

MAYOR'S FUND FOR LONDON

HELPING YOUNG LONDONERS GROW

Kitchen Social – Activity Library Pilot

Ready
to play?

 DECATHLON

 DECATHLON Foundation

About us

We are the Mayor's Fund for London, a charity that champions opportunities for young Londoners facing the biggest barriers.

Throughout the lifetime of a young Londoner, we're here for them – providing food as a foundation, skills as a springboard, and power through our platform so they can grow, thrive, and shape London into a truly inclusive, more prosperous city.

Background

In October 2023, we delivered a co-production session with 12 young people at [The Dalgarno Trust](#) in partnership with [League Leaders](#) and [RED January](#). The young people were challenged to design a physical activity box that would inspire them – alongside their families and peers - to lead more active lives.

Through further conversations, the physical activity box evolved into an Activity Library. We wanted to:

- Find a more sustainable way to benefit young people via equipment investment.
- Acknowledge the vital role of community organisations, and the expert/trusted adults working in these to support young people thrive during the school holidays.
- Understand the difference investing in equipment makes to young people being able to lead more active lives.



The Model

The Activity Library is a simple and inclusive approach replicating the model of a Public Library, just replacing books with sports equipment.

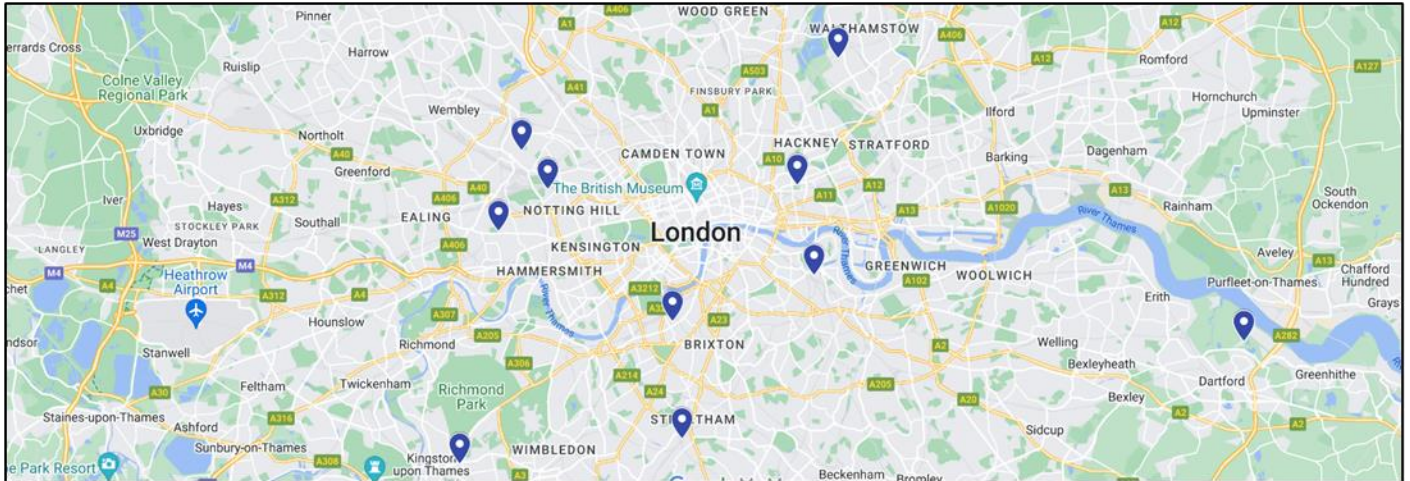
1. **BORROW** – young people offered the choice to borrow from the range of sports equipment at their Kitchen Social hub via a simple sign-out / sign-in process.
2. **USE** – young people use the equipment for the sport/physical/play activity experience that works best for them/their friends. Combination of on-site at their Kitchen Social hub and/or at home with their friends and family.
3. **RETURN** – young people are trusted to bring the equipment back at an agreed time (e.g. at lunchtime, end of the day or the next day/end of the week), enabling others to have their turn.
4. **REPEAT** – young people repeat the process exploring different sports via the range of equipment available.

The Activity Library focused on four values - **INCLUSION, RESPECT, CURIOSITY and FUN.**

The Hubs

Ten Kitchen Social Hubs were invited to take part from across ten London boroughs. 80% working with young people in communities in the top 30% most deprived in the country. The hubs varied in their thematic expertise, including youth work, play and adventure play, sport participation and sport for development, and family and community support.

Elays Network - Wandsworth	SmileyArk Kids – Greenwich/Bexley
Weavers Adventure Playground – Tower Hamlets	Parentskills2go CIC - Southwark
Streatham Youth and Community Trust - Lambeth	Our Parks - Kingston
A.P.P.L.E – Ealing	Sport at the Heart - Brent
The Dalgarno Trust – Kensington and Chelsea	Salaam Peace – Waltham Forest



From the outset, the Kitchen Social Hubs saw the potential for the Activity Library pilot in their communities. Their motivations for wanting to be involved can be summarised as followed:

Promotion of Physical Health and Wellbeing

Hubs recognised the Activity Library's value in promoting lifelong healthy habits by making activity accessible and enjoyable. Be that instilling improved fitness habits, introducing young girls to a greater variety of sports or as a tool to focus on tackling inactivity and obesity.

Addressing Socioeconomic Barriers and Equity

Hubs highlighted the cost-related barriers to participating in sports and physical activities. The cost of purchasing sports equipment meant hubs saw young people increasingly spending time on phones and computers, negatively impacting their wellbeing. Because of the current cost-of-living crisis, hubs were even more aware of their role in supporting low-income families to support children stay engaged, healthy and active.

Family and Community Bonding

Hubs saw the Activity Library as a chance to enhance family engagement and strengthen community ties. The Activity Library was seen as an extension to cooking and workshops on healthy eating that foster family participation and promote connection and communication. The model of Borrow, Use, Return, Repeat was referenced as a positive to create more trusting relationships.

Encourage Exploration and New Hobbies

Hubs were motivated by the idea that the Activity Library would allow children and young people to try new sports and activities they might not otherwise engage in. It was noted that the Activity Library offered a low-risk way for underserved young Londoners to try different activities, potentially sparking interests in new sport without the barrier of financial constraints. The feedback loop was also significant— if certain sports become

popular through the library, hubs could develop sessions for these activities, such as boxing or frisbee, as mentioned by one participant.

Mental Health and Confidence Building

Improving mental and physical wellbeing, plus boosting self-esteem were key reasons for hubs wanting to be involved, both for individual young people and with-in family units. Access to the equipment was seen as creating opportunities for dedicated time away from the daily pressures of life.

Capacity Building and Partnerships

Some hubs saw the Activity Library as an opportunity to activate and enhance their current facilities and develop a broader range of programs on-site. For others, it offered the chance to expand their offer to support more families both on-site and via home-based activities in a way that did not create additional capacity or financial burdens for them as an organisation



Engagement

The Activity Library pilot engaged with 431 young people, and 227 family members during the 6-week summer holidays. The equipment was borrowed 898 times, 71% for on-site use and 29% for use at home.

In terms of the young people, there was an even split of female (47%) and male (53%). 66% of the young people who took part were from the global majority (*all ethnic groups except white British and other groups, including white minorities). 7% of the young people identified as disabled.

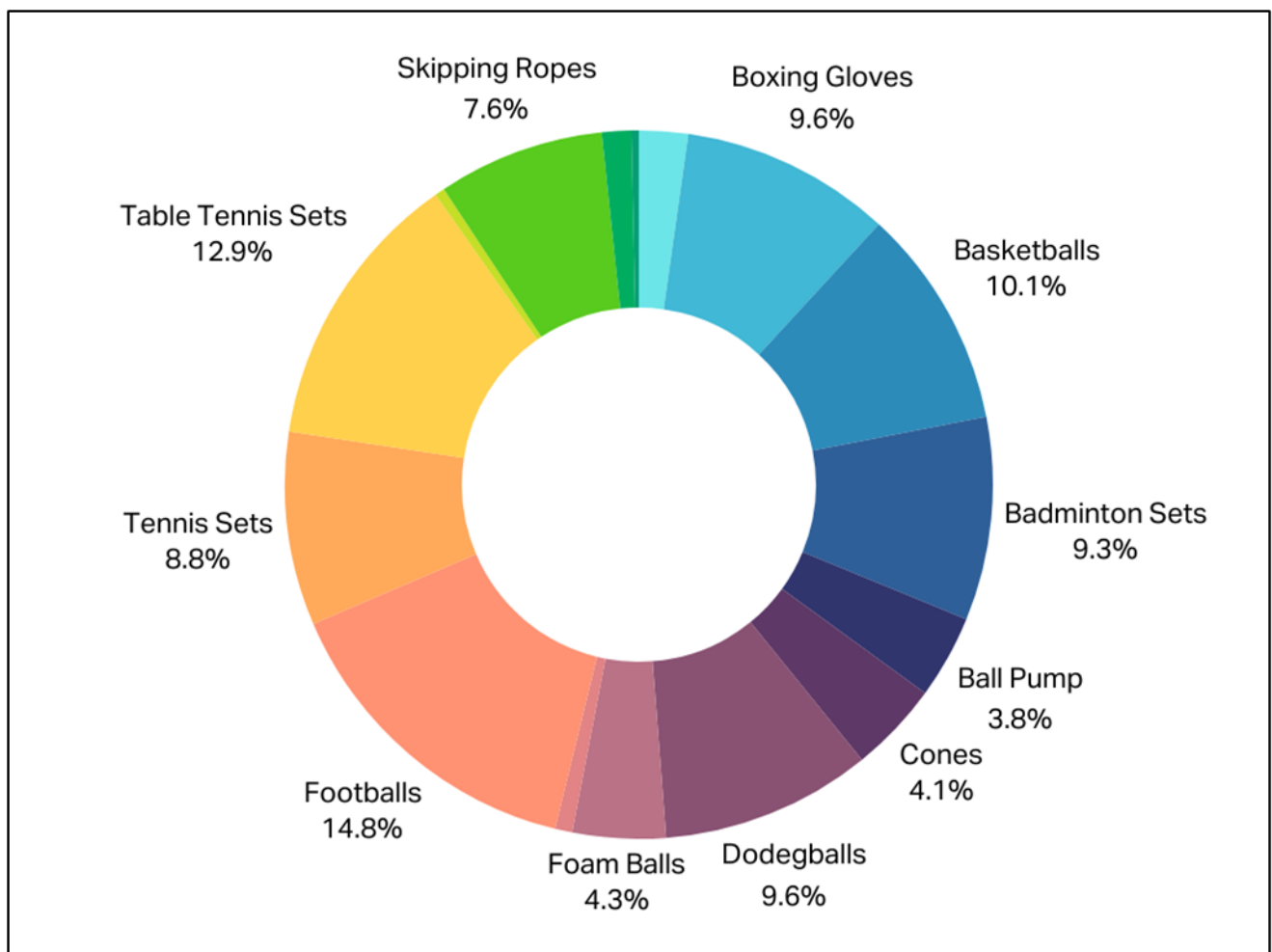
Young people aged twelve and under were the biggest age group engaged. 42% were aged 4 – 8, and 36% were aged 9 – 12. Teenage engagement (those aged 13-18) was 22%.

Reflecting on the sports equipment borrowed, the most popular items were:

- Footballs
- Table Tennis Sets
- Basketballs
- Boxing Gloves and Dodgeballs
- Pop up Badminton sets

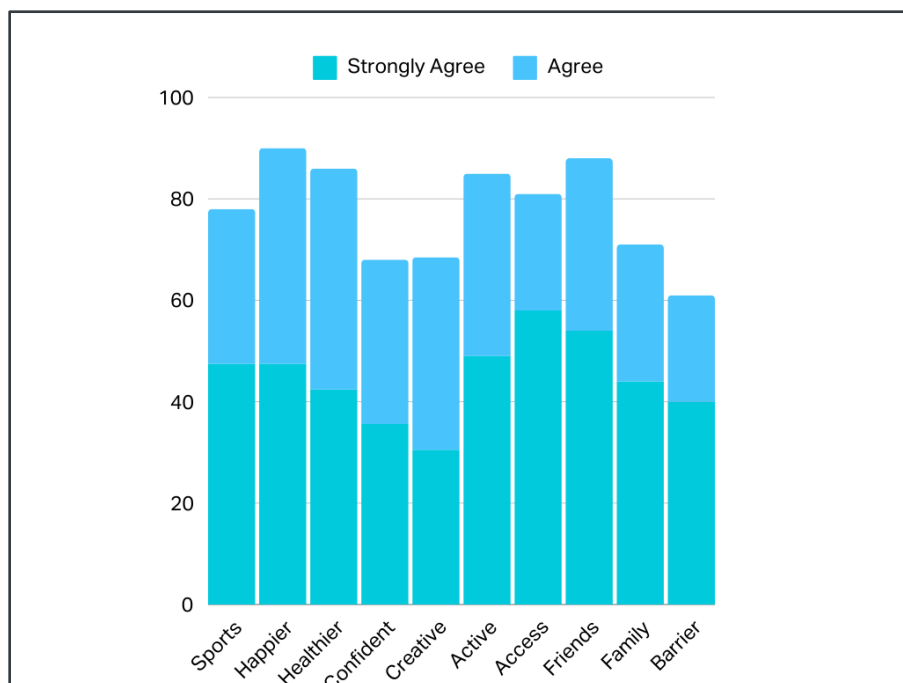
Other equipment that was regularly borrowed was the skipping ropes, tennis sets, the cones, and foam balls. Less well used were the frisbee's, pogo ball, yoga matts, ball pump, wallballs and activity snap cards.

*Two hubs data not included in this report at time of writing



Impact -Young People

Young people's experiences were strongly positive, emphasizing happiness, new experiences, and social connections because of the Activity Library.



Reflecting on the young people's survey responses and their qualitative feedback, the following key themes emerged (*% = strong agree/agree responses)

Positive Emotions and Happiness

90% felt happier and more positive as a result of taking part in the Activity Library. Many participants mentioned feeling happy, happier, and excited. These emotions were strongly associated with engaging in new activities, playing with friends, and trying out sports they had never done before.

Increased Physical Activity and Health

86% reported feeling healthier and more energetic. 85% said they were more active than at the start of the school holidays because of the Activity Library, with 78% reporting trying new sports. This came through in young people's feedback, a number of responses highlighted how participation in the activities made them feel healthier, stronger and more energised. For others, it helped them stay active during the school holidays and increased their physical well-being.

Social Interaction and Friendships

88% reported spending more time being active with their friends, and 71% reported more time being active with their family. Many participants reflected that the Activity

Library helped them make new friends and/or spend more time with their existing friends. *"It's a social thing for me"*, and *"I get to see my friends more"* emphasize the social benefits.

Learning New Skills and Creativity

69% reported being inspired to be more creative, 68% told us their confidence had improved. Many participants found value in learning about new sports and using new equipment. The opportunity to try new things was tied to a sense of accomplishment and discovery.

Fun and Enjoyment

81% reported the Activity Library created more access to fun and engaging activities during the holidays. Fun appeared to be a strong motivator for continued participation and engagement in the Activity Library.

Access to Equipment and Opportunities

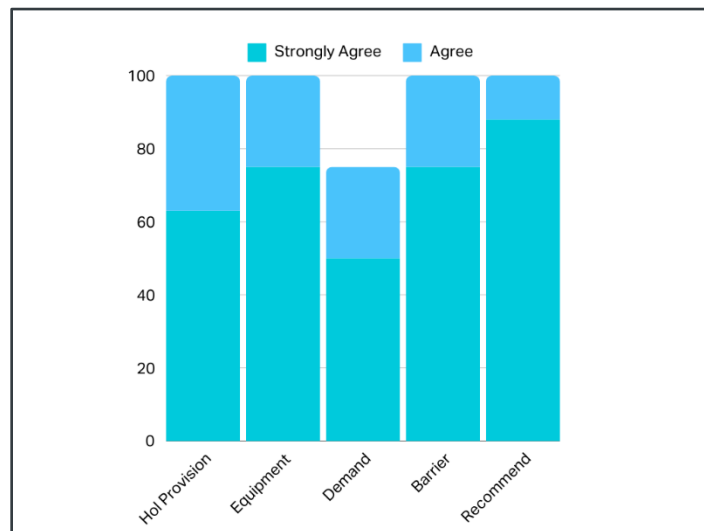
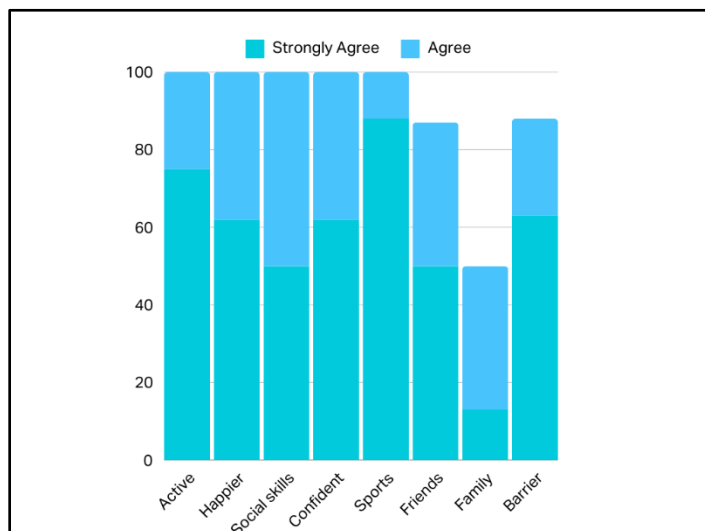
61% of the young people felt the cost of buying sports equipment stops them from being as active as they'd like. There were references to not having access to sports equipment at home, and that Activity Library changed that. Borrowing equipment and having the chance to try new sports such as was seen as a valuable part of the experience.

"The library helped me play sports like table tennis and boxing, I enjoyed it as I don't usually do these activities much. I enjoyed playing table tennis with my friends and trying boxing" – Young Person

"I borrowed fitness activity cards to improve my fitness. My mum borrowed boxing gloves so we could practice together" – Young Person

Impact - Hubs

Hub leader's reflections were overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the Activity Library's success in fostering enthusiasm for sports, increasing physical activity, promoting social interactions, and reducing financial barriers for families. There was also noticeable value for them as organisations in terms of improving quality of holiday provision and equipment available.



Reflecting on the hub leaders survey responses and their qualitative feedback, the following key themes emerged.

Access to Sports Equipment

The Activity Library significantly improved access to sports equipment for young people, who may not have had the means to purchase or regularly access it.

“The pilot provided young people with easily accessible sports equipment” and “reduced financial pressures as children could try equipment and return it back if they did not like it”

Participation and Engagement

Hub leaders saw how young people were enthused by sports that they previously hadn't tried, such as tennis, boxing and badminton. They felt young people broadened their horizons, helping them step out of their comfort zones and increase their confidence. There was a noticeable change in young people's preferences: *“more young people were willing to play other sports not just football”*, indicating the Activity Library diversified their interests.

Physical Activity and Wellbeing

The Activity Library encouraged young people to be more physically active not only during their holiday programs but also outside of it, extending the benefits into their daily lives. There was a positive ripple effect on families also, *“The positive influence extended to their families as well, promoting family involvement in physical activities, enhancing overall well-being and family cohesion”*. One young person who took home boxing equipment now wants to join a boxing club which his parents are supporting to happen. This highlights the pilot's role in sparking deeper interests and future aspirations in sports

Behavioral and Habit Changes

The model of offering equipment to use at home encouraged the use of parks and outdoor community spaces, especially for those young people living in high rise buildings. New habits of outdoor play were also mentioned, speaking to the creative element the equipment enabled.

Social Benefits and Community Building

A recurring theme is the *social cohesion* created by the Activity Library. Hub leaders saw young people interacting with peers they wouldn't normally engage with, and this broadened their social circles. Through shared sporting activities, young people were able to make new friends and participate in a variety of group dynamics, which helped build stronger community ties.

Empowerment and Accountability

The Activity Library model (Borrow-Use-Return-Repeat) instilled a sense of responsibility and accountability in young people. Not only did it create greater access to equipment, it promoted transferable behavioral habits and demonstrated to young people they were trusted by adults.

Organisation Added Value

Kitchen Social hubs welcomed the provision of new and greater variety of equipment *"we didn't have the resources before, but now we have the flexibility to engage young people"*. The Activity Library also reinforced their focuses to *"promote healthy lifestyles and provide innovative ways to support physical development."*

"Before taking part in this project, we were quite limited as an organisation because we didn't have the resources to work with and were dependent on external providers. However, the activity Library pilot has provided a lot of flexibility and given the young people a variety of choices which has improved their engagement with physical activity and sports It has also enabled a lot of creativity, social cohesion and growing desire among young people to try things they have never tried before" – Hub Leader

"The library has had a massive impact on our playground. The boxing gloves sparked a big interest, that we are now planning to start regular boxing sessions with a local coach who used to use the play ground when he was a child," – Hub Leader

Recommendations

88% of hub leaders strongly agreed that an Activity Library should be available at all community organisations in London to help young people and families be more active.

The pilot and the evidence generated indicates that the Activity Library adds significant value to young people. By delivering this through our Kitchen Social hubs, young people not only benefitted directly from the equipment, but also through access to daily nutritious meals. The Fuel for Life needed to thrive.

We believe strongly that it warrants further investment to expand across our Kitchen Social hub network. It is a cost effective (c.£8000 for the pilot) and sustainable approach that simplifies not complicates young Londoners and their families being active.

Future considerations and developments should also consider the following:

- **Equipment** – hubs were keen to grow the variety and volume of equipment available, as well as be involved from the beginning choosing what equipment would work best for their community.
- **Logistics** – continued flexibility in the model was encouraged, particularly around the sign out / in procedure which didn't necessarily always lend itself to the spontaneity of young people
- **Accessibility and Safety** – the Activity Library reinforced the need for safe, accessible spaces for young people during the school holidays to be active and access equipment. Young people's physical living spaces and surrounding areas often impacted "*where, when, and how they can play.*"
- **Parent Engagement** – "*As an organisation where parents are part of the program, I would say that we still need support to enable parents to support their children.*" How could the Activity Library strengthen family involvement in shared sporting experiences, be that with additional resources, workshops focused on developing tools and knowledge.
- **Funding** – the small co-ordination grant per hub was welcomed for the pilot. Long term, it was referenced that investment in infrastructure at each hub (e.g – the time of hub leaders to manage/co-ordinate/evaluate etc.) as well as equipment would be important.