



# Community Fit: Harrogate End of project report

September 2023



North  
Yorkshire  
Sport.

**H&DCA**  
Harrogate and District  
Community Action

# Executive summary

## David Watson, Chief Executive at North Yorkshire Sport

“Having been born out of a desire to bring together the promotion of physical activity and volunteering and a joint aim to support people and reduce inequalities, Community Fit has been a fantastic partnership between North Yorkshire Sport (NYS), Harrogate & District Community Action (HADCA) and Community First Yorkshire (CFY). As the sports charity for York and North Yorkshire, NYS uses movement, activity and sport as drivers for positive change, supporting people to fulfil their potential and to live as healthy and happy a life as possible.

“Community Fit has provided a platform to support people to be both physically active and engaged within their community as well as offering well-needed support to local groups and organisations who have benefited from volunteer input. It has been locally led and funded through Harrogate District Public Services Leadership Board (PSLB) and West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnerships (WYHCP) Harnessing the Power of Communities (HPoC) meaning it has been shaped and informed by the very people it set out to support.

“You’ll see from this Impact Report that having engaged 50 volunteer runners and carried out over 260 projects, Community Fit has made a difference in people’s lives on several fronts, from improved physical and mental health to greater community engagement and pride in place.”

# Executive summary

## Karen Weaver, Strategic Lead (Community Action) at HADCA

“It’s five years since a small group met in a local bar to explore how we could bring to life the concept of combining getting fit with doing good in Harrogate. It’s an understatement to say a lot has happened since then, but Community Fit is proof that “where there’s a will there’s a way” and if Plan A doesn’t work out then try Plan B and even Plan C!

“It’s important to acknowledge the enthusiastic early support from Richard Webb, Jenny Godfrey and Robin Lavin. Also, from Alex Kenmure of GoodGym, as although we ended up with an amicably home-grown solution it was GoodGym that provided the initial inspiration and Alex encouraged us to keep going with our efforts. Ann Duncan gained speedy support from the Harrogate District Public Services Leadership Board (PSLB) (hosted by Harrogate Borough Council) and Mark Hopley and Angela Portz from Community First Yorkshire (CFY) helped us to secure the NHS funding which meant we could eventually get started. This support came via the Harnessing the Power of Communities (HPoC) programme managed by the WYHCP.

“Putting a partnership project into practice is the real test of collaboration and it’s been fantastic to see how much progress has been made since Community Fit was launched in April 2022. The funding enabled both partners to appoint part-time staff to deliver the activity on the ground (literally, in some cases) and our dedicated Community Fit Activator (Maha) and Task Co-ordinator (Anna) have both worked incredibly hard to recruit members, find suitable tasks and partners, and carry out the myriad of activities needed for our concept to be turned into an inspiring reality. Behind the scenes the main partners have met regularly to problem solve, agree procedures, ensure safe working and celebrate successes. Our next challenge is to bring in further investment and support so we can continue to build this vibrant community of local people who meet to be social and active while giving time to Harrogate’s people and spaces.”

# What is Community Fit?

Community Fit is a local activity group based in Harrogate. Our aim is to create a community of local people who meet to be social and active while giving time to Harrogate's people and spaces.

We connect activity and community through regular group sessions during which people will run, walk or cycle together from one of our bases to a community group or charity where we help before heading back to base. Helping can be anything from sorting donations to moving furniture, painting, tree planting or litter picking. Community Fit filled a unique gap by combining fitness with community involvement.

## Group Runs: Helping out in the community

During phase one, our Here to Help Group Runs gathered individuals together on a weekly basis to contribute their time and efforts to local organisations. These runs offer an opportunity for volunteering without requiring a significant long-term commitment.

By joining forces in a group setting, participants can collectively make a substantial impact while only contributing a small portion of their time. Beyond the positive impact on the community, Group Runs foster meaningful connections among people, promoting social cohesion and a sense of unity among participants.



# What is Community Fit?

## Community Tasks: Supporting individuals in their homes

Phase two of the project has begun, and test visits have been made to individuals. The initial goal of this phase is to address the unmet needs of older individuals and vulnerable populations in the Harrogate District through Community Tasks. The Harrogate District has a substantial population of elderly residents, resulting in significant demand for support services.

The community faced prevalent issues such as loneliness, falls, and lower life satisfaction. This demand for assistance has been clear in the high number of requests for tasks like gardening and decorating, as highlighted by HADCA's Harrogate Easier Living Project (HELP).



## Delivering in partnership

NYS has served as the lead partner and fund holder for the programme. Its goal is to increase sports participation, reduce inactivity, and address barriers to physical activity. HADCA, has been the core delivery partner in the initial phase, managing the tasks and engaging new partners to support.

Establishing connections with voluntary and health sector stakeholders has been crucial for programme success. These partnerships helped identify beneficiaries and create volunteering opportunities to support programme objectives.



# Our project in numbers

## Phase one – Group Runs:



## Phase two – Task Runs:

\*All statistics correct as of 30 September 2023

# Combining fitness with community involvement

Community Fit has been an 18-month pilot programme in the Harrogate District that combines fitness activities with social impact, benefiting volunteers and community organisations. It has consisted of two phases, with a proposed third:

**Group Runs:** Following a soft launch in May 2022, weekly sessions officially began in June 2022. Volunteers (FitStars) have been engaged in fitness activities and have contributed to community projects like litter picking and maintaining public spaces. They run from Harrogate to local FitPartner locations.

**Task Runs:** The pilot of this phase began in May 2023, with the official launch in September 2023. Partnering with existing services, volunteers (TaskStars) have helped to clear task backlogs and promote independent living for individuals with health or age-related limitations.

**Friendship Runs (future phase):** FitStars will incorporate running, walking, or cycling into visits with older people, fostering friendships, combating loneliness, and identifying beneficiaries in collaboration with partner organisations offering befriending services.

Harrogate District PSLB and WYHCP HPoC provided £49,000 in funding, which was allocated to staff appointments (Community Fit Activator and Community Fit Task Co-ordinator), volunteer training, evaluation monitoring and marketing and communications. The project aims to expand its volunteer base through recruitment and training efforts, enabling them to extend assistance to a greater number of individuals and undertake a wider range of impactful activities.



## Building the community

“Building the community lies at the heart of our endeavours, and we have taken diverse approaches to foster a sense of togetherness and support among our members. Organising social events has allowed us to connect on a more personal level, strengthening friendships and promoting community cohesion. Additionally, our commitment to fundraisers for other groups has demonstrated our solidarity with various causes, further knitting us into the fabric of the larger community.

“The introduction of social runs to parkrun and similar activities have not only encouraged physical activity but also served as a source of motivation for many, knowing they will be meeting up with like-minded individuals who provide unwavering support. Our collective efforts have not only tackled loneliness but also cultivated a shared sense of purpose, leaving a lasting and positive impact on the lives of all involved.”

Anna Glazier, HADCA, and Maha El Nasser, NYS



# Our objectives

Our comprehensive objectives extend to **promoting both physical and emotional wellbeing** among our Community FitStar volunteers. We aim to motivate individuals to engage in regular physical activity, encouraging them to **move more and for longer**, so enhancing their overall physical wellbeing. Simultaneously, our project aims to **nurture emotional wellbeing**, fostering a sense of self-improvement and contentment among participants, and making them feel better about themselves.

Working hand in hand with the community lies at the core of this project. Through our collective efforts, we foster meaningful relationships among members, providing opportunities to help and support one another, and making a positive difference to both individuals and organisations within the community (or FitPartners). By being actively engaged in community initiatives, our volunteers experience a sense of fulfilment and purpose, empowering them to contribute to the wellbeing of others.

Together, we forge a path towards a healthier, happier, and more connected community. Our efforts encompass the physical, emotional, and social aspects of wellbeing, cultivating an environment where everyone feels empowered to lead a fulfilling and active life. Through our commitment to community building and holistic wellbeing, we see a brighter future for all our Community FitStars, one where lasting positive change ripples throughout the community.



# How we've made a difference

This report focuses on the Group Run phase that has been delivered as part of this project. Here's a selection of feedback from our FitStars and FitPartners:

## What our FitStars have to say...



*“Community Fit sounded ideal as I recently moved to Harrogate and have started doing park runs and volunteering. The group combines sensible pace short runs with completing tasks in the community. I have benefited from being outdoors, slow running, meeting lovely people, feeling like a community crusader and feeling ‘at home’ in the town.” – Janet*

*“I am 64 and this is great for keeping me moving. I originally came for the volunteering, but the physical aspect is really good for me. I wasn't a runner before!” – Anon*

*“I never want to come but as soon as I put on this orange T-shirt I'm there and I'm so glad that I am! I have run further tonight without stopping than I did last time, and I feel much better.” – Anon*



## What our FitPartners have to say...

*“Thank you to the Community Fit Team for helping Saltergate Schools! As well as being a lovely group of people, your energy and enthusiasm for completing tasks was first class! You have helped to improve our school environment which will benefit everyone at Saltergate.”* – **Linda at Saltergate Schools**

*“I can’t tell you just how grateful and impressed I am by your organisation. Your wonderful team arrived, I showed them the jobs that needed doing gave them the tools and left them to it. In no time at all they completely transformed our outside area. We would highly recommend people reaching out to the Community Fit team for support.”* – **Vic at Oatlands Community Centre**

# Coverage on social media and in the press

We received feedback and coverage on social media and in the local press, including Harrogate Life Magazine and the Harrogate Advertiser.

New Harrogate activity group launches next week with focus on being accessible

A new highly accessible activity group launching in Harrogate next week is looking for new members to join them.

By Graham Chalmers

Published 09th Jun 2022, 16:24 BST | 2 min read  
Updated 09th Jun 2022, 16:27 BST



Harrogate Advertiser



Great to have the Harrogate Community Fit team via @HADCAcharity with us again tonight.

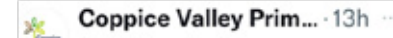
Lots of balsam being sorted!



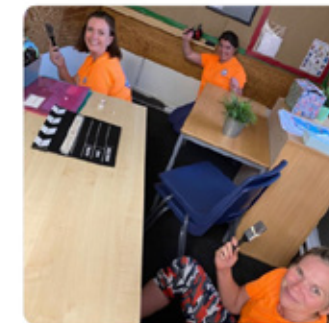
We ❤️❤️❤️ @communityfit1 so much! They came in last night to help us tidy up our donated mobility equipment, freeing space for @ResurrectedBite and making an amazing showroom for us - all in an hour! We would so recommend contacting them if you have a community project.



Huge thanks to our friends at Community Fit - Harrogate for their help transforming one of our project spaces before the new term begins. What superstars!



Huge thanks to @communityfit1 @wearecommunityfit for painting classrooms tonight in school. What a team!



# Case studies

## Anna Glazier – Community Fit Task Co-ordinator at Harrogate & District Community Action (HADCA)

“As a passionate runner and volunteering advocate, I eagerly joined the Community Fit project as Task Co-ordinator, connecting local charities and individuals, and working alongside the Harrogate Easier Living Project.

“Recognising the positive impact of physical activity on mental wellbeing, I have assisted with the recruitment of members and over 20 partner organisations. The Wednesday night helping out sessions have been my highlight, getting to see the community grow and friendships flourish. We have created a secure and friendly environment that promotes accomplishment and wellbeing as members embrace new challenges, from gardening to pulling pints!

“Feedback from the organisations we’ve helped has been 100% positive and we’ve been asked back to help by many of them. The project’s versatility has attracted those wanting flexibility and varied volunteering experiences.

“Attending the Wednesday evening sessions reminds me of the project’s significance and positive impact on people’s lives.

“For those interested in Community Fit, I encourage you to sign up. We prioritise your wellbeing, with no pressure to run fast or have special skills. Whether you join weekly or monthly, we guarantee a fun experience and a warm welcome.”



# Case studies

## James Mclachlan – decorator and FitStar

“I became a FitStar to kickstart my exercise routine. I attended the first session last year and had a fantastic experience.

“The evening sessions fitted around my work, meaning I now have 17 sessions under my belt. The projects I’ve been involved with are varied, from helping primary schools with outdoor tasks to organising spaces in cafes and tackling small jobs that the staff couldn’t manage. Our efforts left a positive impact, making the areas look nicer and getting praise from passers-by.

“One of my most memorable experiences was working behind the bar at a beer festival in Harrogate. The group dynamic was fantastic, and everyone was really relaxed. It’s great to volunteer with a like-minded community of people from a mixture of backgrounds.

“I highly recommend others to join Community Fit. It offers a social aspect, the opportunity to be outdoors, and the satisfaction of feeling better about yourself. There’s also flexibility in choosing the level of physical activity that suits you best. I plan to continue participating in the project for the foreseeable future.”

# Case studies

## Catherine Baxter – Woodlands Community Garden and FitPartner

“The involvement of the Community Fit volunteers has transformed our community garden. With their support, we were able to complete the pond, a crucial aspect of our project, in a fraction of the time.

“What impressed me the most was their willingness to go above and beyond. They even organised a special Saturday session to finish the pond. They were very easy to work and communicate with, and they seamlessly integrated into our project.

Through their social media presence on Facebook, they helped raise awareness of our garden, attracting more people to enjoy this communal space.

“Our collaboration with the project has been a true highlight, providing the momentum and expertise needed to make our garden thrive. We are grateful for their support and the positive impact they have had on our community.”





# Case studies

## Liz Cluderay – UK Director at Artizan International and FitPartner

“Our partnership with Community Fit began when Anna from HADCA invited us to join their pilot project. We eagerly accepted, as the project aligned with our charitable objective of promoting attitudinal change.

“The Community Fit volunteers have helped us with various tasks like painting, organising, crafting, and mosaic cutting for school projects, benefiting us and the local community.

“Through this collaboration, we’ve gained new volunteers, including men, who may not typically volunteer. It’s also helped raise awareness about inclusivity for people with disabilities in the community. Community Fit’s social media posts have been extremely helpful in highlighting our visitors’ achievements and engaging a diverse audience we may not have otherwise connected with.

“The partnership has also created opportunities for us to take part in events such as the local Christmas market, expanding our impact. Although hosting Community Fit sessions in the evening needs a logistical commitment, the experience has been wonderful and has opened doors to new opportunities for us.”



# Case studies

## Andy Lamb - grounds committee member at Harrogate Cricket Club and FitPartner

“When I came across the Community Fit project on social media, I was immediately drawn to their offer of genuine help and connection. I knew we could lend a helping hand.

“We welcomed these strangers into our cricket club with open arms back in February. I’ll never forget the magical scene that night, as they ran towards us with lights gleaming in the pitch-black darkness. It was amazing and everyone was so friendly and willing to help.

“But it wasn’t just about completing tasks such as sanding doors and painting; it was about building a community where everyone mattered. Their dedication to volunteering has inspired our own members, young and old, to pitch in and make a difference.

“Their enthusiasm has become contagious, and I hope their amazing project continues to grow, spreading far beyond Harrogate.”

# Harrogate Cricket Club



# Case studies

## Janet Ross – FitStar turned FitLeader

“A year ago, I moved to Harrogate looking for new experiences and to meet new people in my retirement. I met Anna, a run leader at Community Fit, while outdoor swimming, who encouraged me to join the project. From litter picking to pond digging, we stay active while making a difference and, through this group, I’ve found new friends, making Harrogate feel like home.

“But it doesn’t end there. After we helped out at Artizan International UK, I also became a volunteer for them too. That led me all the way to Peru on a project working towards opening a coffee shop, an incredible life-changing experience.

“Community Fit has created lots of opportunities I would never have considered before. I was asked by Maha to become a run leader for the project and took an England Athletics course. I now also volunteer as a driver for the Harrogate Easier Living Project. Each moment spent with these communities is very satisfying, and their gratitude towards what we do warms my heart.

“To anyone considering joining Community Fit, do it! It’s a fun, inclusive experience for all ages, and you don’t need to be a pro runner. The friends you make and the impact you have will change your life.”



# Lessons learned

Working in a partnership has been a vital factor in the success of the pilot. By bringing together different areas of expertise, such as HADCA's strong community links and understanding of the volunteer landscape, and NYS's expertise in community building and movement elements, we were able to develop and advance the pilot effectively. NYS's contribution in creating the Run Leader training and understanding the requirements for safe physical activities and motivating participants has been invaluable. This collaboration has allowed us to present a comprehensive and compelling vision to the community and potential funders.

With Anna Glazier's appointment at HADCA she brought strong connections within Harrogate and the local running community, this proved to be crucial in initiating relationships and kick-starting the projects. Her involvement surpassed our expectations. While the project would have gone ahead without Anna's involvement, it may have taken a different shape. Looking ahead, it will

be essential to involve individuals with similar links and active involvement in the local community, especially if we plan to replicate the project in other communities.

We have learned that different tasks serve as varying motivations for people to participate, and it is essential to strike a balance between addressing community needs and catering to individual drivers.

While the pilot has achieved significant milestones, we underestimated the time and resources required for the start-up phase, given the limited hours available. Managing expectations and potentially front-loading efforts during the initial phase could prove beneficial in the future. Although we did not accomplish all project objectives, the experience gained has provided valuable insights for approaching future endeavours, and the groundwork laid serves as a solid foundation for future growth.

One delightful surprise was how swiftly members formed a closely-knit community, transitioning from individual attendees to a supportive and engaged group. The speed with which they took ownership and demonstrated interest in each other's wellbeing and the desire to contribute, undergo training as run leaders, and be part of the next steps exceeded our expectations. This sense of camaraderie and ownership bodes well for the project's future development.

# Lessons learned

## Looking to the future

In envisioning the future for Phase 3, our plans are contingent on securing adequate funding. Several ideas have been explored, with the first being to extend the funding and complete Phase 3, which involves introducing a befriending scheme to further support and engage the community. Moreover, we are keen on enhancing the project's sustainability by restructuring it to become more self-sufficient, reducing its reliance on external funding and staffing. To achieve this, we are engaging with members to understand their vision and gather insights on how they envision the project's future. While we are eager to extend the initiative, it is likely that Phase 3 will have a distinct structure, evolving beyond the confines of this pilot and opening new avenues for development.

## Final thoughts...

“Looking ahead to the future, we hope to see Community Fit not only continue in Harrogate but also see how other areas can take the principle and learning and look at their own locally-led version so that we can see even more people engaged in physical activity and volunteering and create more and more community beneficiaries.”

**David Watson,**

Chief Executive at North Yorkshire Sport

# Thank you to our partners and supporters for supporting our project

## Our Partnership

Harrogate and District Community Action  
North Yorkshire Sport  
Community First Yorkshire

## Our Funders

West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership  
Harrogate Borough Council

## Our FitPartners

Age Friendly North Yorkshire  
Artizan International  
Coppice Valley Primary School  
Disability Action Yorkshire  
Harrogate College (Garden of Sanctuary)  
Harrogate Cricket Club  
Harrogate Easier Living Project (HELP)  
Harrogate Fair Trade Shop  
Harrogate High School  
Harrogate Homeless Project  
Oatlands Community Centre  
Pinewoods Conservation Group  
Resurrected Bites  
Richard Taylor Primary School  
Saltergate Schools  
Starbeck in Bloom  
Sustrans  
West Park United Reform Church  
Willow Tree Primary School PTFA  
Woodlands Community Garden

## Our Supporters

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