



Impact Report

Changing the conditions so
more people can be active



2025/26

Reflections from 2025–26



Changing the conditions so more people can be active

Adults in Somerset are significantly more active than they were a decade ago, and inactivity continues to fall. In 2015–16, 62.5% of adults were active and 24.5% were inactive. By 2024–25, activity had risen to 68% and inactivity had dropped to 20.6%. This progress reflects sustained commitment of individuals and organisations throughout the Somerset system - from community organisations and sports clubs to health and wellbeing professionals – who not only encourage people to be more active but also work to create environments in which individuals can thrive.

During 2025–26, SASP built on this momentum by supporting children, young people and adults to be active in ways that work for them. Alongside delivering activity in schools and communities, we strengthened health and wellbeing pathways and played an increasingly influential role within the wider system. Working with partners across health, local government, education and the voluntary and community

sector, our focus has shifted from what we deliver to what needs to be true for physical activity to thrive beyond individual programmes.

This work sits within a wider national and local shift that recognises physical activity as fundamental to prevention, wellbeing and resilience. The NHS 10 Year Health Plan and Somerset's Director of Public Health Annual Report both place physical activity at the heart of improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities. At the same time, Sport England's place based investment has enabled deeper, longer term work focused on changing conditions rather than delivering programmes alone. Conditions of change have been the golden thread for SASP in 2025–26, guiding how we act as an enabler and connector, bring partners together, support shared leadership and align strategy, delivery and lived experience so that physical activity and wellbeing can thrive over the long term.



SASP provide
real world experience and
system insight that genuinely
supports our work. They help
connect initiatives rather than
running things in isolation.

Maria Heard

**Deputy Director of Research
& Innovation, NHS Somerset**



Our Conditions of Change

Our golden thread



Foundations:

1. Barriers and enablers:

Do we understand what supports or gets in the way of activity in this place?

Coastal Place Partnership used Conversations about the Coast and community meetings, to understand how confidence, access and local context affect activity for people in their places.

2. Capacity and capability:

Are people able to work together across roles and organisations?

Club for All training supported volunteers and club leaders to develop inclusive practice, shared language and confidence, strengthening their ability to work collaboratively with partners and support people facing additional barriers.

3. Organisations:

Do organisational structures and processes allow adaptation and collaboration?

Active Place Team brought together a team of three organisations co-developed shared practices and processes to support families in Bridgwater.

Ways of working:

4. Leadership:

Is leadership shared across the system, rather than held by one organisation?

Shared leadership across school and college partnerships enabled staff and young leaders to design, deliver and lead activity within events and programmes, rather than relying on SASP or a single delivery lead.

5. Collaboration:

Are organisations aligning around shared goals rather than working in isolation?

Community Appointment Days brought assessment, advice and onward support into a single setting, improving access and reducing the number of separate appointments people needed to navigate.

6. Community-led:

Are local people shaping priorities and action in their community?

Falls prevention work in Porlock was shaped by local residents and partners, ensuring activity reflected community priorities and built on existing assets rather than externally designed solutions.

Settings:

7. Culture:

Is physical activity seen as part of everyday life and wellbeing?

Our weekly adult social sport offer uses a community based, inclusive approach, which helped normalise movement as part of everyday life rather than something only for confident or already active people.

8. Environments:

Do local environments support people to move and be active?

Somerset Health Walks provided accessible routes, trained leaders and welcoming meeting points, making walking feel safe, social and achievable for people of different ages and abilities.

Embedding Learning:

9. Learning:

Are we using learning to change how work is delivered?

Jump and Thrive test and learn embedded learning into delivery, which allowed the team to adapt quickly when conditions are not right.



Somerset Coastal Partnership

Changing conditions in place, not just delivering programmes

Across the Somerset coastal strip, including Bridgwater and West Somerset, communities face persistent inequalities linked to health, access, safety, transport and connection. Local organisations, statutory services and community groups have long been working hard in these places, often with strong intent but limited alignment. Physical activity featured in many plans, but rarely in ways that reflected everyday life or felt realistic for people facing multiple pressures.

Over time, it became clear that delivering more programmes was not enough. Activity offers alone could not overcome the conditions that shaped whether people felt safe, welcome or able to take part. Work was often fragmented across systems, with short term funding, limited shared learning and decision making that sat away from communities. Without changing the underlying conditions in a place, progress remained uneven and difficult to sustain.

The Somerset Coastal Place Partnership was created to respond to this challenge by working differently. Rather than starting

with services, the partnership focuses on changing the conditions in a place so that being active becomes a supported and sustained part of everyday life. Working across health, local government, education, the voluntary and community sector and locally trusted organisations, almost £1.5m of investment from Sport England is being used to build distributed leadership, strengthen trust between partners and embed learning into decision making. A core feature of this approach has been the use of shared insight and community voice. Conversations about the Coast combined face to face engagement, surveys, polling and children and young people's voice to build a deeper understanding of what matters locally, directly shaping priorities and strategic decisions.

This way of working has created space for partners to align action around shared local priorities and respond more flexibly to community need. Locally embedded roles and co designed approaches have enabled test and learn activity in real places. In Porlock, co design has supported the community to



Coastal Place Partnership

'Enabling active lives for all across our local places'

shape solutions with partners around falls prevention. In Bridgwater, the Active Place Team has worked relationally alongside families and local partners to test how trusted, wraparound support can change the conditions that shape everyday life. Nine Locally Trusted Organisations are now embedded within the partnership, helping to ground action in community relationships and lived experience, while a leadership cohort of 37 people is building shared capability and confidence across the system.

Building on the work of the Sport England Coastal place-based place partnership, we have also developed a universal place programme with a focus on Yeovil. Yeovil was identified to having significant inequalities relating to physical activity, and our work so far has focussed on understanding the barriers and enablers to physical activity for people who live there.

**£1.5
million**



Invested by
**SPORT
ENGLAND**

9

Locally Trusted
Organisations

Positive experiences for children and young people

Changing conditions early in life



We are shifting from individual activities towards the conditions that shape how children experience movement: whether it feels possible, welcoming and something they want to return to, to create more positive experiences for our children and young people.

We are leading with connection and relationships, so movement feels possible.

Rather than starting with sport or physical activity, our work now leads with connection, trust and feeling safe, recognising that movement only becomes meaningful when children feel it is for them. This relational approach has been particularly important for those least likely to be active, including children with negative experiences of PE or sport, where movement is framed as supportive and regulating rather than performative.

Jump Start, mentoring and wraparound care, supported hundreds of young people through trust based relationships that prioritised readiness and confidence before participation. At scale, the same principles

were applied through holiday provision. Over 5,000 children were reached during school holidays through HAF, with delivery designed around enrichment, welcome and belonging rather than attendance alone. This helped maintain positive experiences of activity at times when inequalities often widen, showing that relationship led approaches can work at scale without losing quality or intent.

This way of working has also been supported through our work with schools, where the School Games network and SGOs remain a vital route into education. While events continue to play a role, SGOs have increasingly been used as connectors and influencers within schools, supporting relationships with staff and creating opportunities to share wider messages about inclusion, confidence and positive experiences. Touchpoints such as School Games activity and the county PE and School Sport Conference have provided important moments to engage school staff, share learning and reinforce a shared approach that values belonging and readiness.

We are using physical literacy and test and learn approaches to shape practice and influence the system.

Physical literacy has become a practical lens for shaping how work is designed and delivered, rather than a technical model to be taught. The framing of think, feel, move and connect has supported practitioners to adapt their approach based on what a child or setting needs most, often leading with connection or emotional safety and using movement as a tool for regulation and engagement. This has helped physical activity fit naturally into wider goals such as wellbeing, education and employability.

Jump and Thrive has been a test and learn this year, where small cohorts of pupils in Bridgwater were supported through relational mentoring and short, flexible movement interventions designed to help them regulate and re engage with learning. Across the year, this work generated over 1,500 recorded moments of learning about what helped children calm, reconnect and return to class, allowing approaches to adapt quickly in response to real need. In some cases, partnerships were paused or reshaped where the right conditions were not in place, reinforcing that culture, trust and readiness mattered more than delivery alone.



18,000+

**Children and young
people engaged**

5,000+

Children reached
through HAF

622



Young
people in
leadership
roles

12

Schools
supported
with in
depth CPD



We are still working at scale, but using scale to change conditions rather than just increase participation.

A consistent theme across the year has been the distinction between volume and impact. Rather than assuming that more sessions lead to more participation, the focus has been on designing activity around children's needs, delivering in places they already trust and prioritising voice, choice and belonging. Scale has been intentionally used to widen access and normalise positive experiences, while keeping the emphasis on conditions rather than numbers alone.

This is reflected in both reach and depth. Across the year, more than 18,000 children and young people were engaged through a mix of universal and targeted provision. Over 600 young people took on leadership roles, shifting experiences from passive participation to active contribution and ownership. Schools and community



Leaders in the leadership cohort

settings were supported through professional development and shared learning, helping staff embed movement into everyday practice rather than relying on standalone events. Holiday provision continued to act as a key lever for equity, while targeted programmes for the least active demonstrated how relational approaches at small scale can generate learning that influences wider system practice.

“SASP staff are reliable, consistent and predictable mentors. Those relationships develop quickly and make a real difference.”

Wendy Foreman

Professional Practitioner, Somerset Youth Justice Team



“

Voice:

When we
let the children
choose the activity,
participation doubled

Wraparound Lead

”

“

Choice:

Having a choice
makes such a
difference to his
engagement

School staff

”

“

Belonging:

This is my favourite
place after school

Child

”

Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Barriers and enablers

By leading with relationships, safety and readiness, this work has built a clearer understanding of why movement did not feel possible for some children and what helps them re engage. Test and learn approaches have generated practical insight into when, where and how activity feels welcoming.

Capacity and capability

Shared ways of working, including the use of physical literacy as a common lens, have increased confidence across mentors, schools, wraparound staff and community providers to work together in consistent, relational ways.

Leadership

Leadership and voice have been prioritised, with many children moving to active contribution. This has strengthened confidence, ownership and a sense of belonging.

Culture

Movement is increasingly understood as part of everyday wellbeing, education and early help, rather than as a standalone activity. This has helped normalise physical activity as supportive, inclusive and relevant.

Learning

Iterative, test and learn approaches have embedded learning into delivery, allowing programmes and partnerships to adapt quickly when conditions are not right.



Neighbourhood working in Bridgwater

Changing power dynamics through connection and shared ownership

In Bridgwater, a wide range of organisations, professionals and community leaders have long been working to support children, families and communities. Many had strong influence and deep local knowledge, but this influence was not always visible or connected across the system. Decisions were often shaped by who held funding, formal authority or programme ownership, rather than by lived experience or local leadership.

Traditional ways of working risked reinforcing these power dynamics. When activity or support was framed as something to be added into existing provision, ownership tended to sit with the organisation commissioning or delivering it. This limited collaboration, reduced community voice and created dependency on funding or individual relationships. Without intentionally addressing power, coordination could happen, but shared ownership rarely did.

Through place based neighbourhood working in Bridgwater, SASP deliberately

shifted its role from lead deliverer to connector and honest broker. Rather than positioning physical activity as an intervention to insert, conversations were reframed to recognise partners' influence, reach and leadership within their own systems. As Connect Somerset Champion, SASP convened regular neighbourhood meetings that brought together education, VCSE, health, local authority and community leadership. The focus moved beyond coordination towards building trust, surfacing shared priorities and enabling partners to lead collectively, without creating dependency on SASP funding or ownership. In 2025–26, five neighbourhood meetings were convened, with participation growing to around 40 people from more than 30 organisations. Over time, the work has shifted from information sharing to shared ownership. Early signals include increased trust between partners, clearer understanding of place, and greater alignment around what matters locally. Activity has started to happen not because it was commissioned or delivered, but because

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“This work feels different – it’s about trust, relationships and shared ownership, not just delivering another programme.”

**Neighbourhood
partner reflection,
Bridgwater**

”

“

At its heart, Connect Somerset puts the people of Bridgwater first; ensuring that their needs, voices, and experiences guide the work being done. It remains consistently focused on creating positive outcomes for the community and strengthening the support available to local residents.”

**Neighbourhood
partner reflection,**

”



confidence, connection and coordination have improved. Partners increasingly describe the work as relational, locally grounded and different from programme led approaches.

Learning from Bridgwater has reinforced the importance of addressing power dynamics intentionally. Acting as a connector and honest broker creates space for communities and partners to lead in ways that feel

authentic and sustainable. This learning is shaping how SASP engages across places, with greater emphasis on recognising existing influence, connecting people into wider networks, and supporting leadership without creating dependency.



Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Barriers and enablers

By shifting away from programme-led delivery towards relationship building, the work reduces structural barriers such as funding dependency and creates enablers through trust, connection and shared understanding of place.

Leadership

Leadership shows up as distributed and locally rooted, with partners and community voices increasingly shaping direction rather than relying on SASP to lead.

Collaboration

Collaboration has deepened from simple coordination to shared ownership, where partners align around common priorities and act together.

Community-led

Community-led approaches are strengthened by valuing lived experience and local insight, ensuring that decisions and activity reflect what matters to people in Bridgwater.

Learning

Ongoing reflection on power, relationships and what feels different in practice is shaping how SASP and partners adapt their approach, using Bridgwater as a live example to inform wider place-based work.

Increasing community activity

Changing conditions so activity fits real lives



Across our communities, we have focused on strengthening the conditions for adults to be active in ways that feel relevant, welcoming and make activity part of everyday life.

We've expanded our inclusive environments for people to be active

We have increased physical activity opportunities through large scale community participation offers. A key part of this has been designing community activity that feels familiar, informal and non judgemental. The In It Together Social Netball League is operating at capacity, with 40 teams and around 440–450 women and girls participating, alongside a growing pool of trained umpires.

Through weekly adult social sport, including badminton, yoga and park yoga, football, rounders, multi sports and workplace games, 1,497 people engaged in regular activity. These offers were intentionally local and non competitive, providing accessible entry

points for people who do not identify with traditional sport. Participants consistently valued the welcoming atmosphere, accessibility and social connection as much as the activity itself.



**People attending the
NGB / Active Partnerships
Connect event**

We've learned that where activity takes place can be as important as what is offered. By partnering with libraries in Frome, Yeovil, Taunton and Bridgwater, we engaged 30 disabled and non disabled participants in physical activity. Sessions were not disability specific, but person centred, shaped around knowing people, offering choice and making small adjustments. For many, the familiarity of the space reduced anxiety and removed barriers before they arrived, helping people feel part of something social and connected without being singled out.



**Women and girls participating
in 'In It Together Social Netball
League', 40 teams entered**



**Celebrating
10 years of the beach
wellness**

1,497

**Individuals engaged in
weekly adult social
sport sessions**



How Move to Include has changed the conditions for disabled people in Somerset

Our insight showed that signposting alone was not enough to support disabled people into community activity, and that providing training to sports clubs in isolation did not always give providers the confidence to adapt their practice. This led us to Move to Include: a package of support, which includes support for individuals with a learning disability and or autism into community activity that reflects their interests and needs, and support for clubs and providers to adapt their practice. The impact has been significant. Families report increased confidence that community groups can meet their children's needs, individuals are now attending independently, social connections have strengthened, and many people describe feeling part of community life rather than separate provision. Molly's story brings this change to life.

Molly's story 

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-s2W9kAwJk>

We've invested in connection and collaboration across the system

Much of our focus this year has been about joining up what already exists and helping partners see the whole picture. We brought together 77 people from Active Partnerships and National Governing Bodies for the South West NGB and Active Partnerships Connect event, strengthening relationships and shared learning.

31

Individuals from 23 organisations in the Disability Network

At a local level, neighbourhood level convening has played an increasing role in strengthening shared ownership and coordination. In Bridgwater, five neighbourhood meetings were held during the year through Connect Somerset, with the most recent bringing together 40 people from over 30 organisations spanning community groups, voluntary organisations, health, education and local services. As explored earlier in the Bridgwater neighbourhood working story, these sessions created a shared understanding of local need and supported more joined up, trust based approaches to supporting communities. Alongside this, we established the Disability Network to support more coordinated, confident and shared approaches to inclusion across the system. The development and early learning from this work is explored further in the Disability Network story later in the report.

Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Barriers and enablers

Targeted engagement and local insight helped identify practical and emotional barriers to activity, shaping where and how community provision was offered.

Capacity and capability

Community organisations, volunteers and partners worked together to support people through trusted, relationship led approaches.

Collaboration

Partnership working across community organisations and local services reduced duplication and strengthened shared ownership.

Culture

Community based, inclusive approaches helped normalise movement as part of everyday life rather than something only for confident or already active people.



Disability Network – from individual champions to shared responsibility

Building inclusive systems, not relying on individuals

Across Somerset, disabled people, families and organisations have long been working to improve access to physical activity. Much of this effort sat with a small number of committed individuals who held relationships, knowledge and confidence within their own organisations.

This reliance on individual champions created fragility across the system. Pathways into activity were inconsistent, confidence varied widely between providers, and learning was rarely shared across organisations. Disabled people were trying to find something right for them, and signposting was not giving them the support they needed to navigate the offers available.

The Disability Network was created to provide a shared space for organisations, professionals and people with lived experience to learn and work together. Rather than delivering new activity, the focus was on building relationships,



sharing practice, challenging assumptions and strengthening confidence across the system. The network brought together local authority teams, disability organisations and delivery partners to explore common challenges, clarify pathways and develop a shared understanding of inclusive practice. From the outset, the intention was to move inclusion from being owned by individuals to being held collectively.

The network now brings together 31 individuals from 23 organisations, creating

a consistent forum for learning, problem solving and alignment. Early learning shows improved clarity about roles and pathways, increased confidence among providers to adapt their practice, and stronger connections between organisations that had previously worked in isolation. Rather than relying on informal knowledge held by a few individuals, partners are beginning to coordinate approaches and share responsibility for inclusion, for example they are already exploring how SASP's new booking system can better direct people





with disabilities to services. While still early, this represents a shift towards more resilient, system wide ownership.

Learning from the Disability Network highlights that early stage networks need active nurturing to sustain momentum. Initial energy can fade if ownership or action sits with a single organisation. The work has reinforced the importance of distributing leadership, clarifying shared purpose and supporting partners to take on visible roles between meetings. This learning is shaping how the network will continue to develop, with greater emphasis on co ownership, shared action and ongoing connection. The Disability Network shows that inclusive systems are built through trust, relationships and shared learning over time.

The Disability Network is at the start of its journey, but by focussing on multiple conditions of change, such as those below, we hope it will become sustainable over time.

Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Barriers and enablers

By bringing organisations together in one space, the network reduces reliance on informal knowledge and strengthens clearer, more accessible pathways into activity.

Collaboration

Collaboration is becoming more intentional and consistent, with partners moving from working in isolation to sharing practice, solving problems together and aligning their approaches.

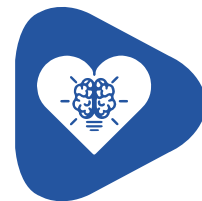
Culture

Culture is shifting from inclusion being championed by a few individuals to being seen as a shared responsibility, with growing confidence and commitment across the system to embed inclusive practice.



Connecting with health and wellbeing

Changing conditions in health and care systems



Our focus this year was on embedding physical activity within health and care systems so that movement supports prevention, recovery and independence. By aligning health pathways, community support and physical activity, this work strengthened the conditions that make it easier for people living with health conditions to be active.

We have increased physical activity through sustained, system embedded health pathways

We've been shifting physical activity from something people are advised to do, to something that is actively built into health and care pathways. We have sustained and grown delivery through ProActive, with over 1,700 referrals and over 440 people completing their programme, alongside an expanded provider network across Somerset. Enhanced Access has further supported people on low incomes, with over 700 referrals into free or low cost community classes across PCN areas. In parallel, pathfinder pathways (e.g. MSK,

women's health and condition specific offers) are becoming more embedded in primary and secondary care, with exploration of new delivery through community hospital settings.

Move 2 Independence supports people with getting back to living well at home, following recent discharge from hospital. This year, Move 2 Independence received 696 referrals, with 582 accepted. Through this programme, we've seen how framing physical activity as part of recovery and independence has had a huge impact on people: Participants reported a 123 percent increase in confidence to access physical activity, with 97 percent engaging in strength and balance exercises and 98 percent reporting progress towards their goals.

By embedding movement within discharge, therapy and recovery pathways, we've strengthened conditions where physical activity supports prevention and independence over time, rather than relying on individuals to navigate complex systems alone.

Move 2 Independence (M2I)

696

Referrals

123%

Increase in
confidence to access
physical activity

97%

Participating in
strength and
balance exercises

Eileen's story

<https://www.sasp.co.uk/news?item=/story/supporting-people-to-live-well-at-home>



Theresa's story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYho1r2Wow0>



705

Participants

Community
Appointment
Days (CAD)



We've strengthened joint working across health, community and voluntary systems

We've intentionally tried to improve how different parts of the system work together around physical activity and wellbeing, by aligning hospitals, primary care networks, community organisations and activity providers. This has helped to reduce fragmentation between advice, referral and ongoing support, helping people move more smoothly between services.

705 people attended Community Appointment Days (CADs), which brought assessment, advice and onward support into a single setting, improving access and reducing the number of separate appointments people needed to navigate. Development work also began on additional CADs focused on pain and women's health, showing this approach is being adapted rather than remaining static.

We supported system learning and capability. Forty one networking and learning opportunities were provided for healthcare, allied health and community professionals, alongside five cascade tutor training sessions focused on pain management, helping them to connect, develop shared understanding and build confidence in using physical activity as part of care.

We have taken a test and learn approach to meeting community need by working closely with health partners and communities. This includes work with a GP through long term health conditions, exploring who is interested, what people want, and how support should be shaped from a community perspective rather than assumed demand.

Suicide prevention mentor support programme (16–25)



Supported

Professional networking & learning opportunities



Opportunities provided or supported for healthcare, allied health and community professionals to meet, network and gain learning



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“Bringing the community and healthcare together has had a positive impact on supporting self management and people’s experience.”

Simon Ingram

**MSK Consultant Physiotherapist,
Somerset NHS Foundation Trust**

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Falls prevention in care homes

1

Falls prevention
project delivered

4

Care homes
engaged

We've created a culture where wellbeing and physical activity are part of everyday care

Connecting with health has helped position physical activity as a normal, valued part of care, recovery and wellbeing. This is evident across falls prevention work in care homes, suicide prevention mentor support for young people aged 16 to 25, and group clinics such as THRIVE delivered through North Sedgemoor Primary Care Network (PCN). In each case, physical activity is framed as a tool for wellbeing, confidence and resilience.

Primary care based health coaching further extended this work. Health coaches supported 899 referrals in Bridgwater PCN, alongside 26 groups delivered, with additional delivery reaching 188 people in West Somerset PCN and 330 people in Taunton Deane West PCN. This blended one to one support, group activity and peer connection, reinforces physical activity as part of wider wellbeing support.

Together, these examples show a shift in culture. Physical activity is increasingly seen by professionals and people as something that belongs within health and care systems, supporting everyday wellbeing rather than sitting outside them.

Health coaching delivery (by PCN area)

Bridgwater PCN:



Referrals



Groups delivered

West Somerset PCN:



Supported

Taunton Deane West PCN:



Supported

Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Barriers and enablers

Targeted services such as Move 2 Independence, Community Appointment Days and PCN based health coaching helped identify barriers linked to confidence, health status, recovery and life transitions, shaping when and how physical activity support was offered.

Capacity and capability

Workforce training, cascade tutor models, mentoring and networking opportunities supported health professionals, community providers and volunteers to work confidently and consistently around physical activity as part of health and wellbeing support.

Collaboration

Closer alignment between hospitals, primary care networks, community organisations and activity providers reduced fragmentation and improved continuity across referral, recovery and community support pathways.

Culture

Embedding movement within discharge, rehabilitation, mental health, falls prevention and long term condition support helped position physical activity as a normal and valued part of health, recovery and everyday care.



Developing more active environments

Changing conditions in environments, not just programmes



During 2025–26, SASP's work to develop more active environments focused on changing the physical, organisational and relational conditions that influence how easy it is for people to move in their everyday lives.

We've made everyday environments easier and safer to move in

We've been reducing the physical and social barriers that shape whether people feel able to move in their everyday lives. We have done this by improving local environments that enable everyday movement, particularly for children and families. Through School Streets, five schools are now fully operational, creating safer, calmer environments at drop off and pick up times. This supports increased walking, scooting and cycling to school and reduces barriers linked to traffic safety, contributing to more positive and inclusive daily activity opportunities.

We have strengthened the local conditions that make being active possible and visible

We have continued to invest in stable, accessible local infrastructure that enables people to be active as part of everyday life. Countywide offers such as Somerset Health Walks contribute to creating everyday environments where people feel confident to be active. Using a strong volunteer base, providing clear information, familiar meeting points and well established routes, Health Walks help reduce uncertainty and fear, particularly for people living with long term health conditions, isolation or lower confidence. More detail on Health walks can be found in our story later in the report.



School Streets fully operational



Additional site development

Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Environments

Work on School Streets, neighbourhood routes and accessible local spaces helped reduce environmental barriers and support everyday movement, particularly for children, families and people with lower confidence..

Leadership

Progress in active environments was strongest where leadership was shared across partners, with SASP acting as an enabler and connector rather than a sole delivery body.

Learning

Learning from Somerset Health Walks informed how the programme has adapted over time. Feedback from walkers has led to clearer meeting points, improved online information, more locations, and greater choice in walk levels.



Somerset Health Walks – 30 years of walking, wellbeing and connection

What sustained conditions for activity look like

On a Tuesday morning in Wellington, a group gathers at the same meeting point they have used for years. Some know each other well. Others arrive quietly, unsure what to expect. One woman moved to the area recently and did not know anyone when she first came. Another lives alone and says the walk now gives her a reason to leave the house each week.

“I didn’t know anyone when I started and was made to feel very welcome”

New resident in the area

“It gives me a purpose for Tuesday mornings.”

Lone resident

These walkers are part of Somerset Health Walks, a programme that has been part of everyday life in Somerset for more than 30 years. It is not a one off intervention or a short term project. It is something people return to, week after week, often for years.

For many people, being active is not a question of knowing it is “good for you”. The barriers are more complex. Confidence, loneliness, health conditions, fear of falling behind, unfamiliar places, and a lack of routine all shape whether someone feels able to take part. The type of people walking has shifted over time, and we are seeing a growing proportion who are living with two or more long term health conditions. These people are often least well served by traditional activity offers, and most likely to drop out when activity feels pressurised or unsafe. Without the right conditions in place, walking can easily become something people stop doing, even if they want to continue.

Somerset Health Walks did not respond to this challenge with a single solution. Over

three decades, it has gradually shaped the conditions around walking so that participation feels possible for a wide range of people. Walks are designed to be inclusive and predictable. Clear information is shared about pace, distance and terrain. Walk leaders adapt routes and respond to how people are feeling on the day. There is no pressure to keep up and no expectation that everyone will walk at the same level.

Volunteer walk leaders play a central role. In 2025–26, over 180 volunteer leaders supported the delivery of more than 2,400 walks, welcoming hundreds of new walkers into established groups. Their consistency and care help create trust, which is critical for people who may be anxious about joining something new.

Just as importantly, the programme has not stood still. Feedback from walkers has led to clearer meeting points, improved online

“
There is
absolutely no
pressure to
participate. You’re
always made
welcome
”

“
“They wait for
people to catch up
and never leave
anyone behind.”
”



information, more locations, and greater choice in walk levels. These changes reflect an ongoing cycle of listening, learning and adapting rather than assuming the offer will always work as it is.

We're seeing the impact of this approach, with walkers describing increased confidence, improved mood, and stronger social connections. Many talk about walking becoming part of their routine, something they plan their week around rather than something they have to motivate themselves to do.

We're also seeing longer term change, with improvements in overall fitness, mood and physical function, particularly for people living with long term health conditions. Across measures of physical activity, fewer people report doing no activity at all, and more are active on multiple days per week, including strength and balance activity.

Social impact is just as strong. Walkers consistently describe reduced loneliness and a sense of belonging. 94 percent of walkers saying they would recommend Somerset Health Walks, and almost 80 percent rating it 10 out of 10. Satisfaction has increased over time, suggesting that the programme has become more effective as it has evolved.

Somerset Health Walks would not have achieved this level of sustained impact by focusing on one condition of change alone. Its strength lies in how multiple conditions have been built together over time.

- Understanding what makes activity feel hard or easy has shaped walk design.
- Volunteer leadership has created trust and reliability.
- Physical environments have been used in ways that feel familiar and safe.
- A culture has developed where walking is about wellbeing and connection, not performance.
- Learning has been embedded so the programme continues to adapt rather than staying static.

Thirty years on, Somerset Health Walks shows what can happen when activity becomes part of everyday life, supported by people, places and relationships that work together. It is a reminder that long term change is often quiet, relational and built slowly, but it is also resilient.

“

“I have been a regular Health Walker for over five years now. It has become an important part of my social and exercise routines.”

”

“

“It makes me go out every Tuesday despite the weather.”

”



Supporting and motivating people to move



Changing confidence, motivation and perceptions around physical activity

During 2025–26, our work to support and motivate people to move focused on changing the psychological, social and practical conditions that shape whether people feel able to be active.

We have strengthened system wide capability to support behaviour change

We have invested in system level behaviour change infrastructure to support sustained increases in activity. This includes convening an external behaviour change working group with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Public Health and behaviour scientists, embedding Behaviour Change Development Framework (BCDF) training as mandatory for staff and supporting the Every Move Matters campaign, a shared regional approach to behaviour change messaging, with partners working together through regular meetings and shared media assets.

We also launched the Take The First Step campaign, where communications were designed as a staged journey, supporting people through different points of readiness, from overcoming initial barriers to seeing activity as part of everyday life. This approach was reinforced by insight work and behaviour change development, which improved understanding of what helps people move from intention to action and from short term engagement to habit. We've noticed this development of a system wide behaviour change infrastructure is strengthening how movement conversations happen across settings.

We've used stories and lived experience to sustain motivation

Supporting and motivating people to move also relied heavily on relational approaches. We've had a growing emphasis on storytelling. Participant and programme stories were captured and shared across the year, helping to make physical activity relatable and human, and showing how motivation builds gradually when people feel supported and understood.

We've found that stories and faces generated stronger engagement than generic messages, with a 117% increase in views and a 240% increase in followers on Active Environments content where community stories were used. As a result, motivation work increasingly focused on real experiences, shared journeys and community connection. Channels such as Get Outside in Somerset played an important role here, growing organically as a community identity rather than a short term campaign. This helped normalise movement as something people do together, not something they need to feel confident or sporty to start. These approaches strengthened the condition of local people supporting and motivating each other, rather than relying on individual willpower alone.

SASP main channels:



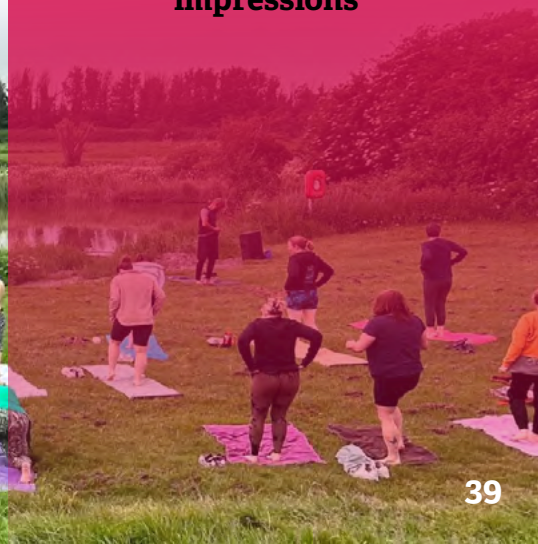
Instagram 54.1k
reached



Facebook 469k views
(300k organic, 168k via ads)
and 103.4k people reached



LinkedIn 15.8k
impressions



We've been reducing the practical barriers that can undermine motivation

The launch of the new SASP website, activity finder and booking system made it easier for people to find opportunities, understand what to expect and take the next step when motivation is high. On launch day alone, almost 3,000 users navigated the booking pages, and the site was designed with a mobile first, accessibility led approach to support ease of use for both individuals and partners.

Communications activity also made deliberate use of seasonal moments and awareness weeks, such as National Walking Month, Mental Health Awareness Week and Volunteers Week, to connect with people when attention and readiness were naturally higher. By aligning behaviour change messages with these moments, motivation was supported in ways that felt timely and relevant rather than forced.



**New website, booking system
and activity finder**

We have used digital infrastructure as a lever for system change

With the full launch in March 2026, the booking system is increasingly operating as shared system infrastructure, supporting access, booking and data consistency across disability partners, Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) providers, health pathways and community organisations, rather than functioning solely as an internal SASP administration tool.

The booking system has added to our Activity Finder, enabling a live, shared infrastructure that community organisations will actively use to publish opportunities, manage availability and connect residents to provision without SASP acting as an intermediary. For example, it supports health to community pathways, enabling referrals and access into provision delivered by PCNs, leisure providers and community partners across the system, rather than SASP only delivery.



**Newsletters as part of
Take The First Step**

Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Culture

Campaigns, storytelling and peer supported programmes helped shift perceptions of physical activity away from performance and towards wellbeing, connection and everyday life.

Barriers and enablers

Insight, behaviour change work and participant feedback improved understanding of the emotional, motivational and social barriers that influence whether people feel able to move.

Learning

Capturing and sharing participant stories, alongside ongoing insight gathering, helped refine messaging and motivational approaches based on what resonated most with people.



Developing leadership, workforce and partnerships



Changing the conditions that sustain impact

Our work to develop leadership, workforce and partnerships focused on strengthening the system: people, skills and relationships needed to sustain physical activity over the long term.

We've created shared learning spaces for collective leadership

Shared learning environments brought people together from across sectors to build trust, challenge assumptions and align around a common direction. In September 2025, we convened over 150 partners from health, education, local government and the voluntary and community sector at our Somerset Moves Strategy Partner Engagement Day.

We intentionally designed the day towards shared responsibility across the system, with a focus on place based and whole system leadership. A keynote from Ken Masser on the power of place invited participants to rethink how leadership shows up locally,

followed by partner led workshops exploring behaviour change, inclusion, storytelling for system impact and embedding physical activity into everyday settings. Structured networking created space for relationships to form and deepen. Learning captured through place evaluation shows that this convening helped build shared language, confidence and momentum, strengthening the conditions for groups and organisations to work together and lead collectively beyond the event itself.



Increasing community activity



Core market
support



Core market
support



Sport welfare
officer

Developing more active environments



Walker leaders trained

Supporting and motivating people to move



Learning In podcasts



We have supported more distributed leadership through accountable body models

We have continued to test and support accountable body approaches that enable distributed leadership and decision making. For example, through the Crisis Resilience Fund, Somerset Council placed funding into an accountable body, which then will lead decisions on distribution. This represents a shift away from centralised control and towards shared leadership. Similarly, Connect Somerset demonstrates distributed leadership in practice even without revenue attached, signalling a wider system shift towards community led approaches, as described in our Neighbourhood working story earlier on.

We've continued to build capacity and capability that can sustain change

We've found that impact is strongest where leadership is supported by adequate capacity, role clarity and continuity. We have started to shift towards sustainability and long term conditions, and have provided training, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), mentoring and workforce development to build capacity and capability across the system. By investing in relationships, capability and learning, and by being explicit about capacity, SASP has supported a system where responsibility for physical activity is held collectively and can endure beyond individual programmes.

Positive experiences for children and young people of all ages



School staff in Special Schools and mainstream settings engaged with CPD opportunities

Connecting with health and wellbeing



Instructors engaged with CPD opportunities for ProActive

Our golden thread

Conditions strengthened here

Capacity and capability

Workforce development, CPD, bursaries and welfare support strengthened the confidence, skills and capacity of instructors, volunteers, school staff and club leaders to work effectively together.

Leadership

Leadership was increasingly shared across clubs, schools, National Governing Bodies and community organisations, with SASP acting as an enabler and connector rather than the sole driver.

Collaboration

Partnership working across education, sport, community and system partners supported alignment, reduced duplication and strengthened collective ownership of physical activity.

Learning

CPD, training programmes, communication and reflective practice helped embed learning across the workforce, supporting continuous improvement and adaptation over time.



What we've learned overall

How the conditions are shifting



This year marks a shift in how we understand impact. Rather than focusing on what was delivered, we have focused on what needs to be true for physical activity to be possible, inclusive and sustained. Some conditions have strengthened, others are still developing, and a small number require deliberate protection.

Progress is most visible where insight and lived experience have shaped design. Community engagement, neighbourhood working and test and learn approaches have improved understanding of what makes activity hard or easy, moving responses away from assumptions and towards real experience.

Joint working has also strengthened. Workers, volunteers and communities are increasingly confident using relational, adaptive approaches, supported by shared language and frameworks. Place based convening has helped partners align around shared priorities rather than working in parallel.

Learning is now more embedded in delivery. Reflection and adaptation are happening alongside action, and physical activity is increasingly understood as part of wellbeing, education, early help and prevention, not a standalone outcome.

Some conditions remain sensitive to capacity and system pressures. Community leadership continues to grow where trust and local roles are in place but is vulnerable to short term funding. Organisational flexibility is uneven, and progress on physical environments remains dependent on wider planning and investment decisions.



Our priorities beyond April 2026

Protecting and strengthening the conditions for change

Looking ahead, our focus is on consolidation rather than expansion. We will deepen conditions that support long term change, including place based working, shared leadership and learning that informs decision making.

Some conditions require protection. Distributed leadership, learning infrastructure and conditions led commissioning need ongoing attention to remain resilient under pressure.

In areas still developing, learning will guide next decisions. Test and learn approaches will continue, and learning will shape the refresh of Somerset Moves, focusing on alignment, shared ownership and clarity of purpose.



Invitation to action

Physical activity sits in everyday life, across services, places and communities. Progress has come from people choosing to work differently together.

As you read this report, we invite you to consider where physical activity already fits within your role and what small shift could make a difference. That might be a conversation you start, a partnership you

strengthen, a decision you approach in a new way, or a space you open for others to lead.

Looking ahead, we will refresh Somerset Moves in 2026 and invite you to be part of it. The refresh will provide a shared framework for continuing to embed physical activity across the system.



Thanks

Thank you to everyone involved in this work: partners across health, local government, education, the voluntary and community sector, locally trusted organisations, community leaders, and the children, young

people and adults who shared their time, insight and trust. This progress has only been possible through your commitment, collaboration and willingness to work differently together.







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