



# Laois Sports Partnership

Mid Year Report 2022



**SPORT IRELAND**  
LOCAL SPORTS PARTNERSHIPS



# Summary of Laois LSP Impact January - June 2022

## Sport Inclusion & Disability Progs

**309**

people engaged in  
**19** Programmes  
/Courses

## Women in Sport



**524**



## Safeguarding Training

**10** courses were  
delivered to **115**  
participnts



## Grants



**€42,644** issued  
to **48 Clubs**



## Reach

Over **100,000**  
people reached  
online via social  
media





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LAOIS SPORTS PARTNERSHIP  
COMHAR SPÓIRT NA LAOISE

— SPORT IRELAND —

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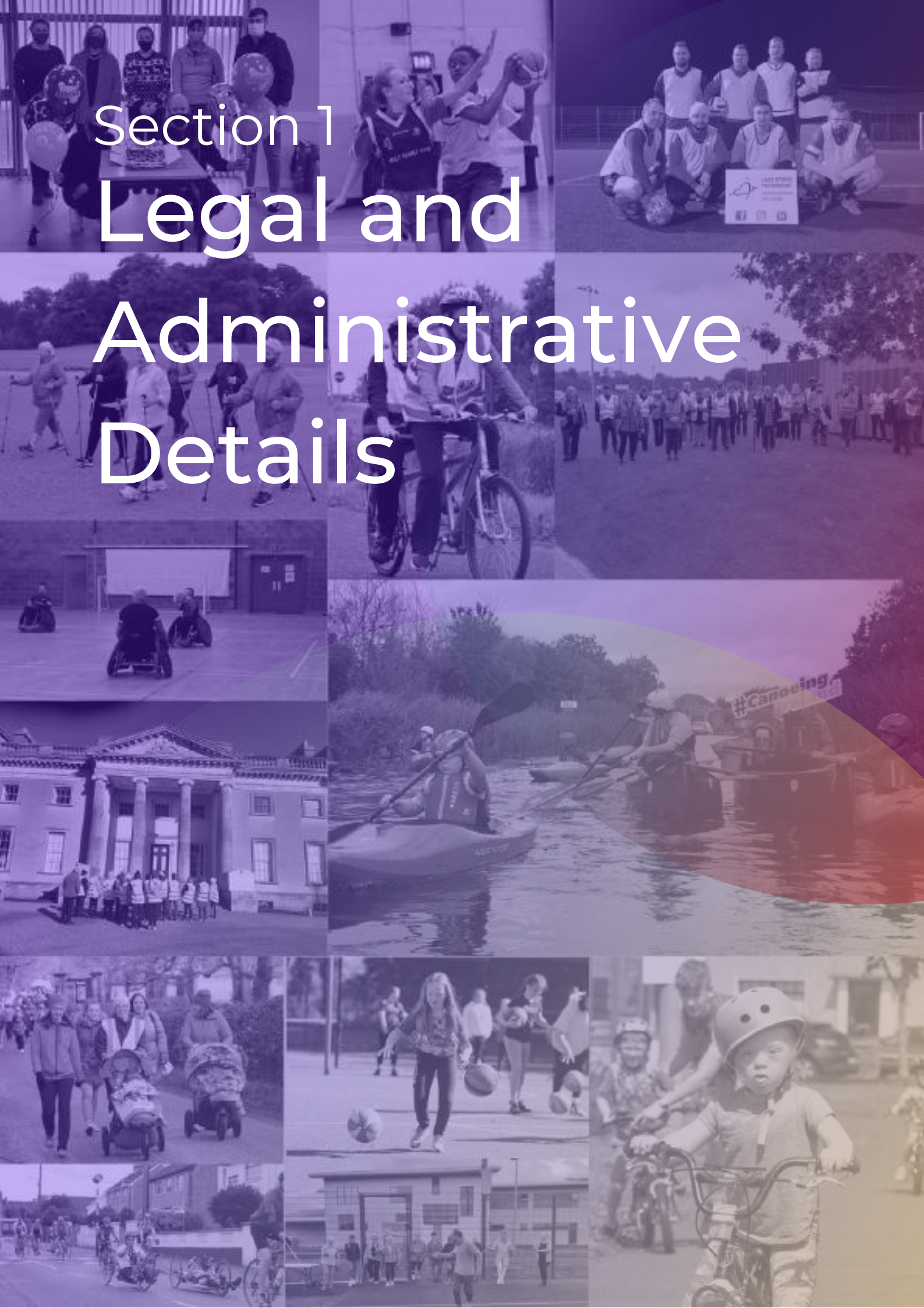
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# Section 1 Legal and

# Administrative Details



## Legal and Administrative Details

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**Directors:**

Eibhlin Smith  
Niall Tully  
Marian Condrón  
Karen Phelan  
Marian O'Boyle  
Eavonne Donoghue  
Ciaran Reilly  
Garry Luttrell  
David Hainsworth  
Wesley Wilkinson

**Company Registered Number:**

346789

**Registered Office:**

Laois Sports Partnership CLG,  
Laois Leisure,  
Portlaoise,  
Moneyballytyrrell,  
Portlaoise,  
Co. Laois.

**Company Secretary:**

Garry Luttrell

**Chief Executive Officer/Manager:**

Caroline Myers

**Independent Auditor:**

Kieran Burns

**Principal Bankers:**

Bank of Ireland,  
Lyster Square,  
Portlaoise,  
Co. Laois.

**Solicitors:**

RDJ Solicitors



LAOIS SPORTS PARTNERSHIP

COMHAR SPÓIRT NA LAOISE

— SPORT IRELAND —



Section 2

# About the Organisation



# Laois Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2022-2026

Laois Sports Partnership launched its new strategic plan in March 2022. This plan will be in place for 2022-2026. Through consultation findings, engagement and planning sessions informed the development of a new strategic framework for Laois Sports Partnership. This is comprised of a vision statement, mission statement and a series of organisation themes which are built upon 5 'active' themes.

## Vision

'Everybody active in County Laois'

## Mission

'Creating sustainable pathways for all to participate in sport, physical activity and recreation in County Laois'

## Values

The new set of values agreed are:

1. Community Development
2. Empowerment
3. Inclusiveness
4. Accountable
5. Integrity
6. Needs Led
7. Sustainable Engagement
8. Strong Partnerships



## Organisation Themes

A key element of the new strategic framework has been the identification of five new 'active' themes. These themes define the type and nature of work that Laois Sports Partnership are engaged in. Each theme is expanded through a strategic aim along with a series of key objectives. Each objective has action areas and key performance indicator/s. These will form the Annual Operational Plans. The 'active' themes are displayed in the chart below with the full strategic plan following. An action plan template for this strategic framework is provided in the form of Annual Operational Plans (Example below).

LSP Name	Strategic Goal	Objective	Action	Staff Lead	Main Funding Partner	Main Delivery Partner	Action Output	Action Category
Laois Sports Partnership CLG								



# Laois Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2022-2026

## Organisation Themes



### Active People

Active People will focus on engaging all inactive people in physical activity and address barriers to sport and physical activity for those who lack the confidence to engage, for those with disabilities and marginalised groups. This will include targeted needs-led provision and creating inclusive sport offerings. The actions for this objective include encouraging clubs to sign up to CARA Disability Charter, developing a Disability Action Plan and increasing activity for women of all ages.

### Active Places

Active Places will address the lack of adequate facilities in the area by ensuring current resources are maximised whilst we work with stakeholders to identify facility gaps and support the development of new inclusive and adaptable facilities for the use of the whole community.

### Active Partnerships

Active Partnerships will address the desire for better engagement with and provision for, schools and enhance collaboration with the local authority and other organisations, including those who advocate for marginalised groups and communities.

### Active Promotion

Active Promotion will address the lack of awareness of people in the community of what is available to them in terms of sport and physical activity and better promote Laois Sports Partnership. This will include a review of PR and Marketing, an enhanced social media presence and taking steps to become the go-to source of information in County Laois for sport and physical activity.

### Active Governance

Active Governance will ensure that the strategic focus and coordination is maintained within Laois Sports Partnership to ensure that as an organisation we are delivering to the highest standards of professionalism, ethics and accountability to all our stakeholders.



## Beneficiaries

The people of Laois would be considered the beneficiaries of Laois Sports Partnership. The Vision and the Mission for Laois LSP is to support all those within Laois to be active, However, within the general population of Laois there are specific groups we may try to target depending on the activities planned and who may benefit most from the message. Below is a list of the specific groups we may try target:

- Social-Economic Disadvantaged
- Educational Disadvantaged
- Disability
- Older Adults
- Ethnic Minorities
- Young People



## #EVERYBODYACTIVEINCOUNTYLAOIS



## Staffing & Volunteers

Laois Sports Partnership employs four full time staff members as well as one part time staff member. Laois LSP also facilitates the placement of Community Employment Scheme Participants, TÚS Participants, Jobs Bridge internships as well as work experience students, All of which assist in the delivery of sporting activities throughout County Laois.

### Full Time Staff

1. Co-ordinator/Manager (Ms. Caroline Myers)
2. Administrator (Mr. Thomas Guilfoyle)
3. Community Sports Development Officer (Ms. Eimear Bryant)
4. Communications Officer (Mr. Ciarán Cafferkey)

### Part Time Staff

1. Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (Ms. Catriona Slattery)

### Contracted Staff

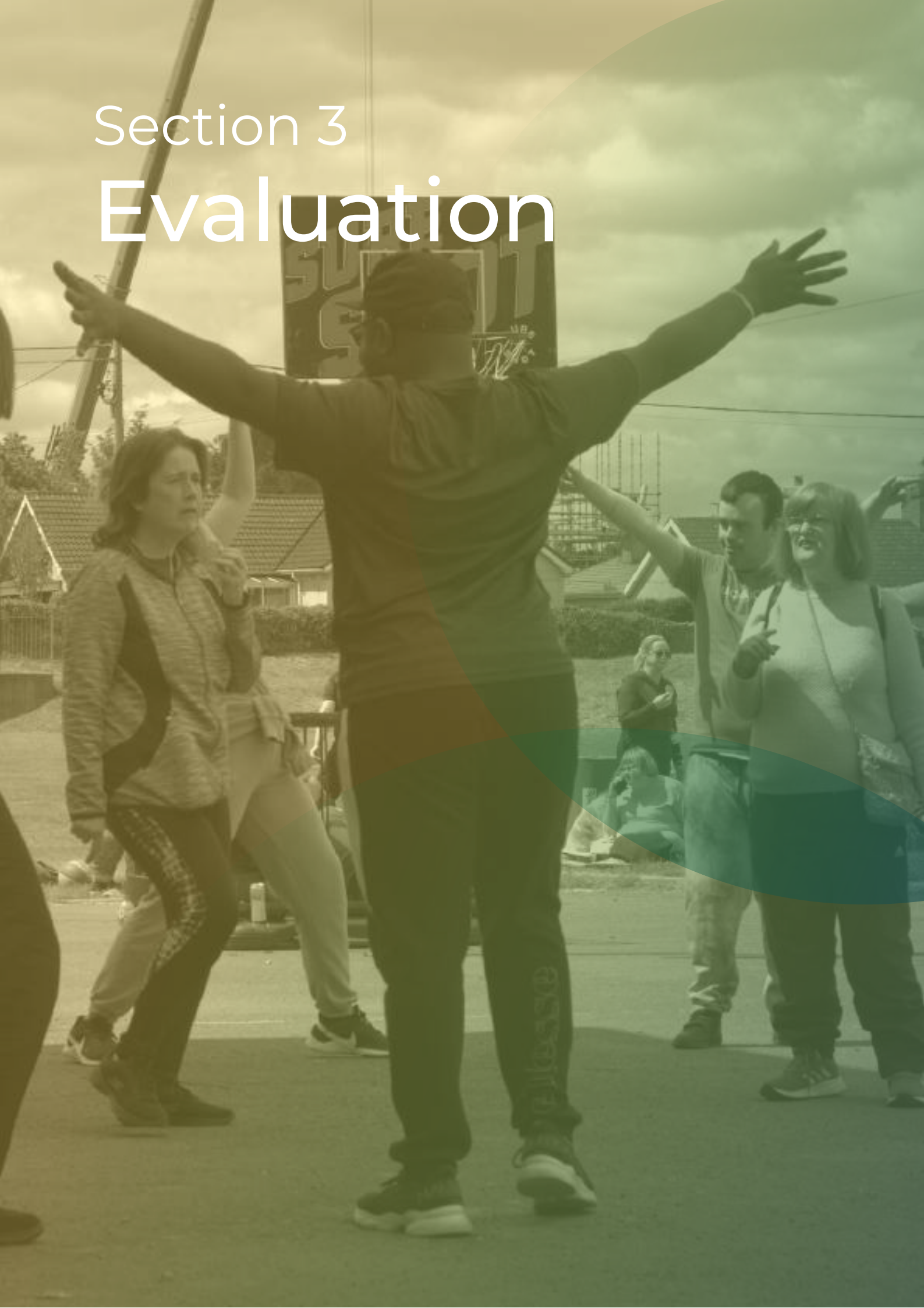
1. Rathdowney Errill (x1)
2. Bloom HQ (x1)



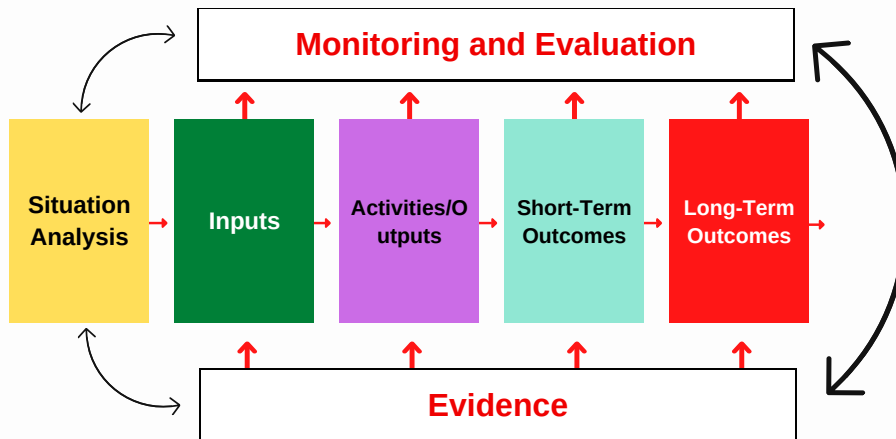


Section 3

# Evaluation



## The Logic Model for Evaluation



Laos Sports Partnership uses the logic model, which is a graphic illustration of the relationship between a program’s resources, activities, and its Intended effects. Logic models clearly and concisely show how interventions affect behaviour and achieve a goal. They can be described as road maps that specify causal pathways and the step-by-step relationship between planned work and intended results. Specifically, a logic model is a visual way to illustrate the resources or inputs required to implement a program, the activities and outputs of a program, and the desired program outcomes (short-term, long-term).

## Annual Operational Plan

2021 Operational Plan											
LSP Name	Strategic Goal	Objective	Action	Staff Lead	Main Funding Partner	Main Delivery Partner	Action Output	Action Category	Behaviour Change Theory-Primary CDM-B Effect of the action (where applicable)		
<b>Operational Planning for activity based actions only</b>											
Quantifying (where applicable)				Target Group (where applicable)							
Target Number of Programmes/Courses /Events	Target Number of Participants	Gender	Age	Ability	Socio-economic disadvantage	Ethnicity					
Reporting for all actions		Reporting for activity based actions									
Cost to LSP (incl. Core Staff Time & Operating Costs)	Level of completion	Name of initiative (breakdown by)	Name of initiative	Type of Sport/Activity	Primary Delivery Mechanisms	No of events/course s/programme s/delivered	Duration of programme/ initiative in weeks	No of sessions in programme / initiative	Duration of each session (hrs)		
Reporting on Reach								Reporting on Evaluation			
No of Adults				No of Youth			PWD			Total No. of participants	
Total	Males	Females	Other	Total	Boys	Girls	Other	Total	Males		Females
										Was the Single Item Measure used to capture PA levels of participants?	

The images above represent the headings in the LSP's Annual Operational Plan. The document is used as a guide for planning, evaluation and reporting of all LSP actions and activities for the year.



# Section 4 Actions in 2022



## Grants

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### Grants Issued

Over €23,000 was awarded to 27 clubs and facilities across Laois at the beginning of May. The total was made up of three separate funds. Sport & Physical Activity Grant Scheme, Women in Sport Grant Scheme and Covid 19 Support, below are the list of clubs who were awarded grants in this round of funding:

- 1.3rd Laois Durrus Scouts
- 2.Abbeyleix Juvenile Soccer Club
- 3.Abbeyleix Tennis Club
- 4.Annanough GAA
- 5.Arthritis Ireland – Laois Branch
- 6.Ballyroan Bluestars Basketball Club
- 7.Camross Camogie Club
- 8.Castletown Community Centre
- 9.Clough Ballacolla Camogie Club
- 10.Clover United FC
- 11.Irish Wheelchair Association – Portlaoise
- 12.Laois Marlins Swimming Club
- 13.Laois Traveller Action Group
- 14.Mountmellick Gymnastics Club
- 15.Mountmellick United
- 16.Mountrath Scout Group
- 17.Naomh Eamann Camogie Club
- 18.Portarlinton Community Games
- 19.Portarlinton GAA
- 20.Portlaoise Association Football Club
- 21.Portlaoise Combat Academy
- 22.Portlaoise Panthers Basketball Club
- 23.St Aengus FC
- 24.St Abbans A.C.
- 25.St. Brigids Camogie Club
- 26.St Lazerians Camogie Club
- 27.The Rock GAA



## Our Activities

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### Operation Transformation

We kicked off the new year with the Nationwide Operation Transformation Walks. For the Operation Transformation Nationwide walk 2022, Laois locals gathered in numbers on a crisp Sunday morning in the beautiful surroundings of Emo Court & Parkland to complete a 5k walk. Others remained involved from a distance and completed walks in Vicarstown. The numbers compared to previous years were slightly lower due to the impact of Covid-19, however there was still a great turn out as many people tried to kick off the new year by being more active.



## Our Activities

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### Late Night Leagues

The FAI Late Night leagues in association with An Garda Síochána, Foróige and Laois Sports partnership have kicked off in three towns across Laois; Portlaoise, Portarlington and Mountmellick. The Late Night Leagues are a nationwide initiative which have proven to be popular and beneficial for many communities. We were able to speak to a member of the FAI, Foróige and An Garda Síochána to get their thoughts of the programme and how it's beneficial. "The objective is to provide an opportunity for teenagers to socialise and play football in a safe environment during peak antisocial hours. We aim to break down barrier between young adults and An Garda Síochána using football as a medium" FAI Community Development Officer, Laois.

"Late night Leagues are a great opportunity for Members of An garda síochána to engage with the local community in a positive way. It is an opportunity for us to break down barriers that may be perceived to exist as it allows us to interact in an environment that is friendly and non confrontational. Due to nature of our job it can be the case that people may see us as enforcers of law alone so these opportunities to show we are more about serving and engaging with our community are very welcome " Garda Fahy, Community Policing Portlaoise.

"Foróige are delighted to be involved in this Late-Night Soccer initiative. It has been of huge benefit to the young people involved in the project by providing opportunities for building friendships, positive recreation and engaging with positive adults in their communities." Foróige member





## Our Activities

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### Bike Week 2022

Bike Week 2022 was held from Saturday 14th May to Sunday the 22nd of May. Throughout County Laois there were 30+ events over the 9-day period dedicated to bikes. Laois Sports Partnership ran a number of bike activities including an inclusive family cycle and two learn to cycle programmes:

1. Inclusive Family Cycle in Vicarstown
2. Cycling with NLN Portlaoise
3. Portlaoise College Learn to Cycle
4. Castletown N.S. Learn to Cycle

On Friday evening of bike week, we joined a group of cyclists for an inclusive family cycle in Vicarstown. We met at the Blueway where we set off for a 10km cycle.

We had a number of accessible bikes in use. In December, we were able to purchase 3 accessible bikes from the Sports Capital Grant 2021 through the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

These bikes are a brilliant new addition, making it possible for people of all abilities to take part in a cycle with family and friends.

We took a break half way through our cycle at the Dilly Dally Coffee Stop for a treat and a coffee before completing our cycle. We had a fantastic time and recommended you take a visit to the Blueway at Vicarstown!





## Our Activities

### Walking Programme

In April, we delivered a 6-week walking programme. Each week over our 6-week programme we explored a different location to experience some of the amazing walking locations we have here in County Laois. We ventured all across over the 6-week period, from Heywood Gardens to Abbeyleix we got a good taste of the variety that Laois has to offer for walkers. Along the way we shared sing songs aswel as celebrating national days such as World Health Day and HELLO Day, speaking about the importance of our health, both physical and mental.

Week 1 of our walking programme in Derrycastle happened to be an accumulation of important dates. The 7th of April is World Health Day, the first National 'HELLO' Day and the birthday of one of our fantastic and long serving tutors Donie Molloy. To celebrate these significant days, we took a walk around the beautiful trails in Derrycastle which exist thanks to the amazing work of Donie and the other volunteers. Along the walk we spoke about the HELLO technique and the importance of reaching out to those around you, highlighting that the smallest of gestures can mean so much to someone who needs it. We joined together to wish Donie a Happy Birthday and at the end of the walk provided all the walkers with a snack pack and some leaflets to recognise World Health Day.



In week 2 of the programme, we visited the beautiful Heywood Gardens followed by a trip to Abbeyleix Bog Walk for week 3 where Garry Luttrell gave participants an insight into the history of the bog.

Glenbarrow was the location for week 6. Walkers used fitsticks to assist them along the rocky trail. To end the day, we sat down for a chat and enjoyed a beautiful scone with teas and coffees.

We thank everyone who got involved over the 6 - week programme



## Our Activities

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### Minister Visit

Minister Frank Feighan, Minister of State for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy visited a number of Healthy Ireland funded initiatives in Laois on Tuesday, 3rd May, to view at first-hand various health partnership programmes and health and wellbeing initiatives being undertaken by Healthy Ireland Laois in the county.

The Minister was welcomed by Mr Donal Brennan, Director of Service, Laois County Council, Cathaoirleach Conor Bergin, M.C.C., Ms Emma O' Connor, Healthy Laois County Co-ordinator and Ms Anne Marie Kirrane, Healthy Laois Manager.

Director of Services, Mr Donal Brennan welcoming the Minister said, "Through our Healthy Laois initiatives and through collaboration with our Partners, together we work with communities and individuals to increase healthy life choices and opportunities across all stages of life".

Catriona Slattery Sports Inclusion Disability Officer, Laois Sports Partnership presented the Minister with details of the new Fit Sticks Trail in Derryounce, near Portarlinton, County Laois. "This newly installed trail is a 2km stretch adjacent to the old bog railway line in Derryounce. This trail is designed for the use of ACTIVATOR™ Poles/ Fit Sticks and is also suitable for wheelchairs. Walking with ACTIVATOR™ Poles Improves stability, reduces impact on hips/knees, develops core strength, improves posture, and promotes better gait pattern.

Through funding from Healthy Ireland Laois, we were able to purchase activator poles and deliver programmes throughout Laois.

Participants include the Men's Shed, Parkinson's Group, Arthritis Group, Woodlands for Health Mental Health Group, Older Adult Groups, Care centres for people with disabilities with intellectual & physical disabilities. Participants found the use of the poles very helpful with posture, gait, and mobility & strength.

During the Pandemic, Poles were distributed to homes across Laois and Activator Poles sessions continued online, via zoom and if participants did not have access to broadband, they were supplied with DVDs, so that they could participate and benefit from the exercises, in the comfort of their own homes"

Following the presentation to the Minister, a demonstration of the ACTIVATOR™ Poles exercises were performed by a group that regularly attends out ACTIVATOR™ Poles sessions.



## Our Activities

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### Couch to 5k

St. Fergal's College, Rathdowney 1st year students recently completed a 6-week couch to 5k running programme. At the end of the 6-week programme, a final 5k run was held at the school.

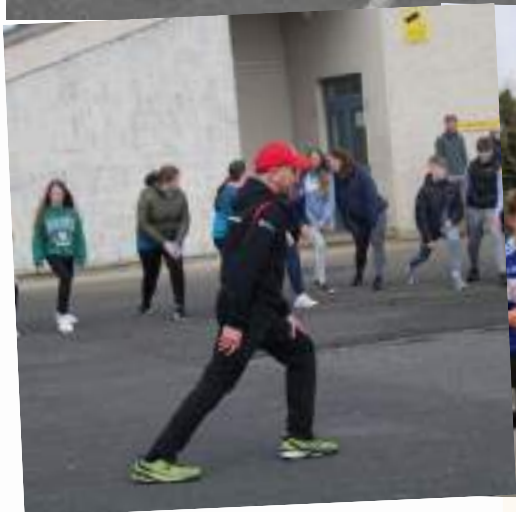
The run was organised by Rathdowney Errill Community Sports Hub Coordinator, Shane Keegan and assisted was by 6th year prefect Ella Hayes.

85 1st year students took part on the final run, with TY students assisting in the running of the event.

The participants began with a warmup which included some light jogging and stretching. The students then commenced the run, with all participants completing the 5k. Sweets and water were provided for all the runners after the run.

All participants were entered into a raffle for a number of One 4 All vouchers, Councillor John King was in attendance on the day and picked the winning names out.

A special thanks to student, Ellen Meaghar who captured some excellent photos of the event





## Our Activities

### Laois Gets Irelands First Fit Sticks Trail

In April, some of our Activator Poles participants joined for a walk along Ireland's first Fit Sticks Trail in Derryounce, Portarlinton. The Derryounce Fit Sticks Trail is funded by Healthy Ireland Laois, administered by LCDC Laois County Council. Fit Stick Trails are designed as a solid flat surface with a low incline making it very appropriate for those with poor balance. Along this particular trail, there are various signposts with exercises for participants to execute including a warmup station at the beginning of the trail.

This trail is a fabulous addition to the county of Laois and benefit so many of the groups we work with and those in the community. The groups that we deal with are Men's Shed, Parkinson's Group, Woodlands for Health Mental Health Group, Older Adult Groups, Care centres for people with disabilities with intellectual & physical disabilities. Participants have found the use of the poles/ fit sticks very helpful with posture, gait and mobility & strength.

Through Healthy Ireland Laois we were able to purchase activator poles from Fit Walk Ireland and deliver programmes throughout Laois. We have seen the benefit of these poles to participants and that is when we approached Frank Fahey about installing an activator trail in Derryounce which is funded by Healthy Ireland Laois.

The social aspect of the classes is as important as the exercise, these are all done at one's own pace, always light-hearted and ending with a sing song.

Since 2020 we have delivered 16 programmes throughout Laois and trained up tutors to deliver these programmes.





## Our Activities

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### Blazing Saddles

We held a learn to cycle camp at the beginning of May in Laois Leisure Portlaoise.

The programme which took place over 3 days aimed to help children learn to cycle in a safe and supportive environment while still giving them the freedom to learn themselves.

A combination of 'balance bikes' and supported cycling were used over the 3 days. Balance bikes are bikes with pedals removed, this allows users to push themselves and experience balancing their bike without the help of stabilisers.

Those who advanced from balance bikes were either capable of cycling on their own, or with the support of one of our tutors. Each child progressed massively over the three days, with some taking to cycling like a duck to water and others coming very close.

The pictures on the final day show clear skies however this wasn't the case all week. We were faced with tough conditions of wind and rain in the first two days. So a special thanks goes to all those who helped over the three days especially, Charlie, Amy, Fionn and Lee along with every child who kept smiling throughout.

The feedback from parents was fantastic and reminds us of why we do the work we do, it's great to see someone benefit from our programmes.

“Even with his autism she had so much patience and got him going and almost there. We will keep practicing with him, we really appreciate the time and encouragement she gave him over the 2 days.”

“Thanks so much to you and your team from LSP for teaching Scott how to cycle. It's a brilliant programme.”

“Thanks very much to you and all the team, Ellie really enjoyed learning how to cycle. This is such a great achievement for her”

“Thank you and your team for your hard work and dedication over the past 3 days. You were all outstanding, and regularly went over and above”

“Thanks so much for the opportunity to set our little man off on his bike, he just needed that environment, to be brave and take off. It's such a wonderful idea and is executed so well. Massive, genuine thanks to all involved.”





## Our Activities

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### Couch to 2k for Primary Schools

The schools couch to 2k programme was an initiative to encourage people to become more active. The programme was for 6 weeks and Schools that participated would incorporate running in their week at their own convenience. The couch to 2k running programme has been a continued success. 17 schools across Laois have taken part in this programme in 2022 to date. The primary schools programme has gained a lot of attention and new schools have continued to sign up and become involved. The aims are to get children more active; this is achieved by encouraging students to run as a group over 6 weeks and on the final week, members of LSP team visit the school to facilitate a final 2k run where the students are presented with certificates of their achievement.

Not only did the students take part, but so did many of the teachers. In fact, one of the schools that took part completed the final run as an entire school. This was amazing to see, every teacher and every student from this particular school took part on the day which is exactly what this programme aimed to encourage.

We hope that this is only the start and that everyone involved can continue to remain regularly active.

The feedback from all involved has been fantastic, and we plan to restart this programme to remaining schools in September.



## Sport Inclusion & Disability

### Disability Bikes

We recently purchase 3 accessible bikes; an accessible tandem, a tricycle and a bike with an assisted motor which allows wheelchair users to be able to join in on a bike ride.

We have had a few people this past month try out the bikes along the Canal in Vicarstown and the feedback has been fantastic. We spoke to one lady who had used the assisted motor bike with her son and both their experience was amazing. "One of the most amazing experiences I have ever shared with Jason. Although I couldn't see his face, I could tell by his happy voice singing along the canal and his relaxed legs he was in his element. Can't wait to go again!"

If you have an queries in relation to these bikes, get in contact with us by phone: 0578671248 or by email: [info@laoissports.ie](mailto:info@laoissports.ie).





## Sport Inclusion & Disability

### Vision Impaired / Blind Football Development Day

Vision Sports Ireland held football development day in Portlaoise AFC in February. Mervue United, Bohemians and Portlaoise AFC are inclusive football clubs for Bind/VI impaired footballers. On the day, representatives from each of the clubs along with members of vision sports Ireland and the FAI Football for All department attended to deliver a number of practices and games for the young footballers. The players participating then sat together and had a well-deserved lunch together after a great session.

The turnout for the session was fantastic and there was a great buzz throughout the entire day.

This is only some of the excellent work being rolled out across the country to allow everyone to access and participate in sport.



## Our Activities

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### Tai Chi Yoga with Portlaoise Men's Shed

Portlaoise Men's Shed recently completed a 6-week Tai Chi Yoga programme. We spoke to Ray Harte, Secretary Portlaoise Men's Shed to get some feedback on the programme. "The programme went very well. It was a new concept that we ran as a pilot to see how it would be received. This was a new form of exercise for the members, but everyone thoroughly enjoyed it. We were delighted to provide a new experience and new approach to exercise rather than your more traditional forms that may include more vigorous movements such as pushing, pulling, and lifting."

The Portlaoise Men's shed currently has between 30-40 members. They are open to including other members of the community in their activities and those participating don't necessarily have to be members.

Ray also added that "sustainability is a huge part of what we do, we want to be able to offer programmes to the members that we can have a continuation of and grow. We have shared videos of the 10 Tai Chi exercises with the lads so they can hopefully continue to exercise at home. We will look to continue the Tai Chi and incorporate it in other programmes, for example we may plan a walk and stop for 10-15 minutes along the way to perform some Tai Chi. What is great is that this was very inviting for all, older adults and those with disabilities were included which was great."

The Men's shed have also participated in other programmes lately which Ray believed contributed to the success of the Tai Chi Programme. "We participated in an activator poles programme recently too. Similar to that of the Tai Chi Programme, using activator poles was a whole new form of exercise for our members. I feel this broke the comfort barrier and helped the lads open up to more new forms of exercise. It's brilliant to have high levels of engagement particularly when we introduce a new concept. Overall, we are absolutely delighted with the success of recent programmes and look forward to the continuation of them", said Ray.









## Our Activities

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### Go for Life fun days (Older Adults Fun Days)

Go for Life fun days (Older Adults Fun Days) began in February 2022. This programme was a real success. It is inclusive for all, regardless of age or disability. The feedback and the general mood every Thursday was so positive and it's great to see so many smiles on people's faces.

The participants experienced a range of different activities each week from dancing to volleyball. The attendance over the past couple of weeks has been fantastic. There is a real high energy in the hall for the 2-hour session.

Generally, the session will begin with some dancing (seated & standing) as a warmup. This is led by two of our tutors, Moez and Susanne who get the sessions off to a great start. The participants love this part of the session, it gets people moving and creates a great atmosphere for everyone.

The participants then move onto some games. Seated volleyball and Scooch have been the most popular amongst the participants. The great thing about both of these games is that there is a good level of competition make it more enjoyable and they are suitable for everyone to participate in.

One of the Older Adults Fun Days occurred during women in sport week, to celebrate this week there were cakes prepared for the participants and a number of TY students came to assist on the day. It was a great sight to have everyone contribute to such a good day, there were men and women, and old and young. This is what we are trying to achieve, everyone active together.





## Women In Sport

### Self-Defence for Women Programme

A Self-Defence programme was delivered by Portlaoise Combat Academy. This programme was aimed at teaching women the necessary skills of self-defence. There were a total 15 participants signed up to the programme. Those who signed up to this programme received two sessions weekly for 6 weeks. The cost of this programme was €30 for a total of 12 classes over 6 weeks.



### Mom and Me Bootcamp

The Mom and Me Bootcamp was set up online for mothers and daughters to participate in an online exercise bootcamp. This was a free to register programme and was delivered online by Seva Strength. The bootcamp took place via zoom on Tuesday evening for 6 weeks with over 34 participants signed up.

### Swimmin' Women Programme

The Swimmin' Women programme was a 6-week programme of aqua aerobics for women who are in their mid-life. The programme is to complete strengthening exercises in the water. 15 participants have come on board for the programme. The programme cost €25 which was excellent value, this equates to less the €5 per session and each participant received a goodie bag containing a swimming hat and women's health pamphlets.

### Kick Fit

The Kick Fit football programme for women returned this spring in 3 locations throughout County Laois. Portlaoise Leisure Centre, Mountmellick United and Killeshin F.C. were the three hosts of the programme. This programme is aimed at bringing women together to participate in physical activity through playing soccer. The benefits of the programme aren't just physical. Those who participate have made great friends and have benefitted socially from their participation. The programme was delivered by the FAI development officer for Co. Laois.



## Case Studies - Activator Poles

### Background

#### ORIGINS OF FIT STICKS IN IRELAND

Fit Walk Ireland introduced Fit Sticks into Ireland 5 years ago after a rise in interest of Nordic Poles from people with balance Issues. The traditional use of Nordic Poles is not very appropriate for people with such issues. Franks Fahey of Fit Walk Ireland found Fit Sticks were found to be much more appropriate.

#### FIT STICKS VS NORDIC POLES

While Fit Sticks and Nordic Poles may appear to be the same, there are many differences.

Nordic walking is in fact a high intensity sport. The poles are intended to be used to propel the user forward by applying force as you walk. When using Nordic Poles, you are also strapped to the poles. Overall, Nordic Poles are not the most suitable for people with poor balance. The main purpose of Activator Poles is to allow support while walking. These were discovered to be a much more suitable option to be used by people with poor balance as the use of activator poles can also enhance stability and reduce the fear of falling

Fit Sticks allow all to take part, there is no limitation on who can benefit from using them. Whether you are an experienced walker or those who have low levels of mobility, there is benefit to be taken from using Fit Sticks.

It all started one day about 4 years ago with a taster session in Laois, a lot of people with different abilities arrived on the day and took part. We very quickly realised the benefits and the different groups throughout Laois were looking for activator poles classes for their groups.

### Primary Target Group

Fit Sticks allow all to take part, there is no limitation on who can benefit from using them. Whether you are an experienced walker or those who have low levels of mobility, there is benefit to be taken from using Fit Sticks.

Using Activator Poles/Fit Sticks, there are many benefits to be achieved. Benefits are not limited to just the obvious physical gains, but Fit Sticks users also experience social and mental health benefits. Fit Sticks main purpose is to provide support for users while walking, however, the uses stretch beyond this. Fit Sticks also allow users to execute a number of exercises using Fit Sticks.

**PHYSICAL BENEFITS:** Improves stability Reduces impact on hips/knees Develops core strength Improves posture,Promotes better gait pattern.





## Case Studies - Activator Poles

### Programme Partners

- Fitwalk Ireland
- Age Friendly Laois
- Arthritis Ireland Laois Branch
- Midlands East Parkinsons Group
- Muiriosa Foundation
- Nua Healthcare
- Derrycastle Lakes & Trails
- Laois PPN
- Laois County Council
- Healthy Ireland Laois
- Rehabcare
- Irish Wheelchair Association
- National Learning Network
- Portarlington Community Development Association



### Programme Objectives

Through Healthy Ireland Laois we were able to purchase activator poles from Fit Walk Ireland and deliver programmes throughout Laois. The groups that we deal with are Men's Shed, Parkinson's Group, Arthritis Group, Woodlands for Health Mental Health Group, Older Adult Groups, Care centres for people with disabilities with intellectual & physical disabilities. Participants found the use of the poles extremely helpful with posture, gait, and mobility & strength. Prior to the second lockdown we trained up Older Adults on zoom so that they could continue their exercise while cocooning. Through the support of Age Friendly Laois, we distributed poles to homes across Laois and continued activator poles online via zoom. If participants did not have access to broadband, we supplied them with DVDs so that they could do the exercises. Along the 2km trail, there are multiple signposts with descriptions of a variety of exercises that can be performed using Fit Sticks. At the beginning of the trail there is a warmup and warm down section and along the trail you will find a number of exercises which target different muscles in the body (Squat, Arm Lift, Calf Lift, Lunge, Arm Up, Knee Up). Throughout the trail, walkers will experience a full body work out with the support of the poles.



## Case Studies - Activator Poles

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### Programme Description

Indoor training involves exercises which incorporate the use of chairs, making it suitable for those with extremely poor balance or those in wheelchairs to participate. Due to the large social element, the participation numbers seem to grow rather than decrease. While there is much to gain in a physical aspect, the social elements are what participants really love. There is always a good atmosphere and fun had during Fit Sticks sessions, which not only brings existing participants back but also attracts new people.

Taster sessions in local halls is how this all starts, then a programme for 4-6 weeks.

Fall Prevention Exercises Using the Activator Poles Assessment: TUB, Berg, Targeting: knee flexion/extension, hip abductors, ankle plantar and dorsi flexion Progression: • Start with sitting exercises • Start with 3 to 5 x. Gradually increase reps & frequency • Use weights and resistance band to upgrade the exercises Tips: • Sit upright • Keep coaching your client to breathe • Use a solid chair or chair against a wall • Guide the other person with the poles (exercise raising their arms, leaning forward, sit to stand)

Sitting Exercises Poles & Legs Apart then Together With your arms apart, place your feet apart, then place your poles together and your feet together.

An ACTIVATOR Session aims to enable the user to achieve some of the above recommendations. The following session format is recommended

1. mobilisers
2. shufflers
3. period of walking (accumulating steps) and stops to incorporate strengtheners
4. stretchers

### Programme Results

NATIONWIDE 60 people trained up as leaders. 18 Local Sports Partnerships trained up.

The ability to participate in Fit Sticks indoors and outdoors allows people of all abilities to take part. One participant said they are now able to do things they did not think they would ever be able to do again. The poles can help people perform movements such as getting up off a chair by themselves, although with support, providing a sense of independence. NATIONWIDE 60 people trained up as leaders. 18 Local Sports Partnerships trained up. There are now sixty people trained across eighteen counties including two individuals with Parkinsons. Initially Laois and Kildare Locals Sports Partnerships received training and there are now 18 LSP's trained up. In Wexford, Wicklow and Cork, there were programmes run specifically for people with Parkinson's. The programme in Wicklow was only meant to be for 6 weeks but then ran for six more, totalling 12 weeks. In Wexford, Ballyfermot, and Tallaght there were programmes run specially for people with C.O.P.D

FIT STICKS IN SANTRY The benefits of using Fit Sticks have reached as far as Santry Clinic in Dublin. Two surgeons who perform hip and knee replacements have recognised the benefits of using Activator Poles/ Fit Sticks. They do not just recommend that their patients use Fit Sticks as part of their recovery, but they provide their patients with a set of Activator Poles accompanied with a set of exercises for them to perform.



## Case Studies - Activator Poles

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### Number of Participants

We have purchased forty sets of Activator Poles, held a training course with twelve people and delivered sixteen programmes which engaged with 410 participants

Since the Fitsticks trail was installed, the trail is used regularly with groups going out themselves to use the trail, this is somewhere in the region of two hundred since June.

### Programme Challenges

The set of poles costs approximately €60 per pair. Some people do not want to be walking with poles, they tell us they do not need two poles they only need one, they are afraid of what their neighbours will say if they see them walking with poles.

### Sustainability

Through Age & Opportunity many groups have used a grant to buy activator poles that they can use on the trail or within their own group in an indoor setting.

We are hoping to get a local community centre to be a hub for the activator poles so that people can hire out poles, use the trail, and return them.

We have used volunteers from our local Woodlands for Health Walking Group with Mental Health Ireland

### Participant Quotes

"Being a sufferer from Parkinsons I have problems with gait, and muscle stiffness. I found the use of the poles very helpful and improved my posture and gait. Thanks to Catriona Slattery and the girls in LSP we had group walks guided by Donie Molloy around Derrycastle Lakes and Emo Court. This was particularly welcome as we could meet which was socially very beneficial." Participant with Parkinson's

"The exercises are great, you perform movements you would not usually perform, especially lifting your arms."

"We have seen great benefit from the use of Fit Sticks on our walks. One individual struggled to walk when he first starting using Fit Sticks but is now capable of jogging lightly"

### ALONG THE TRAIL

Along the trail there are a number of nature/ wildlife features and exercise stations for Fit Stick users to perform including a warmup/ warm down station at the beginning/ end of the trail. Exercise stations found on the trail are:

Warm Up / Warm Down, Squat, Arm Up, Calf Lift, Lunge, Arm Lift & Knee Up

With further funding we would love to get another trail installed in Derrycastle Lakes and trails.

## Case Studies - Couch to 50k Cycle

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### Background

The programme originated as we were exciting the pandemic where people began to address their mental and physical health. Laois Cycling Club saw this as an opportunity to attract more members to the club as it offered benefit to those looking to address both of the above.

Working with Laois Cycling Club a framework was developed for people to build their physical fitness in a social way.

Laois Sports Partnership were approached by members of Laois Cycling club which began the process.

### Primary Target Group

Beginner/ less experienced male and female cyclist.

### Programme Partners

Laois Cycling Club  
Race Right Cycles  
Portlaoise Turbo



### Programme Objectives

1. Attract more members to the club, particularly more females
2. Assist those looking to improve Physical and Mental Health
3. Introduce a new cycling group for less experienced cyclists to join Laois Cycling Club

### Programme Description

The Couch to 50km Cycle programme was a brilliant success. Over the 8 weeks, the participants built up their cycling distance from 10km to 50km on the final ride.

Over the past 8 weeks, cyclists met every Wednesday. The turn out and success rate was great, over 30 people started the programme with the majority of the participants completing the entire programme.

### Programme Results

The participants of the programme started at a distance of 10km in week 1 and eventually completed a total of 250km over an 8-week period. The programme played a different role for each participant, some took part to improve fitness, to meet new people or to escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Physical and mental health both benefited from the couch to 50km.

The couch to 50km saw an increase in female cyclists, with roughly a 50/50 split of males to females on the programme.



## Case Studies - Couch to 50k Cycle

### Programme Challenges

Challenges faced during this programme:

- Covid-19 (Riders missing due to isolation).
- Weather (Weather permitting but thankfully only 1 week was postponed).
- General life (Riders unable to make some nights due to work, family and other commitments).

### Sustainability

Laois Cycling Club intended to facilitate a third cycling group. This 'C' group aimed to attract less experienced cyclists along with those who are looking to ease back into things. The 'C' group covers shorter distances in the beginning and ride at a slower pace in the beginning. This group was specifically targeting graduates of the Couch to 50km Cycle to continue their journey and progress.

### Programme Cost

Delivery & Tutor Costs/ Merchandise for participants: €700

Newspaper Article & Photography: €264

Merchandise: €100

Total: €1064

Estimated Contribution from Partners:

Volunteers throughout programme: 3/4 Tutors each week estimated cost of €2,700

Refreshments on the day of the event: Tea/Coffee, buns, ice-cream estimated cost of €500

Potential Money to be Paid to club:

30 potential members to club with estimated cost of €1500 - €3000



## Case Studies - Couch to 50k Cycle

### Quotes From Participants

“This initiative has been brilliant; it was a delight to be apart of and today you can see the success of the programme. Particularly the number of women participants. The support of the other members was fantastic; particularly Mick Mc Dermott who is so generous and encouraging. I am sure there will be more members following this programme”

“I started the couch to 50km programme because I had long Covid last year. I wanted to get myself back to my previous levels of fitness if not better. I found the couch to 50km brilliant, the club were fantastic with me. They were full of info and tips. The help was always there, and I will definitely be joining the club. From start to end, everything was brilliant.”

“I found the couch to 50km great. I had previously done a little bit of cycling before but 50km seemed really out of reach for me. Now today I have crossed the finish line and am able to have a laugh and a chat with the other participants. I am new to the area, and I found it a great way to meet new people. I was surprised to see so many women involved as typically it is a male dominated sport but in fact there were more women here than men. The programme was a great excuse to get out, the commitment of the group helps push on when you don't feel like going. I will definitely be joining the group.”

### Next Steps

Following the couch to 50km, the aim for Laois Cycling Club was to include another cycling group. They previously had an 'A' and a 'B' group. They intended to add a 'C' group to attract less experienced cyclists along with those who are looking to ease back into things. The 'C' group covers shorter distances in the beginning and ride at a slower pace in the beginning. This group was specifically targeting graduates of the Couch to 50km Cycle.





## Our New Strategy

On Thursday 24th March 2022, Laois Sports Partnership Launched it's 5th Strategic Plan The Launch was Held in Bloom HQ, Mountrath. This plan will be delivered over the next four years, from 2022 - 2026.

Our plan has been developed around 5 thematic themes; Active People, Active Places, Active Partnerships, Active Promotion, Active Governance which these have been identified and refined to address challenge, barriers and gaps in existing provision which are aligned to other policy documents such as the National Sports Plan, Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy, National Physical Activity Plan, Sport Ireland Participation Plan, Healthy Ireland Framework for improved health and wellbeing, Laois County Council Development Plan and Laois County Council Local Economic and Community Plan.

As part of the launch, we also held an activities showcase in Bloom HQ to demonstrate some of the activities and programmes the LSP delivers. We invited a number of the groups we regularly engage with along, including Older Adults, Disability groups and a local primary school. It provided a real sense of community, with out staff, board, tutors, volunteers and participants of out programmes together at once to launch our new strategy for the next 4 years.



We were honoured to be joined by special guests Dr. Una May (CEO Sport Ireland), Gary O' Reilly (Irish Paralympian) and Bernie Turner (In place of daughter, Nicole Turner, Irish Paralympian. Dr. Una May presented Gary O' Reilly and Nicole Turner (Represented by her mother, Bernie) paintings on behalf of the Laois LSP Team as an acknowledgement of their medal winning performances at the 2021 Paralympics in Tokyo.



## Innovation Project - Wellness UnLaoised

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### Wellness UnLAOISed

Wellness UnLAOISed is a FREE 12-week online physical activity and health education programme designed and delivered by True Fitness in partnership with Laois Sports Partnership and funded by Sport Ireland through the Sport Ireland Innovation Fund. Wellness is the act of practicing healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better physical and mental health outcomes.

The first 'Wellness UnLAOISed' class started on the 3rd of May. Participants began with a short exercise education workshop with Dr Diane Cooper followed by 45 minutes of multimodal exercise. Participants learned that it's important to be aware of exercise intensity during the exercise classes and explained the RPE (Rate of Perceived Exertion) scale. This is a simple tool that can help people monitor exercise intensity.

Other engagements with participants included the delivery of multiple workshops. A nutrition and health workshop delivered by nutritionist Ruth from True Fitness as part of the Wellness UnLAOISed programme. During the workshop, Ruth explained what 'balanced meals' are and by the end of the workshop 100% of participants could correctly identify nutritionally balanced meals.

Dr Diane Cooper delivered a workshop titled 'Resistance Training & Functional Healthy Ageing' to Wellness UnLAOISed participants. After the age of 30 we can lose 1-2kgs of muscle per decade. If we are inactive, we lose more muscle more quickly, this impacts our physical health, mental health and quality of life.

Diane asked 'Wellness UnLAOISed' participants if they prefer on-site or online exercise classes who attended our on-site exercise class in Portarlinton. Participants said that they like on-site classes but that they would be unable to attend all onsite classes. Participants like online classes as they are convenient and time efficient.

Overall participants prefer a blended approach.





## Communications

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### FIS Sport Industry Awards 2022 Finalists



Laois Sports Partnership were nominated as a finalist in the Local Sports Partnership of the year for this years Irish Sport Industry Awards.

The winners of the 2022 Irish Sport Industry Awards, hosted by the Federation of Irish Sport in association with Clubforce, were announced at an awards ceremony at Dublin's Westin Hotel on Tuesday, 17th May. Minister Jack Chambers TD, Minister for State for Sport and the Gaeltacht delivered the keynote address to an audience of representatives from across the sports sector.

The 10 award categories recognise the value that sport adds to the Irish economy from the sports industry perspective, in addition to celebrating the ongoing work done by national governing bodies and local sports partnerships to promote sport and physical activity nationwide. The Sport industry in Ireland supports 64,000 jobs and stimulates €3.3 billion in household spending.

Congratulations to Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership who were eventual winners of the LSP of the year award. Laois Sports Partnership were honoured to be nominated as finalists amongst such strong contenders for the award.

## Communications

### Working with our Partners

We created an infographic to display the work carried out through the pandemic with Healthy Ireland funding.



### S'porting Wellbeing

A new version of our S'porting Wellbeing brochure is now available. This brochure was designed to give the people some ideas and inspiration towards living a healthier lifestyle. With reading you will find some exercise tips, eating tips, the benefits of being active and some challenges for you to take on yourself.

This brochure is available in English and Ukrainian versions on our social medias and our website [www.laoissports.ie](http://www.laoissports.ie)





# Communications

## Publications

The use of Fit Sticks have become increasingly popular in recent times and developments have followed up to support existing Fit Sticks users and to entice more to become involved.

We created a short publication based on the experiences of Laois Fit Sticks users along with the details of Fit Sticks and future plans for the trail in Derrycastle. This can be viewed on our social media/ website.



### FIT STICKS TRAILS

Ireland's first Fit Sticks Trail was recently opened for use in Derrycastle, Monaghan County Laois. The trail was created by Fit Walk Ireland through funding from Healthy Ireland Ltd. The addition comes from a positive response and growth in the use of Fit Sticks, which are commonly known as Activator Poles.



#### FIT WALK IRELAND

Fit Walk Ireland Director, Frank Fahy has been involved in the promotion of fitness walking in Ireland for over 20 years, leading in the field of Physical Recreation and Active Living. A large portion of their work is through Local Sports Partnerships as they see there is large potential and benefit from support of existing structures.

#### ORIGINS OF FIT STICKS IN IRELAND

Fit Walk Ireland introduced Fit Sticks into Ireland 5 years ago after a rise in interest of Nordic Poles from people with balance issues. The traditional use of Nordic Poles is actually not very appropriate for people with such issues, Frank Fahy of Fit Walk Ireland found Fit Sticks were found to be much more appropriate.

#### FIT STICKS VS NORDIC POLES

While Fit Sticks and Nordic Poles may appear to be the same, there are many differences.

##### NORDIC POLES

Nordic walking is in fact a high intensity sport. The poles are intended to be used to propel the user forward by applying force as you walk. When using Nordic Poles you are also strapped to the poles. Overall, Nordic Poles are not the most suitable for people with poor balance.

##### FIT STICKS/ ACTIVATOR POLES

The main purpose of Activator Poles is to allow support while walking. These were discovered to be a much more suitable option to be used by people with poor balance as the use of activator poles can also enhance stability and reduce the fear of falling.

## FIT STICKS TRAILS

#### FIT STICKS IMPACT

Due to the large social element, the participation numbers seem to grow rather than decrease. While there is much to gain in a physical aspect, the social elements are what participants really love. There is always a good atmosphere and fun had during Fit Sticks sessions, which not only brings existing participants back but also attracts new people.

#### TRAINING

There are 2 forms of training for leaders to choose from:

1. Outdoor Training
2. Indoor Training

Indoor training involves exercises which incorporate the use of chairs, making it suitable for those with very poor balance or those in wheelchairs to participate.

#### NATIONWIDE



60 people trained up as leaders.



18 Local Sports Partnerships trained up.

The ability to participate in Fit Sticks indoors and outdoors allows people of all abilities to take part. One participant said they are now able to do things they didn't think they would ever be able to do again. The poles can help people perform improvements such as getting up off a chair by themselves, although with support, providing a sense of independence.

There are now 60 people trained across 18 counties including 2 individuals with Parkinson's. Initially Laois and Kildare Local Sports Partnerships received training and there are now 18 LSP's trained up.

In Wexford, Wicklow and Cork, there were programmes run specifically for people with Parkinson's. The programme in Wicklow was only meant to be for 6 weeks but then ran for 8 more, totalling 12 weeks.

In Wexford, Ballyfermot and Tallaght, there were programmes run specially for people with COPD.



# Communications

## Diversity and Inclusion in Sport

At the beginning of June Sport Ireland launched its first Diversity and Inclusion Policy in Sport which expresses its vision for a sport sector that celebrates diversity, promotes inclusion, and is pro-active in providing opportunities for lifelong participation for everyone. This was a fitting time to launch this new policy as June is pride month.

To show our support to the LGBTQ community we joined other LSP's and sporting organisations by displaying messages across our social media along with adopting rainbow colours in our posts and creating a rainbow themed logo.





# Training

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## Safeguarding Training

10 Safeguarding courses were delivered on line this year with 115 people participating.

Safeguarding 1: 8 Courses  
Safeguarding 2: 1 Course  
Safeguarding 3: 1 Course



SPORT  
IRELAND  
ETHICS

Safeguard training educates participants on the implementation of best practice in protecting the welfare of children involved in sport.

Certified by Sport Ireland, this course is recommended for coaches, parents and volunteers involved with young people in sport.

## Cara Training Courses

44 participants engaged in Cara Disability Inclusion and Autism Awareness workshops this spring. These are 2 fantastic courses and we recommend anyone involved in sport to take part in.



### *Disability Inclusion Training*

This course is a 2.5 hour introductory level workshop, designed to give participants ideas and inspiration to adapt their sport and physical activity sessions, to make them more accessible and inclusive for children and adults with a disability.

On completion of the course, participants received a Cara APA Centre certificate of attendance, endorsed by Sport Ireland.

### *Autism Awareness*

This workshop provides attendees with an understanding of Autism focussing on the delivery of sport.

It will help participants to recognise and understand key areas of difference as well as looking at practical strategies which will help to include people with autism in sport sessions.

This course was delivered online via the Zoom platform.

# Laois Sports Partnership Mid Year Report 2022



LAOIS SPORTS PARTNERSHIP  
COMHAR SPÓIRT NA LAOISE

— SPORT IRELAND —



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