

2023-2024

SPORT AND ACTIVITY ENABLER
PILOT



Essex County Council

ESSEX
VIOLENCE & VULNERABILITY
UNIT



The Sport and Activity Enabler Pilot was a collaboration between Active Essex Foundation and Essex County Council's Involvement Service. The pilot was funded by Essex's Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VVU).

The role was one of three which were embedded across the Youth Justice system in Essex to build capacity and clear referral pathways that connect vulnerable children and young people across the county to sports and physical activity providers in their local community.



In the pilot year

103 young people were referred to the Enabler and were offered personalised support

8 young people returned to school, started training, entered employment, or began actively job-seeking in the 3 months after their referral to the Enabler

16 young people's risk in the community level reduced enough for them to be closed to MACE 1 in the 3 months after their referral to the Enabler

92.2% reduction in the number of missing episodes among young people referred to the Enabler



The Enabler has played a pivotal role in developing relationships with sports provisions and coaches [...] who have become a valuable resource for young people that we never had before. In the climate of stretched public resources, using the [...] sport sector in this way makes a huge difference in reducing harm within the community.

ECC Involvement Service



Roles like the Enabler inject vital capacity into the system to improve outcomes for children and young people at risk.

Further funding will enable Active Essex Foundation and Essex County Council's Involvement Service to continue their collaboration, using sport and physical activity to benefit young people across Essex.

ABOUT THE ROLE

Working closely with colleagues from the Active Essex Foundation and ECC's Involvement Service, the Enabler connected referred children and young people who were vulnerable to exploitation to a sport or physical activity provision delivered by a locally trusted organisation (LTO).

The Enabler balanced what a young person wanted to do with what was available in their area. Some young people were offered physical activity as part of a group while others with more complex needs were offered one-to-one sessions.

The Enabler worked with each young person (and the adults around them) to understand how much support they needed. In some cases, the Enabler connected the young person to an LTO and checked in regularly. In others, the Enabler offered tailored and intensive support to facilitate access to and sustained engagement with sport and physical activity opportunities.

Activities offered included:

Football



Parkour



Boxing



Rugby



Martial Arts



Running



Cycling



WHY SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?



Sport and physical activity can increase children and young people's happiness and self-esteem and reduce stress, anxiety and depression (Sport England, 2023).



Engaging in sport and physical activity can have a positive impact on their employment opportunities (Sport England, 2023).



Coaches and physical activity leaders can act as positive role models for children and young people, which is particularly important to those at risk (StreetGames, 2022; Youth Endowment Fund 2024).



The LTOs have received specialist training through the Foundation from organisations such as StreetGames to help them to support children and young people who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES).

WHY WAS THE ENABLER NEEDED?

Typically, there are around 350 young people with open Risk in the Community (RIC) records, and between 100-130 young people open to MACE (Missing & Child Exploitation) in Essex.

The Active Essex Foundation, which advocates for the power of sport to make a difference to the lives of children and young people at risk, saw an opportunity to offer something different to these young people.

The Foundation works closely with system partners and LTOs to offer sport and physical activity opportunities to this cohort and has experience of working in partnership to serve communities.

Building on the successes of the Foundation's flagship Sport and Life Skills Project, the Foundation team worked with ECC's involvement Service to pilot a referral model that functioned as a bridge between the system and the sport and physical activity sector.

The pilot is part of the Involvement Service's Risk in the Community partnership response to tackling exploitation. Working with the Enabler allows the team to take a more flexible approach to working with young people that focuses on building relationships and widening access to sport and physical activity opportunities.

THE REFERRALS PROCESS

Referrals were made using a confidential form that captured:

- the young person's personal details and the details of their case manager
- the reasons for the referral and the young person's perceived openness to support
- any information that could support the Enabler and LTO to understand the needs of the young person
- which activities the young person had expressed an interest in

Care was taken to understand potential and identified risks faced by each child or young person, as well as their needs and wants.

A young person could be referred to the Enabler if they:

- ✓ were identified at a multi-agency Missing & Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting
- ✓ had been missing and received a 'Missing Chat' from the Involvement Team
- ✓ were in care or transitioning from care to independent living.

WHO DID THE ENABLER WORK WITH?

103

at risk children and young people were referred to the Enabler in the role's pilot year.

49%

aged 10-15

51%

aged 16+



The role exceeded its target of 100 referrals in the first 12 months, showing the need for this referral pathway.



77 identified as male



26 identified as female

Key Insight

1/3

of the young people referred to the Enabler were 16 at the time of their referral.

At this age, young people leave secondary school and begin the transition to adult support services. The Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB) notes that 15-16 years is the most common age range for child criminal exploitation (CCE).

At this time of transition and increased risk, it is vital that young people have support.

Children and young people in this cohort often have complex needs and overlapping risk factors. Of those referred:

7 had a disability or long term health condition

85 had additional needs/SEN

30 were Looked After Children (LAC)

of whom

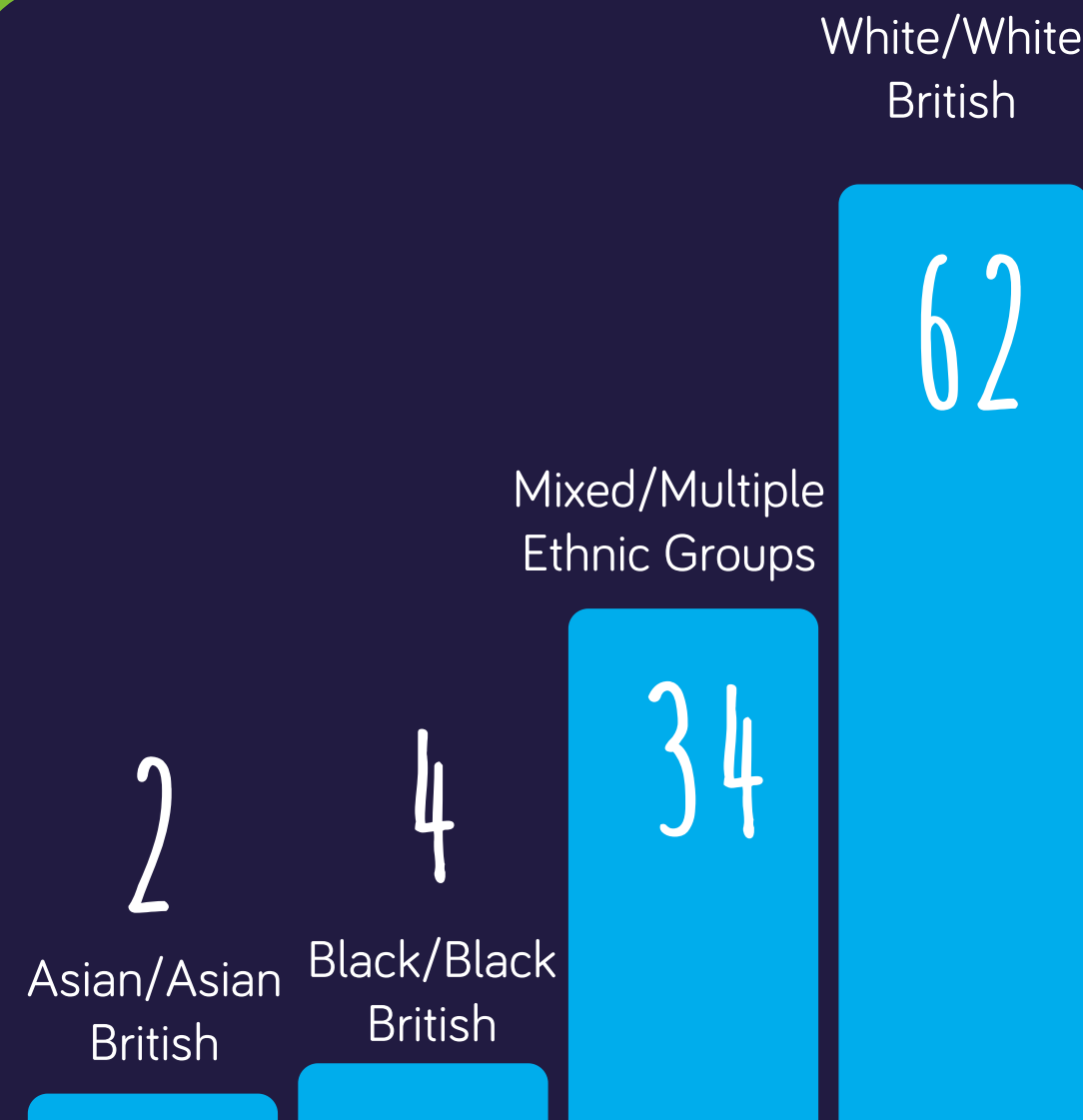
16 were Separated Migrant Young People

70 had emotional and/or behavioural difficulties



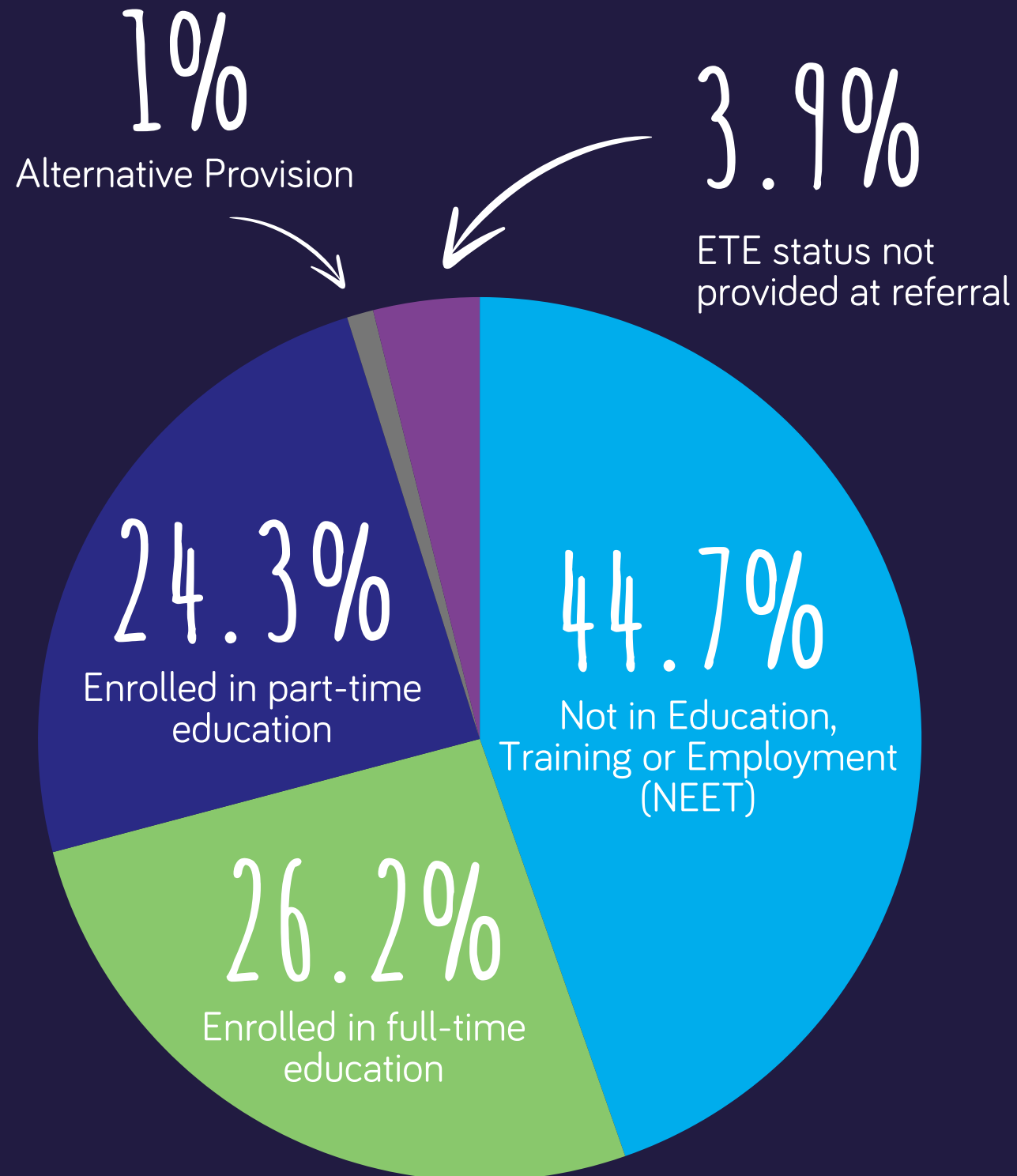
Referrals were received from across the county:

- Basildon
- Braintree
- Brentwood
- Castle Point
- Chelmsford
- Colchester
- Epping Forest
- Harlow
- Rochford
- Tendring
- Uttlesford



WHO DID THE ENABLER WORK WITH?

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (ETE) STATUS



Key Insights

- 46 children and young people were Not in Education, Training or Employment (NEET) at the time of their referral
- 14 were under 16
- 32 were 16+

Of those who were recorded as enrolled in full-time education at the time of their referral, many were not attending, or only attending sporadically.



OUTCOMES

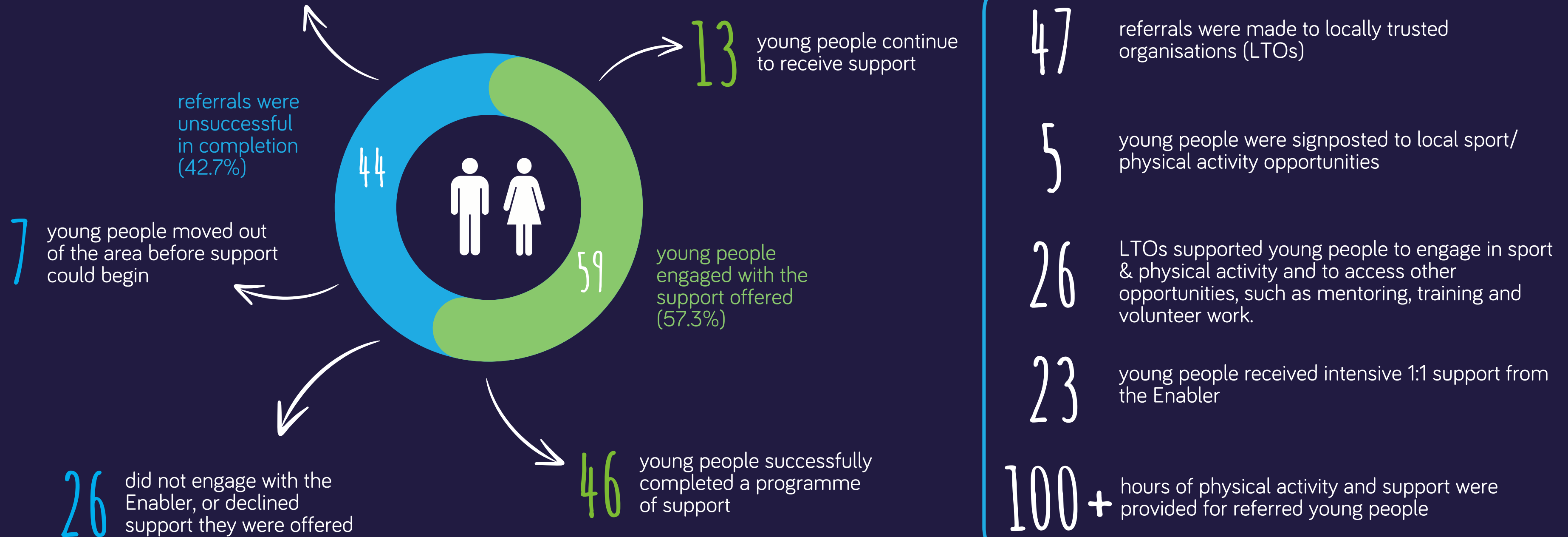
Key Insight



A referral is most likely to be successful if the young person:

- has expressed a strong interest in sport or physical activity
- has other supportive adults in their life to encourage engagement

11 young people's age or risk status changed after their referral and they were no longer eligible for support



IMPACT



The Enabler has allowed us to give young people who are vulnerable to exploitation the opportunity to engage in sport and activity with additional lifeskills, and to raise their aspirations.

Project Manager, Active Essex Foundation



Reducing missing episodes

8 young people referred to the Enabler were known to the Missing Service.

51 combined total missing episodes in the 3 months before referral which was reduced to 4 episodes after 3 months.

↓ 92.2%

This represents a significant reduction (92.2%) in the number of missing episodes.

Reducing young people's risk levels

Young people are opened to MACE 1 if they are at high risk of exploitation or if they have come to harm in the community during a missing episode.

16

young people were closed to MACE 1 in the 3 months following their referral to the Enabler

A young person is closed to MACE 1 when a board of professionals assesses their risk level and finds that it has reduced to then need less intensive support from statutory services.

Getting young people back in to education, training or employment

Research has shown that being in education can reduce the risk that a child will be involved in serious violence (YEF, 2024).

After their referral to the Enabler:

8

young people who had not been attending school or in training saw a positive change to their Education, Training or Employment (ETE) status.

Outcomes for young people included returning to education, joining a new school community, starting a training course, entering employment, and actively job-seeking.

SUCCESS STORY - KEIRON

From at risk in the community to community volunteer

It took several weeks for the Enabler to build trust with Keiron*, who was referred after concerns were raised about his vulnerability and risk of exploitation by gangs. Keiron was not leaving the house much due to threats and was initially very reluctant to engage with the Enabler.

After he responded well to informal one-to-one boxing sessions in his back garden, the Enabler connected Keiron to Achieve Thrive Flourish (ATF). A youth worker from ATF began taking Keiron to a boxing gym where his natural talent has been nurtured. Keiron attended the boxing gym regularly and began aspiring to become a professional boxer.

The Enabler's persistence was key to engaging Keiron and helping him to turn his life around. In late 2023, Keiron attended the Active Essex Foundation's Power of Sport conference and spoke in a workshop about the difference physical activity had made to his life.

Recently, Keiron has been competing at county level and volunteering as a boxing coach at ATF.

* not his real name



SUCCESS STORY - JOSHUA

From NEET to job-ready

Joshua* was referred so he could access support that promoted wellbeing, provided positive activities, and gave him some routine. At the time of his referral, Joshua was Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and at high risk of criminal exploitation.

When the Enabler first met Joshua, he expressed interest in boxing or joining a gym. The Enabler took Joshua to a local martial arts provider for a trial session.

Despite enjoying the martial arts session, Joshua told the Enabler he'd also really like to try swimming. He asked the Enabler for help with his CV and job applications.

The Enabler organised a 3 month leisure centre membership for Joshua. Joshua loves swimming, and meets the Enabler every week for a mentoring session before he gets in the pool.

“

Using our model of intensive and targeted work, the Enabler has been doing some great work, helping Joshua look for work and getting him job-ready. This young person is now so focused on getting a job and feeling really positive about life.

ECC Involvement Service

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* not his real name



SUCCESS STORY - AJ

The importance of joined-up, multi-agency working

The Enabler met AJ*, got to know him, and did some boxing exercises with him. AJ expressed an interest in boxing and football, so the Enabler found suitable local sports provisions for him to attend. The Enabler also secured a work placement for AJ through a local community organisation.

After an incident in the community that resulted in criminal charges, AJ stopped engaging with the Enabler and the sport provision he had been offered. His work placement also fell through.

The Enabler, AJ's social worker, and a staff member at the LTO AJ had been referred to worked together to re-engage AJ. After the Enabler reached out to him several times, AJ agreed to return to his mentoring and boxing sessions. When the Enabler visited AJ at a session a few weeks later, he was doing well.

This case demonstrates the value of persistence and collaborative, multi-agency case work that capacity-building roles like the Enabler facilitate.

* not his real name

“

AJ has been fantastic - he attends every session with a positive attitude and has built a great relationship with his mentor at the LTO. He's also now got employment - 4 days a week as a labourer!”

Active Essex Foundation Enabler

”



SUCCESS STORY - TYLER

The power of persistence

The Enabler looked at several potential provisions for Tyler* investigating 1:1 support and a free trial at a martial arts gym.

Tyler was at high risk of exploitation and initially did not engage with the support he was offered. Many statutory agencies had also previously failed to engage Tyler.

A few months after his first Enabler referral was closed unsuccessfully, Tyler was re-referred. The Enabler reached out to Tyler again and this time Tyler was ready for support.

Together, the Enabler and Tyler decided that direct work was best-suited to Tyler's needs. They began going to the gym together and building a strong relationship through their shared passion for being active - and for video games.

Tyler has sustained his engagement in the programme and the Enabler informally mentors Tyler during their gym sessions. The Enabler says Tyler is really committed to making a change. Adults around Tyler have reported positive changes in his behaviours and his aspirations.

“

The Enabler has made a great connection with Tyler, who is seeking guidance from him when they attend gym sessions. I really don't think this young person would be in this positive position had it not been for the Enabler. He now has such a positive mindset and feels he has opportunities available to him that he never thought possible before.

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ECC Involvement Service



WHAT HAS WORKED WELL



The role has created a clear and simple sport and physical activity referral pathway.

This has been used by colleagues across Essex who work with children and young people at risk.

The volume of referrals demonstrates the need for this referral pathway.



The collaboration between the Active Essex Foundation and Essex County Council's Involvement Service has been a success.

The Enabler has had the support of both teams and being embedded in the Involvement Service has extended the reach to cohorts that would not otherwise have been targeted.



As the stories in this report show, many of the children and young people referred to the Enabler have benefitted from the sport and physical activity opportunities they have been offered.

This contributes further support to the growing base of evidence about the power of sport the lives of young people (Sport England, Streetgames, YEF).



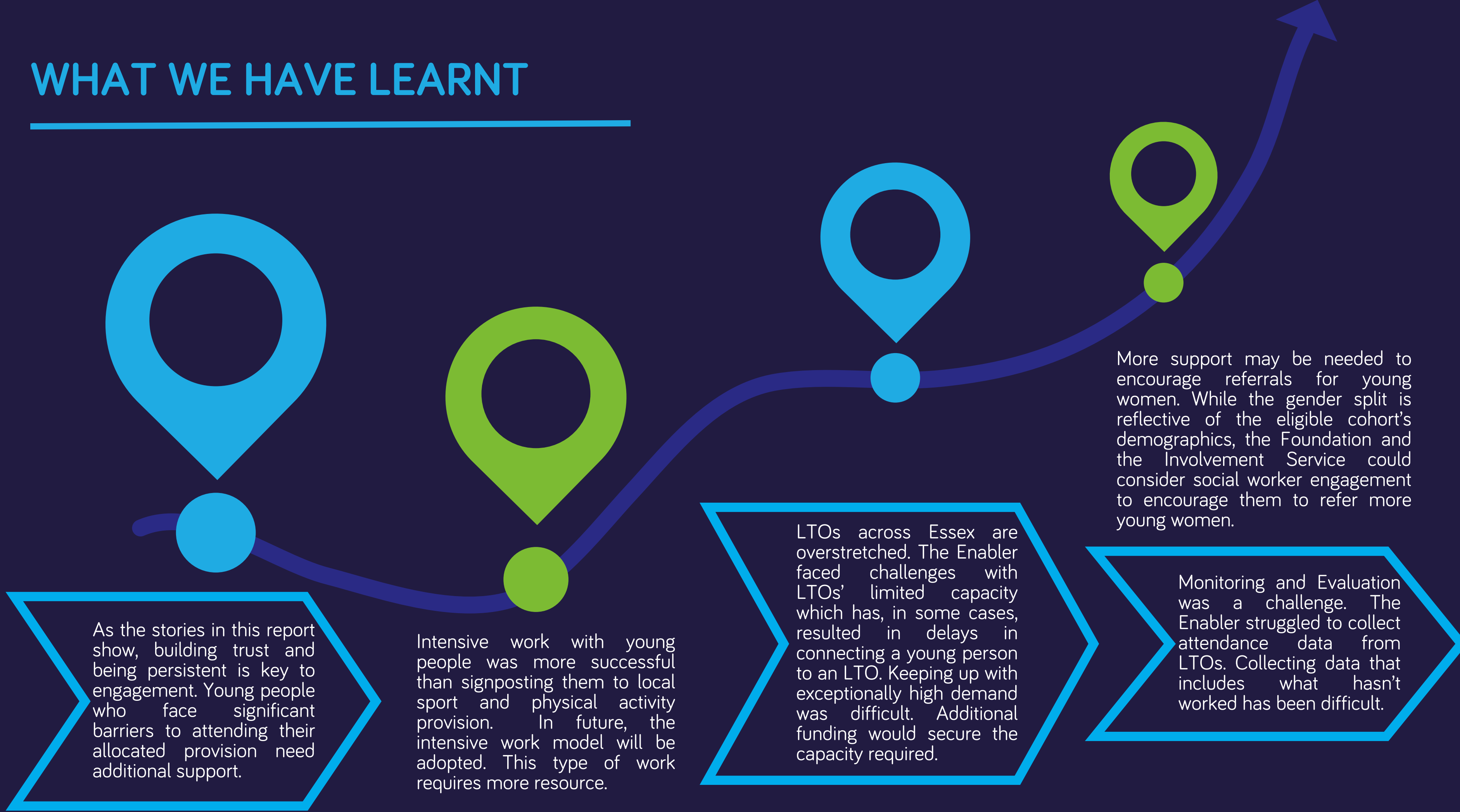
The pilot has demonstrated the value of this role.

Further funding will enable Active Essex Foundation and Essex County Council's Involvement Service to continue their collaboration, using sport and physical activity to benefit young people across Essex.

Access to regular, positive sport and physical activity provided many children and young people with the five protective factors ECC's Involvement Service have identified as key to reducing risk:

- 1) reintegration into education, training or employment;
- 2) achieving resilience and emotional wellbeing;
- 3) developing positive peer relationships;
- 4) having trusted adults around them;
- 5) improved relationships at home

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT



As the stories in this report show, building trust and being persistent is key to engagement. Young people who face significant barriers to attending their allocated provision need additional support.

Intensive work with young people was more successful than signposting them to local sport and physical activity provision. In future, the intensive work model will be adopted. This type of work requires more resource.

LTOs across Essex are overstretched. The Enabler faced challenges with LTOs' limited capacity which has, in some cases, resulted in delays in connecting a young person to an LTO. Keeping up with exceptionally high demand was difficult. Additional funding would secure the capacity required.

Monitoring and Evaluation was a challenge. The Enabler struggled to collect attendance data from LTOs. Collecting data that includes what hasn't worked has been difficult.

More support may be needed to encourage referrals for young women. While the gender split is reflective of the eligible cohort's demographics, the Foundation and the Involvement Service could consider social worker engagement to encourage them to refer more young women.

SOURCES

- Active Essex Foundation, 2023, Sport and Life Skills Project <https://www.activeessexfoundation.org/projects/sport-and-life-skills-project>
- Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB), Criminal Exploitation <https://www.escb.co.uk/working-with-children/risk-in-the-community-ric/what-is-exploitation/criminal-exploitation>
- Sport England, 2023, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey - Academic Year 2022-2023 <https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives>
- StreetGames, 2022, StreetGames Young People's Voices Report <https://www.streetgames.org/research-and-insights/young-peoples-voices/>
- Youth Endowment Fund (YEF), 2024, Education, Children and Violence: Guidance for school, college and alternative provision leaders to help prevent children's involvement in violence <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/education-guidance/>