Introduction
Active children become active adults and the children of active adults are, in turn, active. Being active throughout the life course improves health and wellbeing, prevents illness, lifts self-esteem and raises aspirations. Lifestyle choices and opportunities in childhood impact on how we live as adults. We are living in a time of unprecedented levels of overweight and obesity, and too many people are at avoidably high risk of diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Inactivity and income
Inactivity is costing the country approximately £8.3 billion per year. Only one third of our young people, aged under 15, are active at recommended levels, leaving them more likely to get ill and die early. It is not an even picture. Children and families on the lowest incomes are less active and suffer poorer health than others. Indeed, in the last 10 years, the gap between the healthiest and the least healthy has grown. The need to get more children and families active has never been more urgent.
Physical activity is probably the 'best buy' in public health. There are few public health initiatives that have greater potential for improving health and well-being than increasing the activity levels of the population in England.²

**Bigger picture**

But it isn’t just about physical health and wellbeing. Social networks are essential to people’s overall health, and activity is a great ‘uniter’. Doorstep sport has the capacity to address all these factors and therefore impact significantly on both the health of participants and the communities in which they live.

**Every Child and Youth Matters**

When asked what is most important to them, children and young people invariably answer: “having things to do and places to go”. The launch of Every Child Matters in 2004 put children’s health under the spotlight, and it has stayed there since. Investment in play, school and community sport, and active travel to school has followed, with notable successes around the country.

Just as with health inequalities, however, the picture is uneven. Children living in the most disadvantaged areas still have less opportunity than others.

In 2005, Youth Matters set the challenge that every young person aged 13-19 should have more say in what’s available, more things to do and places to go, and more opportunities to volunteer, get advice and access help when they need it. The recognised approach for making all of this happen is partnership working – a fact which makes doorstep sport collaborative projects an ideal mechanism for change.

**What works**

Doorstep sport means physical activity, in all its forms, at a time, a place, a cost (usually free) and in a style that suits young people. It is about getting more young people involved, keeping them coming back and supporting them on a pathway to sustained behaviour change. It’s not just about participation. Young people do come and take part, of course, but then find there are options to volunteer, to train, to lead and to learn. The following examples demonstrate why doorstep sport works as a mechanism for tackling health inequalities.
Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

Example 1 - West Midlands
The StreetGames Heart of Birmingham project is part of the PCT’s response to youth obesity. Launched in January 09 and funded jointly by the Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT and NHS Change4life, the project is delivering over 400 free multi-sport sessions, 296 StreetCheer sessions, several tournaments and festivals, and training for over 100 new coaches. There are new activities for young people with mental health issues and for the hearing impaired. Kevin Haywood, Head of Public Health Programmes, says: “The new NHS Change4life movement encourages people to ‘Eat Well, Move More and Live Longer’. This StreetGames Heart of Birmingham project is already taking great strides towards these objectives by reaching hundreds of inner city young people and engaging them in fun, different, accessible sporting activities, making physical activity part of their everyday lives.”

Example 2 - South West
The Cornwall StreetGames project is managed and delivered by Cornwall and Isles of Scilly PCT. The project aims to encourage all young people to adopt a more healthy lifestyle through becoming more physically active using their local environment. The sessions focus upon fun and enjoyment in order to help individuals make positive lifestyle changes. The impact of doorstep sport on increasing physical activity is obvious but the sessions are also used to convey other key health messages around obesity, healthy eating, smoking cessation etc. “The StreetGames project in Cornwall operates in our areas of greatest health inequalities and has had a huge impact locally encouraging a large number of young people to become more physically active on a regular basis and sustain this activity in the longer term.” Felicity Owen, Director of Public Health, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly PCT.

The need for world class commissioning
By placing greater emphasis on assessing local needs, and prioritising investments to deliver long-term improvements in health outcomes, world class commissioning will be pivotal in reducing health inequalities. For every Primary Care Trust in the country, the Department of Health has calculated the financial cost of an inactive population. Turning that cost into investment will result in massive savings to the health service but the potential benefits go far wider than that. A more active population means a
Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

StreetGames

StreetGames is a national partner of Sport England and a centre of expertise for developing doorstep sport in disadvantaged communities. The charity supports community based sports projects that deliver sport and volunteering opportunities to young people living in the 20% most deprived wards in the UK.

StreetGames works with National Governing Bodies of Sport to establish and develop links between community and mainstream sport. Recognised by the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games Inspire Mark, StreetGames is creating a lasting legacy of doorstep sport in the UK.

Moving forward

To find out more about how doorstep sport can be used to tackle health inequalities, Directors of Public Health should ensure that physical activity is prioritised in local strategic planning and recognised for its impact across the range of health determinants. Commissioning plans for physical activity in areas of high inequalities should also be checked, it could be that doorstep sport interventions are appropriate mechanisms for change.

 Those delivering doorstep sport initiatives should consider contacting the Director of Public Health at their local PCT to try and arrange a meeting and should familiarise themselves with local health priorities, including National Indicators in the Local Area Agreement.

A guide on implementing the 2009 NICE guidelines on Promoting Physical Activity for Children is also available from StreetGames.

Olympic legacy

The UK won the competition to host the 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games on two pillars: first, as a Games for young people; and second, as a Games with a lasting health and participation legacy. The latter has never been formally attempted. We are in new territory but already some great success stories are emerging in local towns and communities. The festival spirit is taking hold, and people are getting involved in activities because they want to feel part of the occasion. For NHS organisations seeking to capitalise on the 2012 legacy potential, doorstep sport projects are ideally positioned to deliver.

Doorstep sport projects are ideal for commissioning; they work to the latest evidence base, follow social marketing principles, are focussed on health outcomes, thrive on partnerships, undertake robust evaluation and, above all, are firmly rooted in the local community.

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