Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy for the next three years, reaching more isolated communities, providing up to 15 activities a week and doubling the number of people who are able to enjoy the benefits of supported outdoor activity. Other sources of funding have been awarded throughout the Project, such as via Flying Start in Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham; windfarm funding which has enabled work to continue in coastal areas; and a landscape Project in Conwy County Council with specific sessions with a focus on culture, flora and fauna. Approximately £1.3m had been sourced up to the end of 2024. The Project continues to seek further funding and is working with partners to maintain provision and support new families.

Certain aspects from the Project have become embedded in the work of the organisation. The Project coordinator remains in a full-time post. During the programme, the organisation undertook a comprehensive risk review and revised the structure of professional standards and competencies, which has prepared a blueprint for delivering parent and baby outdoor sessions. Babi Actif branding remains and has provided the foundation for applying for future funding. The development of the resource 'Things to do before you're two' and a website of pre- and post-natal workouts and activity ideas provides a legacy resource to encourage parents to be active outdoors with their babies. Participants are also signposted to other opportunities to be active outdoors, and social media content supports this.

Finally, a key element is the knowledge and experience gained by the workforce, including partners such as social services and health staff and family support teams through their involvement in Babi Actif. The learning gained (and published) through the Project's research and evaluation has helped the Babi Actif model become more rounded, tested and evidenced to help influence wider services.

¹³ [Babi Actif Project celebrates grant of £300k from The National Lottery Community Fund](#)

**Balanced Lives for Care Homes.
Grant funding received: £308,000**

Balanced Lives for Care Homes aimed to improve the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of mainly sedentary residents in five care homes in the Swansea Bay Health area.

Sustainability in 2024

Learning and research contribute greatly to the way the organisation works and HAF has played a key role in this. Research showed that when there was no regular programme in place, the health and wellbeing of older people deteriorated, exacerbated by a lack of social contact and support. Sustainability of service was therefore always important. However, the intention to focus on social care was at the worst time for the third sector, and delivery through volunteers and/or training staff was a real challenge. There were setbacks in recruiting volunteers for the Project, predominantly due to the external factors of the pandemic and the economic crisis. As a result, some of the thinking around how to achieve sustainability changed during the course of the Project.

For this target group of older people, Action for Elders want to see a sustained relationship between the volunteer and the older person because the relationship is an important part of the overall support. Recruiting volunteers who can offer longer term and more consistent support is crucial, so they can build those relationships. This requires training and for volunteers to have a different mindset towards ageing, with a positive attitude towards what older people can do in later life. Terminology has been adapted so that 'volunteers' for the organisation are known as 'action-eers'.

The benefits seen and evaluated through HAF have given more weight to the organisation's funding applications. Although the funding environment was said to be extremely challenging, the evidence gained through HAF is seen as a positive. The organisation has applied for a WCVA volunteering grant to help fund the ongoing training and support for volunteers that is required.

The Project has had a far greater reach than intended at the outset, working closely with community groups as well as on its original focus in Swansea and in care homes. Long term work via a commercial contract with Parc Prison also continues. At the end of programme reporting, the Project continued to provide face to face support to over 300 individuals on a weekly basis.

BeActive RCT
Grant funding received: £472,000

The BeActive Project was led by Interlink RCT as a collaboration between six core delivery partners working with wider community groups to establish 'Wellbeing Pathways' focused on outdoor activities delivered by local community and voluntary organisations. It built on the existing community referral infrastructure and involved co-design with community members and linking with a range of services.

Sustainability in 2024

A wide range of activities continue to be delivered directly as legacy projects by the partners involved. All Project partners were keen to sustain the work and continue to maintain links with each other. Opportunities for the local community to participate in a wide range of activities have therefore been sustained for the long term. Some participants who have been involved with Project activities since the early stages of HAF are still involved, demonstrating long term physical activity participation. Opportunities to take part remain accessible. Some activities are free, or participants pay nominal amounts to providers for the activities to continue.

Volunteers have been a key part of achieving sustainability in this Project. Some Project participants have become volunteers, and with training now lead sessions themselves. Several of the groups and activities that were set up during HAF have run throughout the programme and have become self-sustaining¹⁴, and in some cases formalised with constitution, committees, local sponsorship and the ability to apply for funding. Partner organisations who initially led the groups are able to 'step away', while being open to offering support when required.

A key success was that Rhondda Housing Association recognised the positive impact of BeActive on the wellbeing of its tenants and has invested in a permanent full time Health and Wellbeing post to ensure they can sustain this offer. The post is currently held by the HAF Project Lead, meaning there is continuity in the relationships that have been built (with partners and participants), and the experience and insight gained through HAF is retained.

The Project leaves a legacy of having built referral pathways among the six partners involved in HAF as well as with other partners. There is also a legacy of learning. The HAF lead felt that one of the most important things to sustain is the learning that has been gained about partnership working: working collaboratively with different organisations who can build relationships with different target audiences, supporting new referral pathways and better-connected communities.

¹⁴ Examples include Rhondda Vets Touch Rugby (Rhondda Raptors), Social Strollers and Rhondda Valley Dippers

Cyfeillion Cerdded Cymru

Grant funding received £271,000

The Project aimed to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of older people aged 50+, particularly those at risk of social isolation and sedentary lifestyles in South East Wales, Cardiff City Region and part of the valleys, through walking activities and guided group walks.

Sustainability in 2024

The Project saw sustainability through changes to individual behaviours. This was across three levels: individuals, walk leaders and partners. Numbers boosted significantly in the 4th year. Being funded through the HAF Programme helped to develop trust at community level and with other local organisations such as GP surgeries, given the assurance of being backed by Welsh Government.

The Project partnership was structured with clear objectives. The aim was to link walk leaders with local Living Streets coordinators. However, some walk leaders linked with local community groups as the formality of the process of linking to the coordinators was not appealing to them.

When there was less face to face activities during the pandemic, documentary materials were developed alongside investment of time in spreading awareness and knowledge. Targets for training of individuals was met. Partner organisations continue to be active, with local groups still running. Now that they lack a local coordinator the response rates have reduced, and it has not been possible to collect as much data – there are qualitative responses, but not accurate numerical data.

Much of the online material remains accessible and is printed/disseminated at GP surgeries thereby showing a sustained and continued use of resources. There is evidence of influence on other institutions, and some walking groups have been taken over and continued by partner organisations.

The Project felt there were many opportunities for linking and engaging with other HAF Projects which could have been exploited more specifically with regard to sustainability.

Family Engagement Project

Grant funding received £475,000

The Project was designed to increase physical activity and associated mental wellbeing levels among families in poverty through bespoke engagement. StreetGames offered this activity in seven localities across Wales through arrangements developed for HAF, with StreetGames as lead body and seven Local Delivery Partnerships (LDP's) comprising 30 delivery partners. Each LDP was designed to address the specific needs and demographics of an area.

Sustainability in 2024

StreetGames continue to support the Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs) that lead on local project delivery. The emphasis is on supporting behaviour change rather than continuing a specific activity. Since 2020, there has been a full time Fundraising Support officer in post at StreetGames, who has provided bespoke support for the local delivery partners engaged in the Family Engagement Programme (FEP), supporting them to think about their needs and how to sustain their provision. StreetGames is assuming a brokering role; supporting leaders working within LTOs to achieve sustainability; and providing a forum for different organisations to continue partnership working and share learning.

Five LTOs are committed to continuing the HAF family engagement work post-project. Organisations have integrated family support within their core operations. Examples of how this has taken place include:

- Job descriptions for staff in the LTOs have been updated to reflect their commitment to family engagement approaches developed in HAF. For example, Aneurin Leisure have appointed a Community Engagement Officer who has a responsibility to enhance family engagement
- Public health funding via Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales was secured to support the network in Merthyr Tydfil. Family engagement approaches are embedded / mainstreamed in the organisation
- Valleys Gymnastics Academy has social and community aims underpinning the ethos and operating culture of their clubs and continues to host holiday activities with food for families
- Removing barriers to participation, such as offering reduced memberships to leisure facilities. Several LTOs have developed successful community kit / boot rooms and sporting library initiatives
- Continuing to offer physical activity sessions funded by core budgets.

There is limited data available to understand whether participants in FEP continue to be active, and data capture of individual participants has been a challenge for StreetGames (who do not have a direct relationship with the participant) and for delivery partners with limited resources. However, Project learning shows that the signposting element of the FEP has become an integral part of helping to create a holistic menu of opportunities and services. Where staff and participants have that all-round knowledge and awareness of the local landscape, it helps to maximise the chances of increasing overall family health and wellbeing and provides exit routes for participants to sustain their activities.

StreetGames has proactively shared learning gained from HAF through hosting an in-person celebration event and network meeting, plus online networking events. HAF enabled StreetGames to road test a model for delivery which it will be able to adapt or repeat. This is informing current work: StreetGames is currently a pilot organisation delivering a Children and Families Project for Sport Wales as part of Pipyn Actif.

Growing Together **Grant funding received £295,000**

Growing Together was an intergenerational food growing Project, which aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of older vulnerable adults and primary school children through the creation of accessible outdoor garden spaces at five sheltered accommodation sites operated by registered social landlords in deprived areas across Southeast Wales.

Sustainability in 2024

The approach to sustainability did not change during HAF, with the exception that Project staff were unable to involve people in the initial build of gardens during the pandemic as planned. However, with the additional year of delivery, the Project was able to catch up and help beneficiaries to gain practical skills in building and growing.

All ten growing sites that were developed through HAF continue to operate with active participation. The benefit of establishing a garden is that it is a permanent fixture if maintained. The gardens have given access to the 'right' people and places, having been developed in areas that fall in the top 20% of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. To date, two participant groups, one in Cardiff and one in Caerphilly (part of United Welsh), have become constituted.

The Project work has been successfully mainstreamed by the partner organisations involved. United Welsh see it as a popular intervention among their staff and residents, and Newport City Homes have buy-in from senior management. Newport City Homes and Age Connect Torfaen have updated job descriptions to formalise the role of staff in supporting activities in the gardens. This reduces the risk of loss of knowledge and impetus through staff turnover, which did happen during HAF, but wider senior engagement and support enabled the Project to continue.

Although the Project is becoming embedded through the work of different partners, Keep Wales Tidy staff have been able to use some resources to revisit the locations and maintain partner relationships, offering support where needed. These 'top up visits' started in April 2024 and were hugely popular. Keep Wales Tidy staff have forged relationships with the host organisations and having seen the benefits, there is appetite from those partners to do more work in this sphere, which has been viewed as a real success.

The prolonged time available for HAF allowed lots of different activities to take place in addition to growing. This included social games, coffee/tea and a chat. 'Lead' residents started instructing others in the groups informally, sharing skills such as showing people how to use apps, do video story diaries, and offering helpful digital expertise. In two sites, residents took part in digital inclusion training in the final year of HAF. Learning showed that it took a long time to raise the appetite among participants for things like this training offer, which was paid for by host organisations.

With the current buy in from host organisations for this Project, there is the potential for them to replicate it elsewhere. Host organisations such as housing associations have lots of different sites that could be improved. To enable long term success, consultation with user groups should happen from the outset. Involving people in planning and mapping out the Project site makes it easier to overcome any later obstacles, and aids participant buy in and sustainability.

HAPPy

Grant funding received £228,000

This Project was a partnership between Tredegar House (National Trust), Newport Mind, Growing Space and Duffryn Community Link. It focused on mental health and inactivity in the Tredegar House area of Newport, which has high levels of deprivation with a significant proportion of the population experiencing health challenges. The Project used the grounds of Tredegar House to create opportunities to access parkland and woodland to improve physical and mental wellbeing.

Sustainability in 2024

Organisational resilience is a key feature relating to the impact and legacy of this Project, including agility in staff resource allocation. The National Trust has an embedded sustainability framework as part of its operating model, which was followed for this Project.

Staffing changes within all partner organisations meant data sharing did not happen as was intended. However, the learning from the Project will be taken into the National Trust new strategy 'Access to Nature', given the synergies between activities and benefits for participants.

Strong governance sees all projects follow an official 'gate' process – when the Project is past its final gate, there will be a formal report into the senior management team with details of its evaluation. Cascading information about the Project and its evaluation will be determined by the Senior Management Team, recognising that large projects such as this provide more opportunity to share organisational learning, including reporting on what may not have worked so well.

The National Trust has a central project team with sustainability impact reports produced post Project conclusion at year 2 (2025) and year 5 (2029). There is also a central repository of case studies which have been lodged and are accessible to the National Trust's wider organisation. The Project described sustainability through learning as 'stealing with pride'.

Volunteer engagement activity has been sustained and there has been demonstrable organisational impact, for example mental health first aid training being undertaken. This was a result of the Project feeding into the wider organisational business case. Partnership relations have also been sustained, demonstrated through work together on activities and the provision of mutual support in different areas, including on funding bids.

Whilst being a national organisation, funding streams such as HAF enables the space for the organisation to focus on specific areas. This Project was intended to be activity based but ultimately became more about mental health and wellbeing.

Healthy and Active Newport Grant funding received £460,000

The Project engaged a group of eight schools and their extended communities in a programme of sporting and physical activity. There was an emphasis on enhancing the skills and capacity of the schools' workforce and developing a network of volunteers to assist with delivery. The target group of pupils were those who had low levels of physical activity and those whose families did not participate in physical activity. The Project was collaborative and following COVID-19, was through digital delivery.

Sustainability in 2024

The core activity of the Project was not sustained as further funding was unavailable, which was required to release teaching staff for training. However, there were sustained Project outcomes.

Treating the data with caution, quantitative scores demonstrated a slight increase in children's physical activity and mental wellbeing scores. Perhaps more encouraging was evidence from focus groups that showed children were now aware of the positive benefits of physical activity and that it does not solely need to be playing sport. This may go a long way in terms of encouraging more of the pupils to continue their levels of physical activity following the HAF sessions. To help enable longer term participation, pupils on HAF all had a golden ticket to use at Newport Live to do an activity such as tennis, helping to get people into facilities they may not have accessed previously. A primary school girls after-school football league was established in response to pupil voice, which by summer 2024 involved 24 schools, and had delivered three festivals with 600 female participations. The Newport Boot Room remains in place at a number of locations across the city.

The Project addressed a known gap of teachers lacking confidence to deliver physical activity sessions by providing them with training, equipment, session workbooks and video recordings. 90% of the 64 teachers supported reported they had improved their confidence in physical activity delivery. The Project's *How To* videos have become part of the [Hwb](#) resources for the Curriculum for Wales health and wellbeing area of learning and experience, leaving a legacy for the teaching community and activity providers.

The dedicated wellbeing coaches that HAF deployed established a good relationship with schools, getting to know them well. Project staff reported that having consistency of staff "really does work", with schools asking for staff members to return to support new cohorts of pupils. Some schools are now paying to do HAF enrichment days, enabling children to mix with other schools, visit facilities such as the velodrome, and benefit from healthy eating workshops.

Through the Project, the team learned that it was important to have staff with a mix of skill sets from education *and* sports backgrounds with the expertise to have informed conversations with schools and partners in different local authority departments. This has influenced recruitment processes. The skills now sought when appointing team members are based on behaviours and attitudes more than certain qualifications, with the current Sport and Wellbeing team able to train up people where required internally. This approach is now used across wider Newport Live programmes and there is a greater focus on health and wellbeing and connection with the Family First team in addition to sports development. The whole team have completed food nutrition training and incorporate healthy lifestyles activities in their summer events.

Healthy Body Healthy Mind Grant funding received £449,000

Healthy Body Healthy Mind (HBHM) was led by Women Connect First and covered Cardiff and the surrounding areas. It engaged Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic women and their families in physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

Sustainability in 2024

As described by Project staff in their final report to Welsh Government, “*one of the biggest strategic achievements of the HBHM Project...has been a culture change within ethnic minority women and our communities...We can very proudly say that our women look forward to our weekly activity programme, be it online or face to face, and increasingly have a set routine of physical activity, sports, fitness and well-being incorporated into their daily lifestyles.*” Interviewees spoke about how the Project has become embedded in participants' lives, with Project WhatsApp groups established and Women Connect First staff staying in touch with participants. This stretches their own organisational resources, but with the observation that the most important thing to sustain from the HAF is the beneficiaries' behavioural and lifestyle changes.

There are, however, risks to this success, with staff reporting that the cost of living is having a real impact on people's ability to pay even a small charge to attend sessions and to travel to activities. Those partner organisations who supported the Project during HAF and beyond by offering free or low-cost sessions are also under increased pressure to balance their books.

Volunteers have been key to sustaining activities, following the support they have received through HBHM. Two participants who learned to swim through the Project have since trained and qualified as swimming instructors through Cardiff Met. 56 ethnic minority women are now able to promote and provide health, wellbeing and/or leisure advice to, and/or on behalf of, their peers.

Women Connect First has gained its own learning and development through HAF, not just through their commissioned evaluation but through the new experiences in monitoring and evaluation and writing the business case for the original application. At Programme level, this Project felt that “sustainability on the side of the funder has lacked”; the stop-start nature of seeking funds for successful projects that have demonstrated positive impact was a challenge. Projects would like to better understand what is happening as a result of HAF and the learning it generated.

In Year 3, Women Connect First attracted additional funding from the Rosa Foundation/Smallwood Trust to run physical activities for young girls, which has allowed it to relieve some of the problems of over-demand for HBHM's activities by directing younger women to that Project instead. Looking ahead, Women Connect First are exploring collaborations with others to apply for funding; for example, following taster sessions with Archery GB, there is demand for follow up sessions.

Ten partners had made changes to improve their practice to engage with ethnic minority women and their families by the end of the Project's four years. Five of these organisations/partners made those changes in year 4, suggesting that this cannot be achieved quickly. “*The highlight of the quarter was finally succeeding in restarting the long-awaited swimming classes for women after advocating for women-only provision for over two years ... with the lessons learnt that a) change can come within mainstream services through this kind of Project, but also b) this kind of change needs a long time and a lot of persistence.*”

This has been a key success. Swimming sessions continue to be offered in Cardiff with very high demand and uptake: for example, 40 women booked on two ten-week courses with a waiting list of a further 67 women. Leisure centre staff identified they required an increase in the number of female swim teachers who could teach adults to swim. This led to a recent women-only swim teachers' course being held. Positive staff outcomes have been recorded, such as improved confidence of swim instructors to deliver to a wide audience with different languages and the ability to overcome

communication barriers. Other examples include the Cardiff and Vale Health Board dietetics team using HBHM community nutrition courses as a case study in order to extend this provision to other areas of Cardiff. Project staff work with the dietetics team on an ongoing basis, designing bespoke health and nutrition courses that are culturally appropriate for ethnic minority communities and providing help to contain issues such as diabetes, obesity and nutrition for those aged 50+.

Opening Doors to the Outdoors

Grant funding received £285,000

This Project aimed to increase physical activity levels and mental wellbeing amongst participants with mental and physical health issues, through a collaborative pilot social prescribing project, working with partners from the outdoor and health sectors in North Wales.

Sustainability in 2024

The Outdoor Partnership has mainstreamed sustainability through all it does. This Project focussed on sustainable groups and upskilling health partners, using pathways to employment as a framework.

There is detailed follow up work to be undertaken with regard to beneficiary behaviour change, through a PhD student following up on work undertaken in partnership with Bangor University.

The Project engendered policy influence on other organisations. Specifically, Community Health Teams have taken this on as a new concept. Local Authorities (Gwynedd and Anglesey) became a huge advocate of group therapy by getting people outdoors, and this was facilitated by putting standard operating procedures in place as this was a new operating model for them. The Project sees great social value of the partnership.

In terms of workforce skills, even though they were freelance, the team went 'over and above', kept in touch and undertook additional training in areas such as mental health. There was upskilling of volunteers and clients, including through awareness of routes and local history, leading to a qualification in outdoor leadership and proficiency qualifications delivered through a national training organisation with a bespoke approach. This opportunity went beyond clients to include support workers being trained and as well as upskilling partners. It facilitated the organisation's own workforce personal career development.

There is ongoing delivery of the Project objectives in Northern Ireland and areas of England. The HAF Programme gave rise to this, allowing the model to expand. There are 12 regions across the UK now running social prescribing projects.

Through the theory of change for this Project, and following a broader Outdoor Partnership strategy review, this has resulted in six core programmes, one of which is Health & Wellbeing. The organisation continues to hold consistent learning sessions as part of the organisation strategy, including a UK shared learning group.

This HAF Project fed into wider recognition of social prescribing. Sustainability over the duration of the Project has increased, especially around alternative funding both for continuation and adaptation, and mainstreaming improvement although not across the whole sector as yet.

Play Wales Ambassadors Grant funding received £216,000

The Project had complementary aims to train young people aged 14-19 to become Play Ambassadors and provide a path to qualification and work placement in Play. Further work was to be carried out to enable Play Ambassadors to facilitate play opportunities across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Sustainability in 2024

From inception, the Project held the view that sustainability did not mean that the Project would continue, given the clarity that funding would stop. It saw sustainability more as changing mindsets at local authority level to support community activity and build community networks, creating communities which are more play friendly and enabling local accessibility. The impact of COVID-19 initially changed the view of sustainability by moving to an online supplementary offer.

Play Wales developed materials to sustain activities at a local level, through local authorities and broadly across Public Health Wales. As well as sustained delivery, relationships between partners had also been sustained.

Working closely with Welsh Government has resulted in 'play' being part of the wider landscape, which in turn has promoted its importance and helped with funding. Whilst not changing the sustainability issue, it enabled discussions and engagement to be much swifter. The Project's focus was on what could be learned, how it could be sustained, and how best to transfer learning. The organisation had a clear objective which it successfully established into the wider policy environment as a mainstream idea.

The Project Officer remained for six months post funding in order to capture learning. The result was completion of three outputs – a play training course, a community play network, and a local playscheme pack. In addition, local community play ambassadors were established across Wales. All material and publications carry the HAF logo.

The HAF Programme was critical to this Project. Without it, capacity would not have been in place, even though the demand was known to be there. Both intended and unintended benefits to beneficiaries followed through the enablement of career development and further programme development. Relationships remain better established with Sport Wales and Public Health Wales as a result of the HAF.

Sporting Memories

Grant funding received £461,000

Sporting Memories supported the mental and physical wellbeing of people over 50 using the power of sport to engage with people living with dementia or depression, or who were socially isolated in South Wales.

Sustainability in 2024

66% of clubs created under this Project are still active and delivering within the local authority areas. Given that the majority of set up costs are in the training of volunteers, this model relies on the sound infrastructure of the national organisation for things such as marketing, support on the ground, umbrella support to clubs, and volunteers.

The HAF funding extension in year 4 supported the regaining of traction post the pandemic, alongside the successful critical planning by two coordinators during the COVID-19 period. A steering group of partner organisations included various levels of support ranging from funding 'in kind' to practical support with facilities.

The Project Officer/coordinator was funded through the organisation's reserves, which enabled the maximisation of funding opportunities nationally. This role is seen as key for sustainability although it relies on other funding sources.

In terms of organisational learning, it found that stronger volunteering activity, interaction between clubs, and a focus on Wales enabled it to extend the activity. Cultures and ways of living in Welsh regions was different to other nations, even where the theory of change remained the same. The form of delivery required for different places needs to be fully understood. Policy changes within the lead organisation means this approach now forms part of their wider delivery approach.

As stated within its sustainability report, the Project is committed to ensuring Sporting Memories Community Clubs continue across Wales as well as extending its reach to support more older people.

Super Agers

Grant funding received £393,000

The Super Agers Project took place across Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Its focus was the development of physical activity opportunities for older people aged 50+, some with additional care needs. Many opportunities would be enabled through training volunteers of all ages, aiding sustainability beyond HAF. The Project emphasised preventative approaches to complement wider local and national strategies aimed at supporting older people.

Sustainability in 2024

Despite not applying for the HAF funding into year 4, the Project achieved a good measure of sustainability. From inception, it had offered a range of activities which were integrated into rather than segregated from other Council services, and these were also intergenerational.

Due to the pandemic, the approach to sustainability changed by developing an 'Active at home' resource. Digital methodologies were used, and activities were aligned with third sector efforts. The Project created its own identity which helped 'buy-in' and trust, generating a critical mass. Each local authority took its own approaches according to the culture and ways of working of their organisation and area. The decision not to take up the funding extension was a joint one between the local authorities. They felt that they needed a level of commitment from within their respective 'parent' organisations, which was not possible to achieve post-pandemic.

The HAF achieved credibility with the Health Board and triggered positive discussions with partners. It created relationships within the local authorities, mainly across social care and leisure, and this resulted in mainstream funding being provided through the Adult Care service. This was preferable to Welsh Government funding, especially where reporting requirements differed from the local authorities' own ones.

The Project emphasised the importance of quality leadership in order to build in sustainability considerations from the outset, and then to achieve it.

Welsh Active Early Years **Grant funding received £442,000**

This Project aimed to bridge the gap in knowledge about physical literacy for children under 4 years of age in various locations across Wales, building on the principles of Play to Learn, and to create sustainable programmes of physical activity for children and adults to enhance their physical literacy and mental well-being.

Sustainability in 2024

The Project has continued to share the legacy of its work and invested beyond the HAF funding period. Whilst some activities were part of the initial plan, others were new and based on additional learning, for example Active Baby at Home activities for babies aged 0-8 months. Training for practitioners helped to reinforce the message of the importance of movement. Practitioners from a multitude of agencies/groups have been sustained across service areas and data collation continues where possible, being tracked through Public Health Wales. The organisation continues to work with schools on physical literacy and has also reached out to similar projects in other countries. Partnership relations were invested in deeply, and the organisation also gave evidence to the Senedd on the importance of movement and of movement 'champions'.

The Project enabled the organisation to have a much wider offering. The HAF provided a stimulus for growth in the number of members and of the organisation itself. Partners have also contributed to sustainability. For example, when the HAF funding ended, some local authorities continued to pay for sessions. All the resources which were created are in digital form, and one local authority has also developed an app. The legacy of HAF continues to be referred to by practitioners, and the HAF Project was the catalyst for a range of positive legacy aspects.

West Wales Walking for Wellbeing Grant funding received £363,521

The Project operated in Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, led by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA). Through walking, it aimed for individuals to become more physically active, with a focus on those who live sedentary or relatively inactive lives.

Sustainability in 2024

Since the beginning of 2024, the Project has not been able to secure further funding and at the time of the sustainability interview, the infrastructure around the Project (three coordinators, website and the collective brand) had been dismantled at a regional level. There was some loss of momentum and service provision as a result of turnover in the Walk Co-ordinator posts.

However, after a pause, some aspects of the Project were reinvigorated and remain in place across the three local authorities. In Pembrokeshire, walking groups are still operating, with the PCNPA providing training and supporting the recruitment of new volunteers. PCNPA continue to maintain a post for a Walk Co-ordinator which was in place pre-HAF. A Walk Co-ordinator post remains in Ceredigion, currently funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund¹⁵. In Carmarthenshire, via the council's support through Actif Sport and Leisure, officers are maintaining walking groups. Although this is positive, it was felt that with the right level of support, a collaborative regional approach would be stronger, and there had been learning gained from working together with partners across a wider network.

The HAF Project also enabled the purchase of kit and equipment such as walking poles and first aid kits, which were given to the walking groups when the Project ended.

Learning from HAF has informed ongoing work. Findings from the local evaluation have been presented to the wider workforce in the lead organisation, sharing insights into productive ways of working across wider programmes. Examples include a greater awareness of the transport barriers people face, and the potential contribution that can be made through community volunteers, who made very competent leaders and provided a strong service. There is also strong evidence from the local evaluation of the benefits to participants and volunteers from their involvement in walking programmes.

The Project's assessment is that some level of funding will always be required to manage groups safely and provide training and support for volunteers, including volunteer expenses in some cases. With the partner organisations currently finding this resource internally or through short term funding, it is unclear to what extent provision of a programme of health walks can be sustained in the longer term. In their final evaluation report, the Project acknowledges that it was not able to achieve the links with primary health care that had been hoped for. However, links to the voluntary sector and 'community connectors' have helped to maintain some of the groups.

¹⁵ [Ceredigion Actif Health Intervention Programmes](#)