BOWL FOR HEALTH

In Partnership with

active norfolk

Breckland COUNCIL

OUTCOME REPORT

BOWLS DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

SPORT ENGLAND

Funded by The Movement Fund

Project Overview

Bowl for Health is the Bowls Development Alliance's outreach programme to support community wellbeing. It combines a bowls physical activity with social engagement to improve both physical and mental health, while promoting inclusivity and reducing barriers for people at risk of social isolation or physical inactivity.

The Bowl for Health programme brings Sport England's Uniting the Movement strategy to life

Funded by Sport Englands the 'Movement Fund', the 8 week programme offers free, weekly bowls sessions, followed by informal social time, creating a welcoming environment that encourages ongoing participation, which is key to maintaining long-term health benefits. Additionally, the informal nature of the bowls session followed by a social gathering creates a welcoming and non-intimidating environment for newcomers, which can be crucial for sustaining engagement.

PURPOSE: **To connect communities and deliver a programme that helps people over 40+ and those living with long-term health conditions rediscover the benefits of being active.**

CORE: **Reduce inactivity, increase social connection, and build confidence supporting people to live more active, healthier lives.**

Active Norfolk Strategic Aims

- Increase participation in sport and physical activity
- Improve health and wellbeing by reducing physical inactivity
- Improve lives by strengthening communities

Inactive – over a quarter (28%) of adults do less than 30 mins of activity a week

60% of Norfolk's 65+ population live in a rural area

24% of adults have high anxiety and 1 in 10 are diagnosed with depression

Breckland Council Priorities

- Improving mental health
- Reducing social isolation and loneliness
- Reducing health inequalities
- Tackling conditions related to physical inactivity

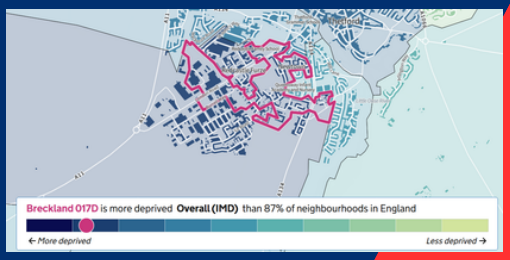
Goal of getting more people active, reducing the number of inactive people and tackling long-standing inequalities.

BACKGROUND - VENUES

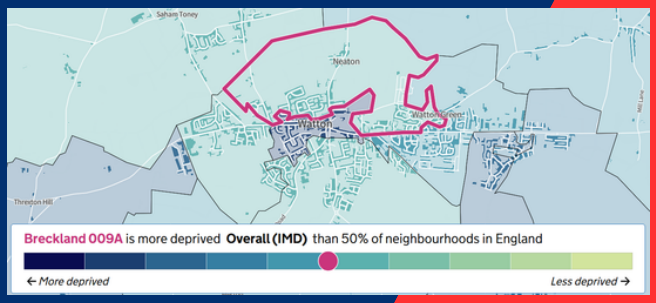
Thetford Short Mat Bowls Club at Charles Burrell Centre - IP24 3LH

Income deprivation affecting old people (IDAOPI): This type of deprivation reflects how many people aged 60 or over experience income deprivation.

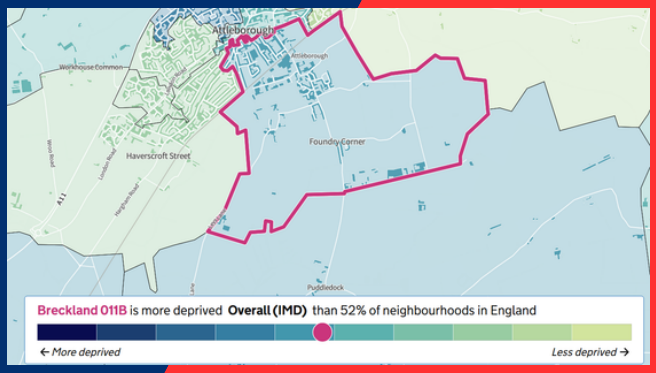
Breckland 017D is more deprived than 86% of neighbourhoods in England



Watton Expendables Short Mat Bowls Club at Watton Sports Centre - IP25 6EZ



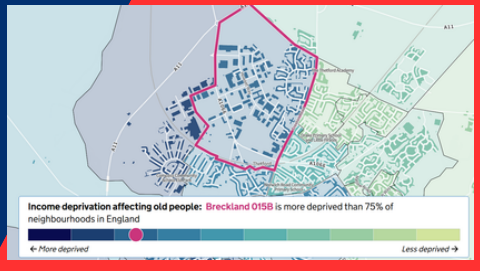
Connaught Short Mat Bowls Club in Attleborough - NR17 2AS

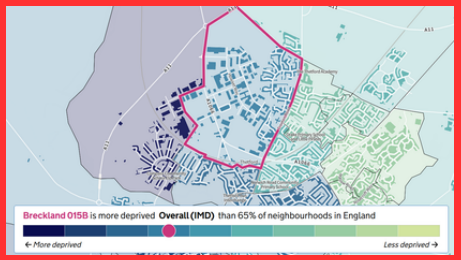


The Brecks Indoor Bowls Club in Thetford - IP24 1JD

Income deprivation affecting old people (IDAOPI): This type of deprivation reflects how many people aged 60 or over experience income deprivation.

Breckland 015B is more deprived than 75% of neighbourhoods in England



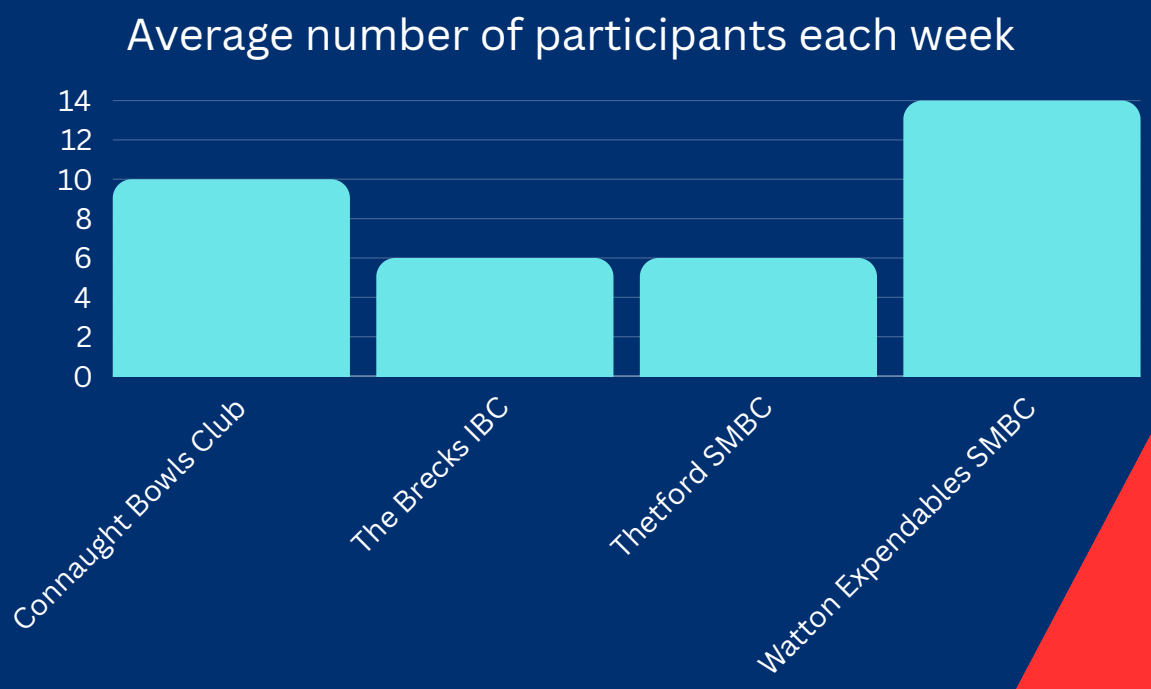


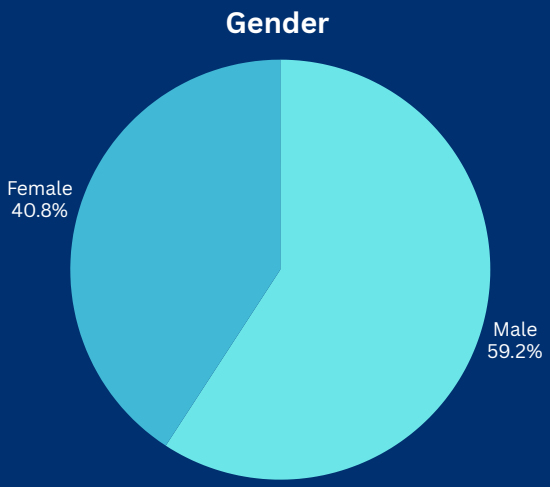
OUTCOMES

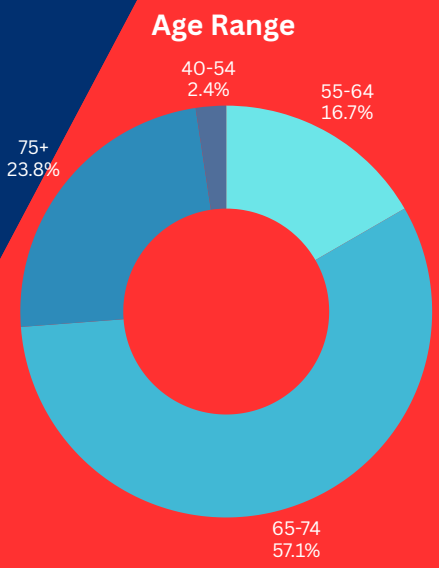
4 Venues

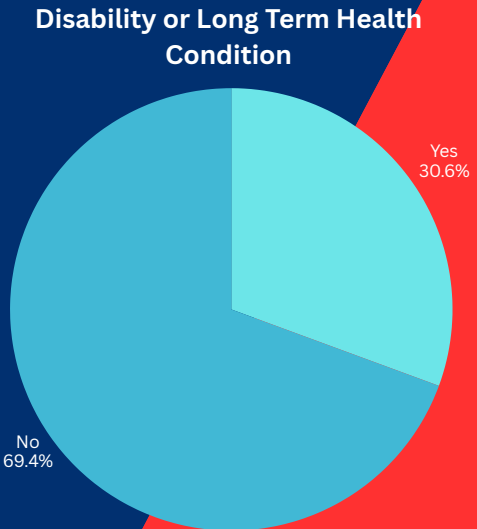
64 sessions in total

36 regular weekly participants









INSIGHT & DATA

These sessions provide a safe, welcoming space for people to:

- Get active at their own pace
- Connect socially and build confidence
- Try bowls in a relaxed, supportive environment
- Enjoy friendly company and free refreshments

Due to the small size of short mat bowls venues, clubs and venues were restricted in the number of participants they could accommodate.

FUTURE

83%

Out of the 36 regular participants playing each week, 30 continued to bowl or joined one of the bowling clubs post programme

WORKFORCE SUPPORT

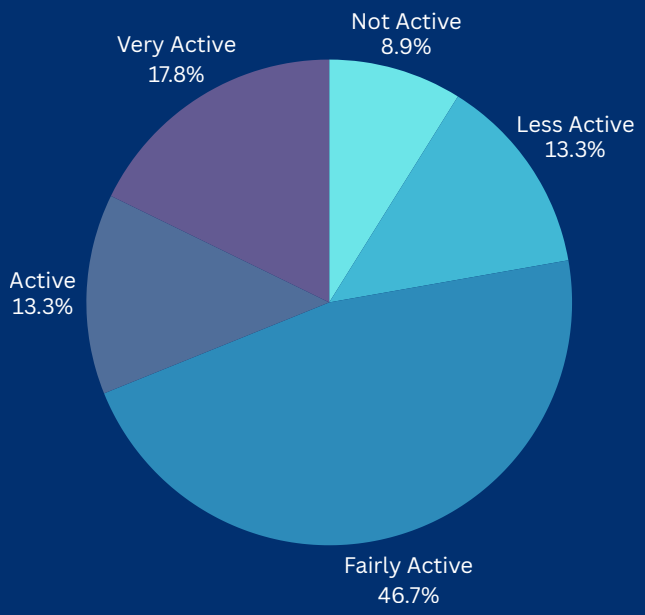
A total of 18 coaches and volunteers delivered the programmes

"The Bowl for Health has helped those in our community" Simon, Coach from Watton Expendables SMBC

INSIGHT & DATA Physical Activity Levels

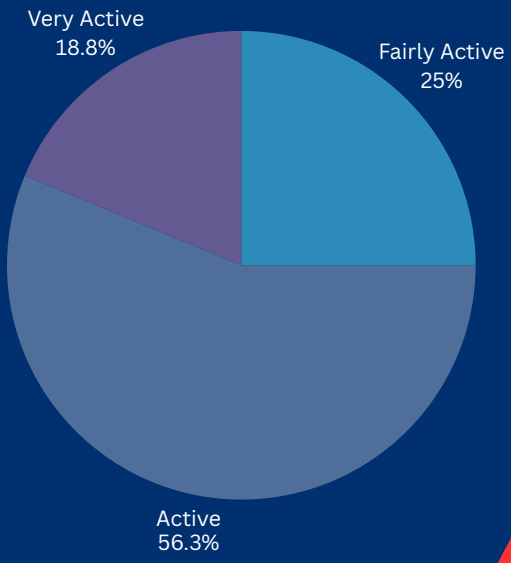
Pre Programme Activity Levels

Averages Scores



Post Programme Activity Levels

Average score

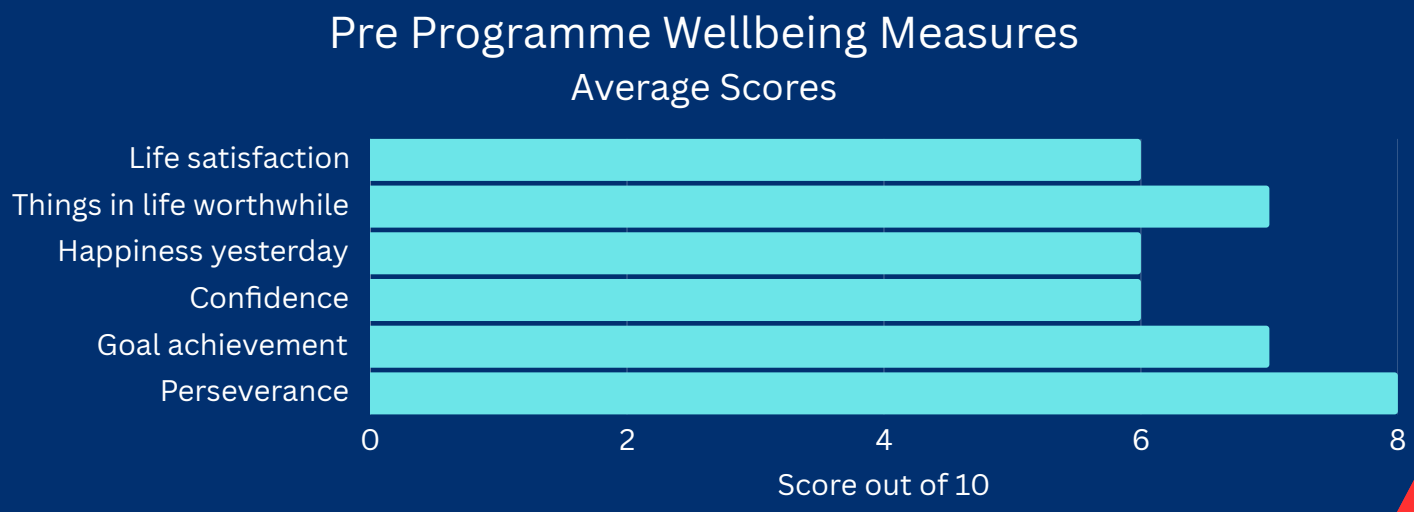


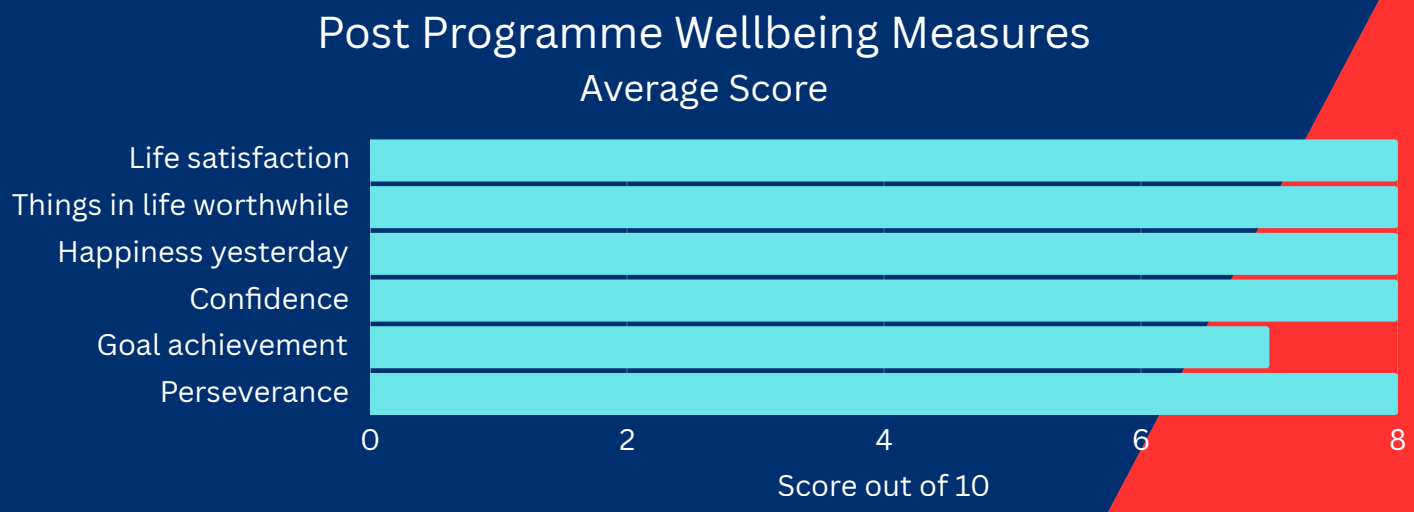
Insight

Post programme physical activity levels indicated there were no participants who were classed as not active or less active and the number of participants who were fairly active decreased.
At the same time, the number of participants who were classed as active increased significantly, and there was also a small increase in those who were very active.

- Active participants consistently report higher wellbeing across satisfaction, happiness, and confidence.
- Some participants with disabilities report lower activity levels and wellbeing, but not always.
- Older age (75+) does not preclude high activity: some are very active and report high wellbeing.
- Fairly active levels dominate 65–74 age group.

INSIGHT & DATA Health and Wellbeing





Key Patterns

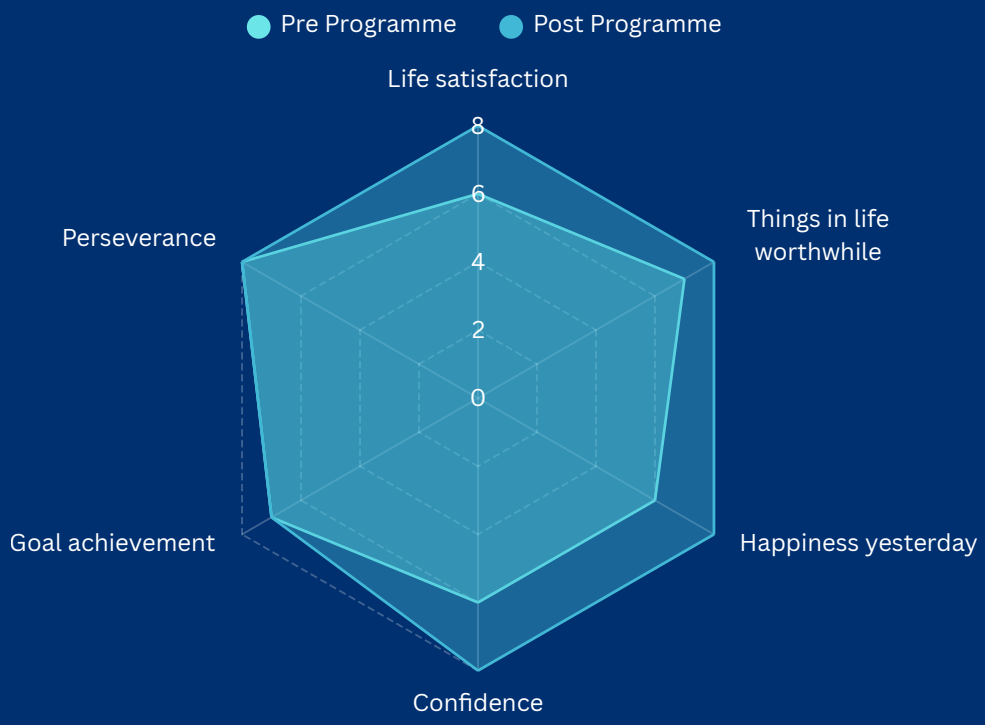
Activity vs Wellbeing
Positive correlation between activity level and:
Life satisfaction, Happiness and Confidence

Disability impact
Mixed effect: some participants with disabilities maintain activity and wellbeing

Motivation/resilience
Most participants show strong perseverance - key for long-term engagement in bowls or physical activity.

INSIGHT & DATA Health and Wellbeing

Average Health and Wellbeing Scores



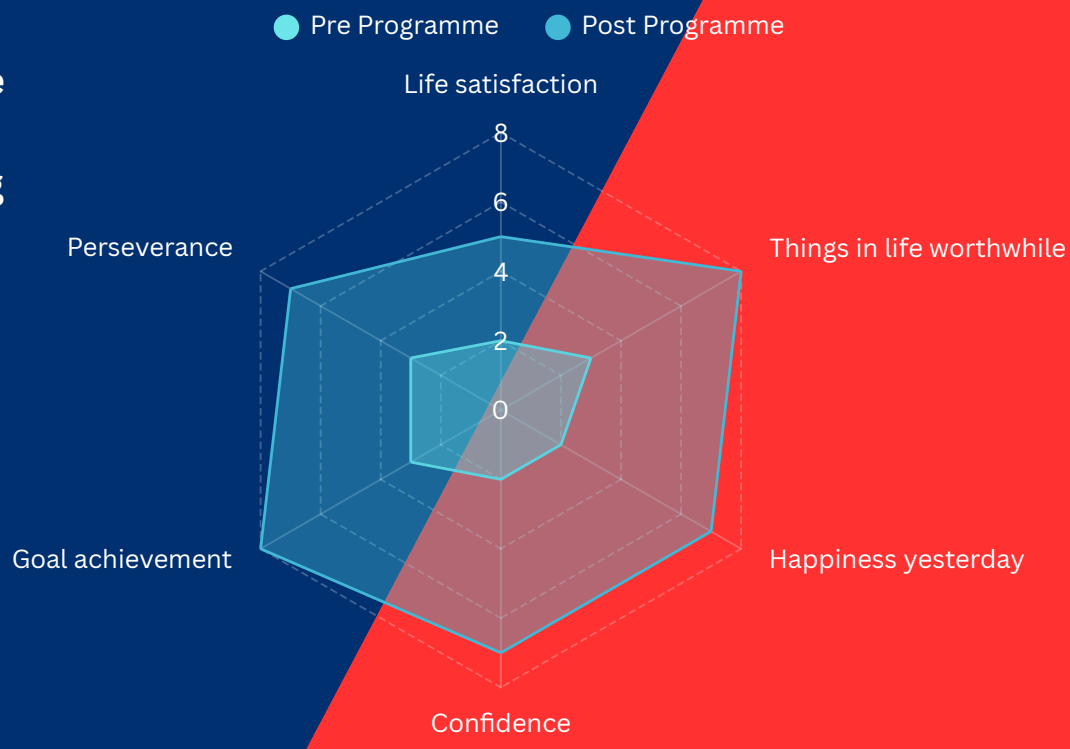
Participants' health and wellbeing scores increased by an average of 17.5% from pre-programme to post-programme as a result of the Bowl for Health Programme.

Example - Participant David Health and Wellbeing Scores

David attended all 8 weeks of the programme

His health and wellbeing scores increased

His levels of physical activity increased from 'Less Active' to 'Active'



PERSONAL QUOTES

"I have suffered from depression and anxiety and might be at home alone; this helps me get out and talk to people" Participant

"I'm really enjoying this! It's interesting and takes some learning but I am getting there. I came with friends from the HUB, we spend other days out doing things together, it's ideal to have things to do in town" Silva, Participant

"I need to get out because I lost my husband, and it helps me get out and have fun again" Participant

"It has been great to get out and chat to both men and women who come along" Participant

VIDEOS

https://www.facebook.com/reel/2617929715241927

https://www.facebook.com/reel/2291103781395618

OUTCOME STORIES

Lorraine from Breckland Council:

"The whole programme was brilliant, honestly one of the best things I've been part of since joining Breckland. I'm sending these over because Jeff isn't able to write his himself, but he really wanted his thoughts to be shared

I also wanted to tell you about my lovely friend Karen. She came along to the Bowls for Health sessions with Jeff and absolutely loved every minute of it. Sadly, she passed away unexpectedly before the sessions finished, but the time she spent there meant so much to her.

The club held an open session on Sunday, and Karen's husband Jon wanted to go along to meet everyone. He knew how much she enjoyed the bowls, but he also wanted to meet the friends she'd made. He was welcomed with open arms, and the club made his visit really special. It was incredibly touching.

Jeff lives on his own and sometimes finds it hard to talk to people, even though he really does enjoy getting out and being around others. When he first came along, he was nervous and wasn't sure he would enjoy it.
He told me the thing that surprised him most was how welcome everyone made him feel. Nobody made him feel awkward or like he didn't belong. Richard always took time to chat with him, which helped him settle in. And the coaches, Cliff and David, were patient and kind, taking the time to explain things slowly and never rushing him.

As the weeks went on, Jeff started to feel more confident. His bowls improved, which he was really proud of, but what mattered even more was the people around him. He said the other participants became like a little supportive family, always encouraging him, laughing with him, and making him feel part of something. They all enjoyed a coffee and a chat together as much as the bowls itself, and that made a big difference to him.

He wanted it said simply: joining these sessions has been really good for him, and he's glad he took the step to come along"

OUTCOME STORIES

Lorraine from Breckland Council:

"I'm writing this for Karen, because she would have wanted people to know how much the Bowls for Health sessions at the Brecks club meant to her.

Karen had been very ill last year, but she was recovering well and was determined to get back to doing things that made her feel like herself again. She came along mainly to support Jeff, wanting to help him get out and build his confidence. But very quickly, the sessions became something special for her too.

She loved the banter with the group, the jokes, the teasing, the friendly atmosphere. She'd happily make coffees for everyone, sit and chat, and enjoy the company just as much as the bowls. You could see how much it lifted her. She took to the sport like a duck to water, and she was so proud to be part of the promotional video. She talked about carrying on and joining the club properly once the sessions were finished.

Very sadly, Karen passed away unexpectedly before the programme ended. The news hit everyone deeply. In such a short time, she had become someone people naturally gravitated towards, confident, kind, and genuinely interested in others. The support the group showed to her family afterwards said everything about the sort of people they are. The Brecks club even made a T-shirt with her picture from week two, when she won the weekly trophy something she had been absolutely thrilled about.

The club has also agreed to host a yearly memorial trophy for Karen's friends, because she enjoyed the sessions so much and made such a big impact on everyone around her. It's a beautiful way to remember her, and it shows just how special the Brecks club is. The whole group were simply amazing.
Karen connected with people so easily, and she loved every minute she spent with the group. That time meant so much to her"

SUMMARY

Programme Delivery

- **Inclusive, low-impact sessions tailored to individual abilities**
- **Trained coaches and 18 volunteers support sessions**
- **Focus areas: enjoyment, confidence-building, social interaction, not competition**
- **Built-in social time to strengthen relationships and reduce loneliness**
- **8-week duration with total participants: 58**
- **Pathways for continued engagement: option to join clubs or social bowls sessions**

Partnerships & Community Links

- **Health professionals**
- **Social prescribing link workers**
- **Community organisations (Active Norfolk, Breckland Council)**
- **Provides a safe, non-clinical activity aligned with NHS prevention and wellbeing priorities**

Workforce & Club Development

- **18 volunteers supported the programme**
- **Builds club workforce skills**
- **Increases inclusivity and positions clubs as sustainable community health venues**

WHAT'S NEXT?

Active Norfolk and Breckland Council will continue to support bowls clubs moving forward with future funding and ongoing programmes to continue to offer bowls provision to their local communities.

Bowl for Health pilot programmes continue to be rolled out nationally

KEEP IN TOUCH

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