

Sport England Local Delivery Pilot: Join Us: Move. Play (JU:MP)

Creating Active Schools Implementation and Initial Impact Report

September 2019 to August 2020

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Executive summary

The Creating Active Schools (CAS) Framework was co-developed by 50 school stakeholders and represents the many factors required to facilitate systems change for physical activity in schools. The framework has been adopted by the Join Us: Move. Play (JU:MP) Local Delivery Pilot in Bradford. In the Pioneer Phase of JU:MP, 13 schools across three of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Bradford are trialling the implementation of the CAS framework. Schools were recruited by the JU:MP Implementation Director and offered a financial incentive to be involved in the project.

A four-stage process of neighbourhood and school-based workshops were delivered to support school adoption of physical activity. Specifically, the schools engaged in a planning workshop using the CAS framework to reflect on current provision and identify areas for new provision. The novelty of the CAS framework and planning process reside in facilitating systems change that focuses at the strategic operational level, rather than the implementation of singular interventions within different segments of the school day. Following the workshops, schools were tasked with creating individual implementation plans.

Key learning established CAS as a credible tool and planning process that facilitated systems change. School leaders highlighted the powerful effects of CAS to encourage discussions on the strategic implementation of physical activity in schools. The need for this was underpinned by the lack of the majority of schools with current provision that addressed the role of the five key stakeholder groups, the social and physical environment. Ultimately, this resulted from a lack of presence of physical activity within the mission and vision statements within the majority of schools, which ultimately meant that physical activity was not seen as a strategic priority. Early evidence suggests that the CAS process has supported schools to make changes to school mission and vision statements and more generally, the ethos and working practises within schools. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the implementation of these plans, some schools have implemented new and innovative ideas to increase physical activity opportunities for their pupils using very little, if any, financial resource.

In order to build on the early learning and impact demonstrated in phase one and if the CAS Framework is to be scaled up and shared beyond Bradford, there is a need for a web portal to support the implementation of the CAS process.

Introduction

The Creating Active Schools (CAS) Framework (Figure 1) is a systems diagram that identifies the multiple factors that need to be addressed to create a whole-school approach to physical activity. The framework is being used as a key component to support schools to embrace physical activity within the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot (LDP) in Bradford - Join Us: Move. Play (JU:MP). To date, the framework and the implementation approach to operationalise this have been in place for 12 months. This report provides a rapid insight into the implementation methodology from this first twelve months.

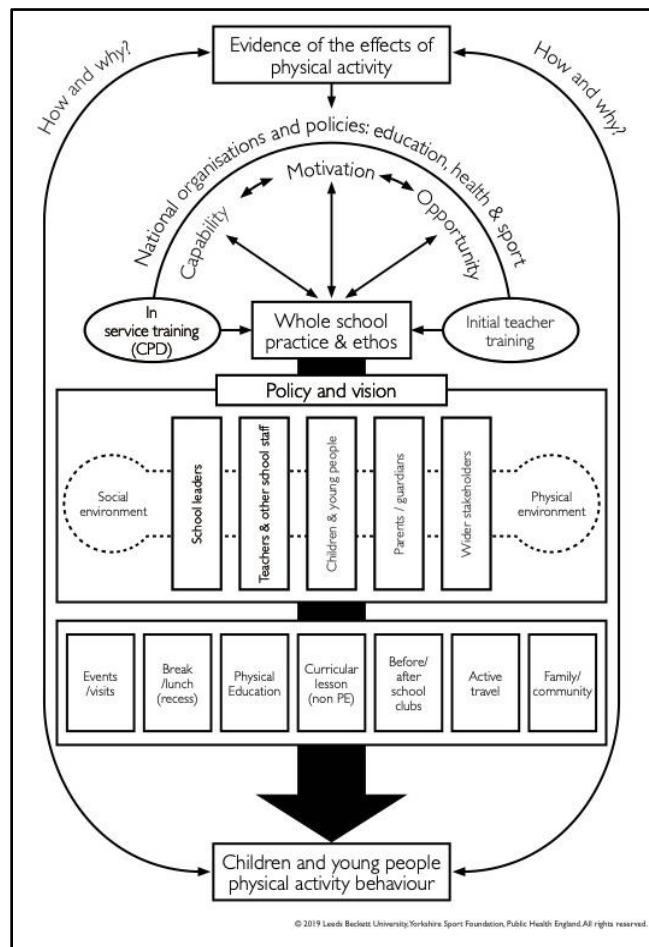


Figure 1: Creating Active Schools Framework (Daly-Smith, 2020).

The Creating Active Schools Framework

The Framework was developed by 50 stakeholders at a think-tank event in Leeds, led by Dr Andy Daly-Smith (Leeds Beckett University, now University of Bradford), Dan Wilson (Yorkshire Sport Foundation) and Nicola Corrigan (Public Health England). Using the UK Design Council Double Diamond approach, the 50 stakeholders worked in mixed and same stakeholder groups and undertook a six-phase design sprint. Following this, modifications were made to the initial framework following the event, via online feedback. There were nine stakeholder groups; teachers, head teachers, active schools and school sport partnership managers, Active Partnership officers, public health officers, senior representatives from national organisations, Sport England local delivery pilot representatives, and UK and international researchers. For more information on the development of the framework, you can watch a brief video ([click here](#)) or read the academic publication published in the world-leading International Journal of Behavioural Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity (Daly-Smith et al., 2020; [click here](#)).



Figure 2: Stakeholders engaging in the design sprint on the CAS development day.

The Framework and implementation package focuses on creating organisational change within schools. Beginning from the centre, whole-school practice and ethos drive the policy and vision of the school. In turn, these establish the social and physical environments within which the five key stakeholders operate. These stakeholders are then jointly responsible for implementing physical activity within the seven opportunity booths, within and beyond the school day.

JU:MP: Creating Active Schools

In October 2019, the CAS Framework was adopted by the Sport England funded Bradford Local Delivery Pilot - Join Us: Move. Play (JU:MP) - to drive systems change for physical activity. The focus of the framework was to drive systems change in schools as one key element of a broader whole-system approach to improve physical activity levels for children and young people aged five to 14. Within the JU:MP project, the framework is a cornerstone to supporting over 40 primary schools and 10 secondary schools to create systems change for physical activity. The team has developed an initial training package and are in the process of implementing this within the first three Pioneer Neighbourhoods with 13 schools. The training programme focuses on creating systems change, enabling the individual schools to take an autonomous approach in how they implement physical activity within their unique social and physical environments. The diversity within the JU:MP region provides an opportunity to test and learn this approach with a diverse array of schools and pupils.

The next section of the report will detail the initial approach taken by the JU:MP team in operationalising the framework, before providing some initial insights gained from operationalising this approach. At the time of writing, the project is approaching the end of the first year of the Pioneer Phase (part one), and is currently planning the Accelerator Phase (part two), which will begin in 2021.

Implementation design

The implementation process included several phases. First, schools were identified within the Pioneer Neighbourhoods. Next, relationships were built through the Community Engagement Managers and Creating Active Schools lead. Following this, inductions and training were provided through neighbourhood steering group workshops and cross-neighbourhood, school-focussed workshops. Prior to commencing this work, baseline physical activity data was collected from pupils within all schools.

School recruitment

Process

Specific areas of the Metropolitan District of Bradford were selected during the LDP funding application process. Primarily these were focussed on areas with high levels of deprivation. Within the Pioneer Phase, this presented three specific neighbourhoods encompassing 13 schools. The communities of Scotchman Road, Peel Park and Allerton/Lower Grange all posed their own unique characteristics, opportunities and challenges, including diverse ethnic groups, availability and access to assets and attitudes to education and physical activity.

The schools within each area were also very different from each other. While they all shared many common characteristics of inner city schools, some were rated Outstanding by Ofsted while others were struggling with lower judgements and the subsequent associated challenges. This meant varying levels of commitment and prioritisation towards JU:MP from schools during the programme. This is explored in more detail later in the report.

At an early stage, schools were offered a large financial incentive to attend a workshop and sign a two-year commitment to be involved in the programme. Initial communication with schools was via a combination of letters in the post (see appendix 1), emails and phone calls. Every school also received an initial visit from the JU:MP Implementation Director to explain what the programme entailed.

Significantly, all 13 schools agreed to be part of the programme, which meant that 100% of schools in the targeted communities were engaged.

Challenges

Initial school engagement and securing each school's agreement to participate in JU:MP was a significant challenge. In many instances it was difficult to communicate directly with school leaders due to messages not being passed on to the right people, or calls not being returned. It was only through persisting and repeated requests for contact that every head teacher engaged. The financial incentive proved to be the most significant driver for these conversations to take place.

Moving forward to the Accelerator Phase, a piece of work needs to be undertaken to develop an effective recruitment strategy in the face of reduced funding per school. As one of the guiding principles of the CAS Framework requires the school to align the framework to their current priorities, initial conversations with schools may be more fruitful if these are clearer from the outset and used as the starting point in early conversations.

Further, finding the time to have initial conversations with school leaders proved very challenging. Even when schools were aware of the financial incentive, it often took several weeks to arrange a meeting and several of these were postponed or cancelled. However, this stage was imperative to the success of the programme. The CAS Framework development process highlighted the importance of head teacher buy-in. Without this, school physical activity programmes often fail to have a significant impact or be sustained over time.

Moving forward towards the Accelerator Phase, strategies to encourage school leaders to prioritise meetings for JU:MP within their busy diaries are required. To address this, a revision of the meetings requirements and a new in-school JU:MP leadership structure is likely required. Further, the JU:MP team have established a more substantial post to lead the Creating Active Schools work package, employing an ex-head teacher who established one of the leading active schools within the United Kingdom. Further, video conferencing will be used to facilitate remote meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEY FINDING: School leaders must be engaged from the outset and throughout the entire process, otherwise system change across the whole school will not happen.

Successes

Onboarding all 13 schools was a significant success. As outlined above, this was largely a result of the financial incentive but other factors that influenced this included; JU:MP team members diligently following up calls and emails, the JU:MP Implementation Director and Community Engagement Managers meeting face-to-face with head teachers, and the early sharing of a comprehensive community-focussed plan, which helped to convince the less motivated schools to be involved.

Rapid and agile planning resulted in a fast paced project evolving in 'real time'. While there was a broad project plan for JU:MP derived from the initial funding application, specific actions remained flexible throughout. These were reactive to each stage of the project and its respective challenges and successes. Regular planning meetings between the JU:MP team and other stakeholders enabled the constant shaping and reshaping of the early stages of the project. This was well received by the schools.

Early on in the programme, two of the original CAS Framework development team members (Dr Andy Daly-Smith and Dan Wilson) were seconded to support the JU:MP project team. This gave the project credibility with schools and enabled conversations with school leaders to progress at a faster pace. One of the seconded team members (Dan Wilson) had previously been a local authority school consultant, which meant that conversations with school leaders were often at a strategic level, based on prior experience of school improvement with a focus on whole-school outcomes.

Inductions and training

Process

As previously discussed, the agile school training process enabled the team to respond in a reactive way to the schools' needs. Early feedback from all stakeholders involved in the project suggested that the following process may be suitable when moving the project forward.

- Stage one: meetings with all stakeholders took place to explain the programme and encourage engagement. Once a verbal commitment was confirmed, all stakeholders (community and schools) were invited to one of three locality-based neighbourhood steering group workshops. The purpose of which was to explain the project in greater detail, while also undertaking an asset mapping exercise for their respective neighbourhood.
- Stage two: a school-specific workshop for head teachers and one other colleague. This workshop was attended by the majority of schools. The session introduced the framework. After this, each school undertook a mapping exercise to identify their current provision, identify gaps and then suggest strategies to implement a whole-school approach to physical activity. The implementation of this strategy required schools to consider how physical activity aligned with current whole-school priorities, their vision and values and how they could be adapted to increase access to physical activity.
- Stage three: the second neighbourhood steering group workshop. These involved all stakeholders from the community with one activity focussing on school-community links. The main activity focussed on all stakeholders co-designing action plans for their local neighbourhood.
- Stage four: school leaders and their CAS lead met with the JU:MP School Implementation Lead to develop a thematic action plan. These meetings required school leaders to review their whole-school development plan and identify opportunities where physical activity could be used as a tool for improvement. Discussions started with the school's vision, strategy and ethos. Photos (see Figure 3) from the stage two school workshop mapping exercise were shared to act as a stimulus to guide priorities.



Figure 3: School leaders identified gaps in provision on enlarged CAS Framework diagrams.

Challenges

School leaders attendance at JU:MP workshops was a significant challenge. Despite attendance being a requirement to access the financial incentive, attendance throughout the process varied by school. It was apparent that head teachers were very busy (admittedly, several emergencies requiring immediate attention resulted in non-attendance), however, there was always the option to devolve attendance to another member of SMT and this frequently did not happen.

The order in which the workshops were delivered was cited as confusing for some school staff. Feedback from the schools and reflection from the team suggests that it may be more suitable to run the school-only workshops prior to introducing the rest of the community for the asset mapping task. The next phase of the schools programme will use this approach.

Arranging and delivering one-to-one meetings with school leaders was an important, but laborious and protracted process. Despite the relatively small number of schools involved, it required almost two months to book and undertake an onsite school visit; this however was necessary. It was clear that despite attending the workshops, some school staff failed to understand the guiding principles of the CAS Framework. For example, one teacher started their meeting by discussing significant successes with the school sports teams. While school sport and competition is important, the purpose of the meetings was to share whole-school priorities and reflect on the vision and policies at a strategic level.

KEY FINDING: Many school staff members are unable to recite their vision and values. These are fundamental to implementing the CAS Framework and often needed reviewing prior to a discussion around reframing them to include physical activity.

Successes

Delivery and content of the school workshops was highly rated. Eighty percent of school leaders attended and feedback was very positive. School staff members were able to review their current practices and identify where there were gaps in their own provision. Engagement throughout the tasks was very good. It was also very obvious to see school leaders understand how the CAS Framework was different to any other intervention they had worked with in the past.

KEY FINDING: Workshops for school staff must start with where they are currently at and focus on and around their individual strengths and priorities. Empowering school leaders to shape how the CAS Framework could be implemented in their setting improves enthusiasm and engagement.



Figure 4: Quotes from head teachers during the schools' workshop.

KEY FINDING: The failure of schools to address the 'social environment' prior working with CAS was a recurring and significant barrier to whole-school physical activity.

Engaging schools as a key stakeholder in the neighbourhood steering group asset mapping worked well. This added an extra tier of expertise with local sports clubs, community organisations and other, less tangible assets such as skills and resources discussed. It also initiated links between schools and other stakeholders within the local community. For example, one school discussed opening beyond schools hours to support the needs of the local community.

Strategy development

Process

The next phase of the pilot was to work with school leaders and their designated JU:MP Implementation Lead staff member to develop bespoke action plans. These were required to be thematic in the first instance. After an initial one-to-one meeting, broad areas were identified which required short-, medium- and long-term outcomes to be determined. Following this, internal individual school action plans were developed over a one month period, using templates which they felt comfortable with (see Figure 5). Support from the JU:MP team was available to complete this task if required. Submission of a completed and approved action plan resulted in the transfer of funds for year one from JU:MP.

On reflection, while schools usually preferred to use their own templates, several requested support for this task. It would aid the process if a generic planning template was available for schools that need additional guidance.

KEY FINDING: *While it was sometimes difficult to transpose themes and actions onto different templates, in general, schools felt most comfortable using ones they were familiar with. This also aided with embedding the CAS plan with other plans throughout the school, ensuring that it didn't sit in isolation.*

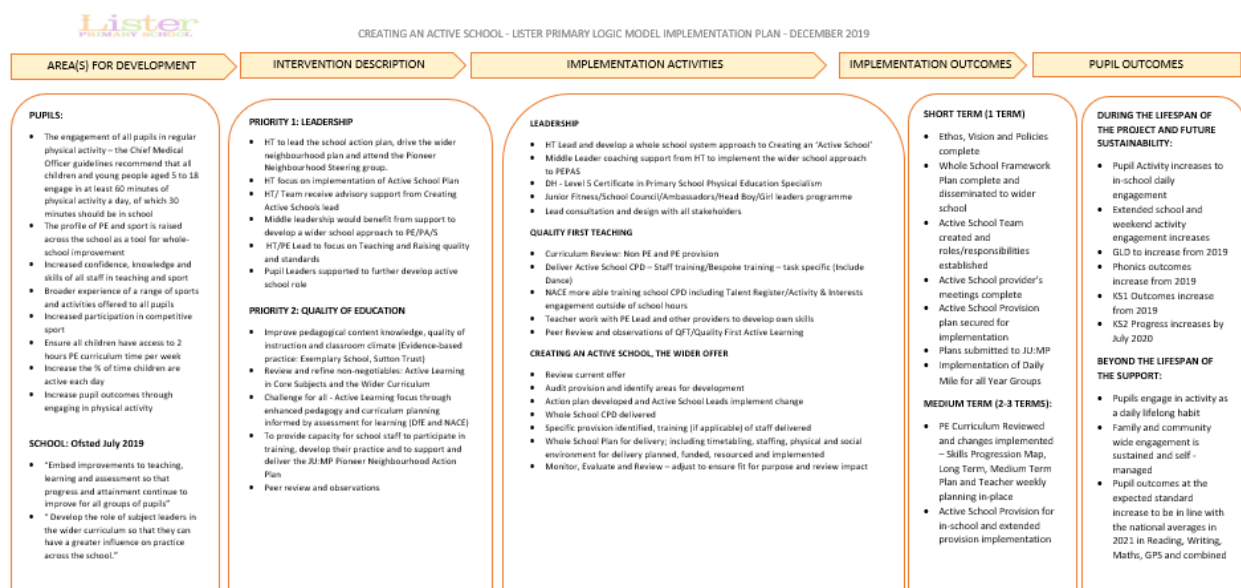


Figure 5: Extract of a CAS Framework implementation action plan. Credit: Lister Primary School.

Challenges

As previously discussed, several schools still found it difficult to write plans that incorporated physical activity into their whole-school strategy. On submission, several were rejected for being too operational and not taking a whole-school approach. This was perhaps compounded by tight time scales that provided challenges. The largest proportion of the work took place during the second half of the Autumn term and clashed with Christmas performances and holidays.

KEY FINDING: Establish short deadlines at a strategic point in the academic year to limit pressures on schools.

During one-to-one meetings with school leaders, it was clear that in many schools, PE subject leaders had been asked to co-write and implement plans. In many cases this led to a bias towards sport and further discussions about who would take responsibility for broader opportunities for physical activity.

KEY FINDING: Responsibility for physical activity should be with a senior member of staff. Similar to the SENDCo role in many schools, leadership experience and an understanding of strategy are essential skills to implement the CAS Framework.

Successes

School staff were empowered by the support from the JU:MP schools team and the autonomous approach. The feeling of ownership supported a stronger embedding of the plans within the school system. It was felt that this would more likely lead to long-term, sustainable change. In addition, the action plans enable JU:MP to hold schools to account for their pledges to change. Further enhanced by the threat to withhold funding, actions are more likely to be followed through if schools believe they will be checked and challenged.

Evidence of initial impact

During the school workshops, head teachers were observed discussing gaps within their current provision. These were made clear by placing sticky notes describing current provision on poster-sized copies of the framework (see Figure 6). This task identified that the majority (12 out of 13 schools) focussed their provision on the seven opportunities (see figure 5), failing to identify factors within the physical and social environments, the five stakeholder roles and policy/vision. This suggests that the majority of schools fail to take a strategic approach to implementing whole-school approaches to physical activity. This strongly justifies the need for the CAS Framework to drive whole-school change.



Figure 6: Example of intervention-level only physical activity provision.

Within the initial school workshop, it was evident that the majority of schools failed to identify the positioning of physical activity at the strategic level. The framework task facilitated detailed conversations about how and where physical activity may appear in school mission and vision statements, and in some cases resulted in immediate simple changes to school rules. For example, one head teacher introduced a new school rule; 'Be active' (see Figure 7). Another added a new box, 'Opportunities to be active', on the schools generic lesson planning template. These small changes to behaviour could be considered 'nudges', as referenced in behavioural insights theory (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008), and while we don't currently have quantitative evidence that this has increased physical activity in pupils, it does clearly show that behaviours across schools are being modified to enable more physical activity to take place.



Figure 7: One school added 'Be Active' to their school rules.

At the end of the initial workshop, head teachers and CAS school leads were asked to reflect on the Framework and the workshop process. All of the feedback was positive, with participants reflecting on importance of reflective practice and the way the Framework facilitated this (Figure 8). In addition, one head teacher commented on the transferability of the Framework to support other strategic priorities within the school commenting that “if you removed the word active, you could replace it with other school priorities”. This comment shows the power and acceptability of the CAS Framework in driving systems change for physical activity, but also, the use of the Framework to support the planning and implementation of other areas of strategic importance.

“Engaging in the active schools framework has been such an enlightening experience. Understanding that to achieve academically you must have great physical, social and emotional wellbeing is really important.” *Head teacher*



Figure 8: Head teacher quote on the effectiveness of the CAS workshop.

All schools involved in the Pioneer Phase of the pilot project were expected to submit a report each term summarising impact against their action plan objectives. Unfortunately, the first submission deadline coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and very few plans were submitted. No pressure was put on schools to meet the deadline as we believed they would have other, more significant challenges at this time. The decision was also taken to put all school implementation work on pause until schools were able to return fully in September. However, some schools are demonstrating early impact from their initial plans.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of schools have taken the opportunity to upgrade their campus with JU:MP investment to promote physical activity. One school has purchased a suite of bikes and built a mountain bike pump track. Recently, this school has been voted winners of the Yorkshire PE and Sport Premium Active School Award.

From the termly reports which were received, it is evident that schools are actioning some of the 'quick wins', such as purchasing equipment and developing the physical environment. There is significant evidence to suggest that whole-school behaviour change has taken place in many schools and it is expected that these changes will continue to develop over a longer period of time.

JU:MP Schools Approach Autumn 2020 to Summer 2021

It is recognised that the key focus in the Autumn term for Pioneer Phase schools will be how they support children, staff and their local communities through the continuing COVID-19 pandemic as they return to school in September. As highlighted throughout the pandemic, physical activity and play (and the related benefits), are so important for children's development, but schools will need support in finding new and creative ways to deliver physical activity for all children through the coming months. This needs to be positioned in such a way that they can see clearly how children's physical and mental wellbeing is an essential component of any "recovery" curriculum being put into place.

With this in mind, and following year one experiences with the Pioneer schools highlighted in this report, the capacity of the JU:MP CAS school improvement lead has been increased to four days. This will not only provide invaluable support and capacity to Pioneer Phase schools as they adapt and reshape their plans in year two, but will also ensure planning for the Accelerator Phase schools addresses the challenges and builds on the successes achieved to date.

Key areas for support of both phases include;

- Ensuring time is taken to understand each school's wider school improvement priorities, so initial engagement is increased and these areas can then be factored into planning around the CAS Framework. Whilst the use of physical activity will be a key driver in implementation, the Framework can then be used to address wider healthy childhood initiatives, (e.g. mental health, obesity) with schools individually and collectively.
- Redefining the planning, monitoring and evaluation methods with schools to ensure greater consistency and accountability. By standardising this aspect of implementation, the impact of interventions across schools can be more easily determined and best practice can be identified and shared. Schools can also commission bespoke support (either individually or collectively) to address shared themes that have developed from using the Framework.
- Supporting and constructively challenging schools on current use of funding streams (PESSPA, JU:MP, Pupil Premium, etc.), and finding ways at school- and area-levels to maximise the outcome from these and ensuring long-term sustainability.
- Ensuring the "profile" of JU:MP is raised in schools, so that all stakeholders are fully aware of the aims and interventions in place to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- Planning towards the development of a web portal to provide a Creating Active Schools toolkit to support the work within Bradford and at a local- and national-level has begun. JU:MP, together with partner organisations, Yorkshire Sport Foundation and the University of Bradford, are seeking funding to support this development.

References

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Thaler and Sunstein (2008) *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness*

Appendix 1- Initial engagement letter to schools

Dear (*HT name*)

We would like to invite your (*name*) school to be part of the Bradford Local Delivery Pilot, a £3 million Sport England programme led by Born in Bradford that aims to test approaches to helping children and families be more active. See information attached

As part of the programme we aim to resource and support schools to be more active places as evidence shows this can improve children's educational attainment, behaviour, mental wellbeing and physical health.

We have identified the three neighbourhoods as having potential for a whole systems approach to physical activity and as such we are inviting 3 - 5 primary schools in the area to be part of the research programme. Resource of at least £(*TBC*) per school will be available and we would like to work collaboratively to develop and support a bespoke action plan for your school and the local area. Born in Bradford have academics with expertise in the field of physical activity and you will be part of a world leading research project.

If you are interested to find out more please let us know when suits to meet at your earliest convenience.

Best wishes