



# Sport



A Home For Lifelong Volunteering

Joint Internal Evaluation Report  
2020-2021



**DfC**

Department  
for Communities

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

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## SECTION 1



# Introduction and Background

The Department for Communities, Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering programme began in 2015 and has continually catered for our clubs, communities and volunteers nationwide. The funding, which is reviewed annually, was extended in 2020 to allow for the delivery of 2020/2021 programme.

*Repeating the successes of previous years, the programme achieved all objectives and targets in 2019/20.*

The continuous hard work and effort by the project officers from all three sports is a testament to the importance of working in partnership and of how effective this can be, not just in a sporting context but also across the voluntary sector and throughout our communities.

Throughout the 12-month period the programme was supported by project officers from each of the three codes:

### Irish FA

**Volunteer Development & Policy Officer:** Michael Carvill

**Club & Community Development Officer:** Gavin Nelson

### Ulster GAA

**Volunteer Development & Policy Officer:**

Ashelene Groogan: 1 April 2020 - 31 July 2020

Pierce Caherty: 1 August 2020 - 28 Feb 2021

Sharon Haughey-Grimley (25 hours pw) and Ashlene Groogan (15 hours pw): 1 March 2021 - present

**Club & Community Development Officer:** Fionntán O'Dowd

### Ulster Rugby

**Volunteer Development & Policy Officer:** Nicci Wilson

**Club & Community Development Officer:** Charlie Farrell

This internal evaluation sets out to summarise the achievements of Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering against the joint project objectives. It also provides some feedback on the highlights and challenges of delivering the programme

The partners would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department for Communities for their support in delivering the programme. On both an individual basis and as a collective, the partners have been able to deliver a wide programme of activities which have empowered and enriched volunteers, broadened their experiences and expanded their opportunities to contribute towards the development of grassroots sport. It is very much appreciated.

## SECTION 2



# Programme Objectives

Form effective partnerships between sporting bodies to provide co-ordinated infrastructure support for volunteering

<b>Steering Panel Meetings</b> Partnership steering panel meetings – minutes and action points recorded	<b>Target partially achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The first steering panel took place on the 27 June 2019 at the Kingspan Stadium</li><li>• A second was scheduled to take place at the end of March but due to the Covid 19 situation it had to be postponed</li></ul>
<b>Strategic Plan</b> Strategic plan with agreed rationale and outcomes	<b>Target achieved</b> <b>Two</b> strategic planning meetings held with Sport Uniting Communities involvement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 9 October 2019 at the National Football Stadium and the 12 March 2020 at the Crowne Plaza, Belfast</li></ul>
<b>Action Plan</b> Agreed action plan which commits partners to work together to deliver actions against agreed priorities and within agreed timescales	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering action plan developed and agreed at steering panel on 27 June 2019</li></ul>
<b>Progress Reporting</b> There is an agreed monitoring framework for the design and collection of data and progress reporting	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Two</b> six-month progress reports were submitted to DfC on Tuesday 29 October 2019 and Friday 27th March 2020</li></ul>
<b>Evaluation and Review</b> There is an agreed evaluation framework to inform the collection, collation and analysis of evidence about programme impact evidence of learning is shared and used to inform improved practice, planning and decision-making	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This report constitutes the evaluation report</li><li>• Format was agreed at DfC at the first steering group meeting on 27 June 2019</li><li>• Two progress reports delivered internally at board level within each code</li><li>• Monitoring framework agreed with DfC (scorecard) at first steering panel meeting on 27 June 2019</li></ul>



## Clubs have enhanced capacity of to recruit, manage and retain volunteers

<p><b>Volunteer Charter</b> Partners review/update the Volunteer Charter on an annual basis reflecting best practice, and disseminate to clubs through sign-up to charter</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer Charter was updated on <b>27 June 2019</b></li> <li>• <b>119</b> clubs signed up to Volunteer Charter</li> </ul>
<p><b>ClubMark Accreditation</b> Partners maintain, regularly review and update accredited quality standards for volunteering in clubs</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retained status as accrediting scheme by Sport NI</li> </ul>
<p><b>ClubMark Accreditation</b> Clubs are supported through the ClubMark process by programme staff</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>37</b> clubs accredited</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lifeline Volunteering Training Programme</b> Key club personnel are provided with the skills to recruit, manage and retain volunteers through a lifelong volunteering training programme</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b> The partnership delivered <b>three</b> bespoke workshops on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Club Planning Webinar: 6 October 2020</li> <li>• Club Fundraising Webinar: 10 November 2020</li> <li>• Making your Funding Application Stronger webinar: 1 December</li> </ul> <p>In total <b>180</b> clubs attended</p>
<p><b>Club Case-Studies</b> Partners document learning and good practice and share in a variety of formats and media</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each code prepared a case-study of a club they have supported through a number of development programmes. These were shared on each code's social media channels in 2020/2021</li> </ul>

## Increased opportunities for volunteering

### Partners to provide volunteering opportunities (including underrepresented groups)

<b>Schools roadshows</b> 120 schools roadshows participants at three events by end of March 2020	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Three</b> schools roadshows delivered: St Louise's Comprehensive College Belfast, St Ronan's College and Banbridge High School</li></ul>
<b>Club placements</b> 60 club placements facilitated by end of March 2020	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>151</b> club placements were facilitated</li></ul>
<b>Governing body placements</b> 300 governing body placements facilitated by end of March 2021	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>649</b> governing body placements facilitated</li></ul>
<b>Inter-organisational placements</b> Due to the postponement of games and the government guidelines for sport, the agreed decision was to facilitate this in 2021 with upcoming matches across all three codes	
<b>Youth forums</b> 60 partner youth forum participants (two forums per code) by end of March 2020	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Irish FA: <b>Two</b> Events with <b>22</b> Volunteers</li><li>• Ulster GAA: <b>Two</b> events with <b>29</b> volunteers</li><li>• Ulster Rugby: <b>Two</b> events with <b>20</b> volunteers</li></ul> <b>71</b> young volunteers engaged
<b>Joint youth forum</b> 2021 125 Young Volunteers attended two events in July 2020 and March 2021	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Multi-Sport Youth Forum was held ahead of National League Game Dublin v Tyrone In Healy Park Omagh 29 February 2020</li></ul> <b>24</b> young volunteers engaged
<b>Respect charter</b> 48 clubs to sign up to joint Inclusion charter by end of March 2020	<b>Target achieved</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>85</b> clubs signed up to the Respect Charter</li></ul>



# Partners recruit and retain volunteers

## Different motivations for volunteering acknowledged and addressed

<p><b>GoldMark log books distributed</b> 300 GoldMark log books distributed to volunteers by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>307</b> log books distributed</li> </ul>
<p><b>GoldMark mentoring</b> 120 volunteers mentored in the GoldMark Programme by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>195</b> volunteers mentored</li> </ul>
<p><b>Engagement programmes</b> 16 engagement programmes for volunteer recruitment by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>30</b> engagement programmes have been implemented</li> </ul>
<p><b>Volunteers showcased</b> 45 volunteer showcase opportunities to be evidenced by the end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>50</b> volunteer opportunities showcased</li> </ul>
<p><b>Volunteer case-studies</b> Three Volunteer Case Studies to be promoted on partner social media with a record of public interactions (hits, likes, shares, retweets etc) by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b> Case-studies were created on the following volunteers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irish FA: Kenny Greenhill, Irish FA Grassroots Leader</li> <li>• Ulster Rugby: Jonathan Reid, Portadown RFC</li> <li>• Ulster GAA: Seamus Mc Kee, Loughinisland GAA</li> </ul>

## Improved support of volunteer support needs

<p><b>Bespoke induction programme</b> 180 volunteers availing of a bespoke induction programme by end of March 2021.</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>776</b> volunteers have attended bespoke induction programmes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mentoring scheme</b> 100 volunteers engaged in mentoring scheme by the end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>144</b> volunteers mentored</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lifelong volunteer training programme</b> Lifelong Volunteer Training programme featuring no fewer than 12 events with 300 club volunteers attending by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>22</b> events have been hosted with <b>495</b> volunteers trained</li> </ul>
<p><b>Multi-sport volunteering forum</b> One multi-sport volunteering forum hosted by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-sport volunteering forum was held on Wednesday 29 April and attended by <b>123</b> volunteers from across <b>84</b> different clubs</li> </ul>
<p><b>E-learning</b> 30 e-learning opportunities made available to volunteers by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>30</b> e-learning opportunities were made available</li> </ul>

## Improved support of volunteer support needs

<p><b>Infographics</b> Two Infographics of high-line delivery developed and shared across all social media channels twice per year by end of March 2021</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Two</b> infographics shared, at board level, steering group presentation and throughout the three codes internal committees</li> </ul>
<p><b>Inclusion in annual report</b> Information to be included in annual reports of all three partners at year end</p>	<p><b>Target achieved</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each partner reported on the findings of the steering panel and progress reports at their respective end of year reports/AGMs</li> </ul>

### **Governing body volunteer recognition event**

Irish FA host McDonald's Awards online with 100 volunteers attending. Ulster Rugby, SONI - Real Rugby Heros: 19 clubs nominated 50 volunteers in three categories. Unable to host event due to Covid-19 restrictions. Ulster GAA had planned on recognising their volunteers at their Ulster Club Championship Finals as in the previous three years, but the competition was cancelled due to Covid restrictions and no GAA competitions had resumed by 31st March to create another opportunity to fulfil this target. It is planned that 2020-2021 volunteers will be recognised at the next available opportunity.

### **GoldMark Awards**

Cancelled due to the current pandemic. Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and the Irish FA reached out to the Minister for Communities alongside players from all sports to create a video to recognise Goldmark volunteers. All certificates were sent electronically to participants.



## HOW MUCH DID WE DO?

Programme events hosted: **30**

- Joint: **9**
- Individual: **21**

**215** sports clubs involved in programme (100 unique clubs) *Target 162*

**3324** volunteers engaged (1547 unique volunteers) *Target 1790*

**513** volunteers recruited *Target 200*

**203** Volunteers recognised/rewarded for their contribution to the programme (120 unique volunteers) *Target 150*

**20** Clubs engaged in management programme/clubmark scheme *Target 20*

**54** Clubs signed up to Respect Charter *Target 48*

**86** Clubs signed up to Volunteer Charter *Target 72*

## HOW WELL DID WE DO IT?

**122%** of programme events hosted against target

**486%** of sports clubs involved in programme activity against target

**186%** of volunteers engaged against target

**392%** of new volunteers recruited against target

**125%** of volunteers recognised against programme target

**185%** of clubs completing management programme/clubmark scheme

**177%** of clubs signed up to the Respect Charter against target

**165%** of clubs signed up to Volunteer Charter against target

**98%** of volunteers engaged who recorded satisfaction as 3+ out of 5 (*Target 80%*)

**96%** of volunteers engaged who recorded programme relevance as 3+ out of 5 (*Target 80%*)

**98%** of volunteers engaged who recorded the programmes as helpful as 3+ out of 5 (*Target 80%*)

## IS ANYONE BETTER OFF?

### Volunteer

No of programme participants who have achieved GoldMark accreditation: **138**

No of volunteers reporting that they have developed skills through the programme: **3119 (94%)**

No of volunteers reporting an increase in confidence having engaged in the programme: **3105 (93%)**

No of volunteers reporting that they feel more valued as a result of the programme: **3087 (96%)**

No of volunteers reporting that the programme has had a positive impact on their well-being: **3042 (92%)**

### Club

No of clubs having achieved ClubMark status: **37**

No of clubs reporting that they are in a better position to recruit and retain volunteers: **37 (100%)**

No of clubs reporting an increased awareness of the benefits of diversity in their organisation: **37 (100%)**

No of clubs reporting an improved link with their community: **37 (100%)**

No of clubs reporting an increased awareness of the importance of promoting opportunities for volunteering: **37 (100%)**



**37**

Clubs achieved ClubMark



**162**

Unique clubs involved in programme



**783**

New volunteers recruited



**188**

Unique volunteers recognised/rewarded for their contribution to the programme



**119**

Clubs signed up to Volunteer Charter

## SECTION 3



# Programme Highlights

## Schools Roadshows

**In early March 2021, the joint sports partnership delivered three multi-sport schools roadshows.**

**The Irish FA, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby delivered workshops to pupils at St Louise's Comprehensive College Belfast, St Ronan's College and Banbridge High School.**



These three sessions were delivered to encourage young people to get involved volunteering in sport.

Each of the sporting codes discussed some of the many volunteering opportunities, programmes and initiatives available to young people who wanted to get involved. Participants were given insights into some of the numerous benefits volunteering had to offer, such as getting recognition for their volunteering hours through the popular GoldMark programme, as well as learning new skills and gaining experience for future employment opportunities.

Other social benefits were promoted, such as meeting new people, improving mental health through volunteering by feeling less isolated, being more involved in community life and having fun.

The feedback we received to these sessions was extremely positive, with a 63% response rate.

- 100% of participants said they had learned something new about volunteering in sport and what volunteering could offer.
- 81% of participants told us they would like to get involved in volunteering.
- 95% said they really enjoyed the session and would like some more information about getting involved in volunteering in sport.

Mr P Rafferty, Head of Careers Education at St Ronan's College commented on the workshop:

*"Fionntan, Nicci and Gavin delivered an interactive, engaging and informative presentation to our Year 13 pupils during Careers Week. It was fantastic to hear professionals from diverse sporting organisations promote the benefits of volunteering. By the end of the session, pupils could clearly see the link between volunteering and the development of key transferable employability skills, such as confidence, communication and teamwork. Pupils were also introduced to a wide range of volunteering opportunities in Ulster Rugby, Irish FA and Ulster GAA that will enhance their CV and future job, university or apprenticeship applications. I would highly recommend this session for all schools."*



## Multi-Sport Youth Forums

**In July 2020, the Irish FA, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby hosted a Multi-Sport Youth Forum as part of the Department for Communities programme: Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering. The event which was hosted online was attended by young volunteers from all three sports.**

Young volunteers got the chance to hear more about the opportunities available to young people, the benefits of volunteering and what potential barriers they may face at times. They also heard from other young people on how volunteering in sport had helped them to develop holistically, meet new people and gave them more confidence. The evening also had interactive elements which gave the attendees opportunities to provide feedback on their experiences of volunteering in sport.

Irish FA Young Leader, Ben Faulkner said: *“The webinar was eye opening for me. Listening to the Irish FA, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby and hearing about their experiences and barriers into volunteering was very interesting. It’s led me to add more transferrable skills to myself to make myself more employable in the future.”*

The following March, the officers from the three sports hosted another online Multi-sport Youth Forum. This time young leaders from the sports were presented with information on leadership, managing people and project management. On the back of this webinar participants were able to apply to take part in an OCN Level 2 in Youth Leadership course which would run over the next 12 months and provide participants with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills to enhance their leadership skills and help their clubs.



# Lifelong Volunteering Workshops

## Club Planning Webinar

**As part of the Lifelong Volunteer Programme, it was agreed to deliver three webinars that focussed on making our clubs stronger and better prepared to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The first of these webinars was hosted via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday 6 October focusing on the area of Club Planning.

All three codes promoted the event via their club databases and through their online media platforms. Registration took place via the Eventbrite platform.



38 people attended the event from across 36 different clubs in the Province

The workshop was facilitated jointly by the Club and Community Development Officers in each code; Fionntán O'Dowd (Ulster GAA), Gavin Nelson (Irish FA) and Charlie Farrell (Ulster Rugby).

The topic Club Planning was the chosen theme for the workshop with a focus on giving an insight to:

- Benefits of having a plan
- Steps to creating the plan
- Consulting with club members and wider community



### Quotes from participants:

*"Congrats for the event! It was very important for my club. We'll use the information given in order to increase our development post-COVID-19 crisis. Thanks a lot!"*

*"Great job by the three guys. A very well prepared and executed workshop. Content was relevant and useful."*

*"That's been as good 45 minutes as I've spent in a long time. There was a serious amount of stuff covered - and covered very well, clearly and concisely."*





## Club Fundraising Webinar

Club Fundraising Webinar was hosted on Tuesday 10th November with 84 people from across 75 clubs in attendance. The workshop was facilitated jointly by the Club and Community Development Officers in each code; Fionntán O'Dowd (Ulster GAA), Gavin Nelson (Irish FA) and Charlie Farrell (Ulster Rugby).

The webinar focussed on supporting clubs to understand more about fundraising and how they can implement a more structured approach to the process.

The presenters gave an insight to:

- Importance of having a fundraising plan
- Examples of successful fundraising
- Sponsorship and Advertising
- Gift Aid
- Fundraising Online



### Quotes from participants:

*"Very well delivered, going to use lots from this webinar going forward."*

*"Enjoyed the presentation got new ideas for fundraising and also picked up information on legislation."*

*"Very informative, to the point and concise. Presented in an easy to understand format. Well worthwhile."*

## Making your Funding Application Stronger

**The final webinar in the series 'Making your Funding Application Stronger', took place on Tuesday 1 December with 81 people from 69 clubs in attendance.**

Facilitated jointly by the Club and Community Development Officers in each code; Fionntán O'Dowd (Ulster GAA), Gavin Nelson (Irish FA) and Charlie Farrell (Ulster Rugby) this session focussed on supporting clubs to understand more about applying for external funding.

Representatives from Community Foundation NI, Halifax Foundation, and Sport NI gave an insight into what clubs need to consider, things that can make their application stronger, common mistakes made by applicants and current / future funding opportunities.

### Quotes from participants:

*"Picked up some useful tips and was very well presented."*

*"The speakers were very good and it was well hosted given the number online."*

*"A very insightful webinar and I will be bringing back the new information to our club management committee for their reference. Thank you."*

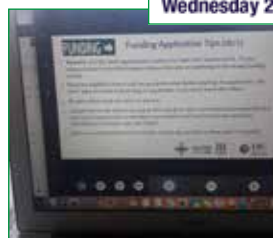


## Multi Sport Volunteer Forum

**The Multi Sport Volunteer Forum was hosted online on Wednesday 29th April, with a focus on funding opportunities available to clubs.**

123 volunteers from across 84 different clubs were in attendance. Irish FA Grants Officer Richard Forsythe provided an overview on funding opportunities for sports clubs looking at ways to:

- Increase prospects of securing funding for your club
- Identify potential new funding sources
- Covid-19 open emergency funds
- Learn other fundraising ideas and techniques



### Quotes from participants:

*"Thank you for making this happen. Really useful information. Lots to take in so glad of the slides now to review."*

*"Well presented and relevant in the current circumstances. Some excellent signposting to funding channels."*

*"May be the way to go with these sort of information events going forward. Not having to travel to live presentations would increase participation from and information to clubs."*



## GoldMark

**Sadly, this year we were unable to hold our annual Goldmark Awards event due to COVID restrictions. The Goldmark Awards are always a highlight of the year for us as we celebrate volunteer milestones being met by young people aged 14-24.**

Although we were unable to hold a live event to celebrate the success of these young people, we had well known players from each sport say "Thanks" from us via video on our social media channels. The video included Michael Lowry (Ulster Rugby), Neve Jones (Ulster Rugby), Julie Nelson (NI Women's Team), Marissa Callaghan (NI Women's Team), Paula O'Hagan (Down GAA) and Mattie Donnelly (Tyrone GAA) celebrating and highlighting the important work carried out by young volunteers through sport both on and off the field.

Deirdre Hardy, Minister for Communities also took the time to add her own message of thanks to the young people for the hours they freely give as volunteers to their own respective clubs. The minister highlighted the many benefits to volunteering as well as congratulating all the young people achieving milestone volunteering hours of 50, 100 or 200 and receiving their GoldMark certificate of recognition for that.

Throughout the video a key point highlighted was the positive impact young people had while volunteering throughout the COVID pandemic in their local communities. The response to the pandemic through our clubs was monumental, this was due, in no small part to the hours put in by our young volunteers.



## SECTION 4

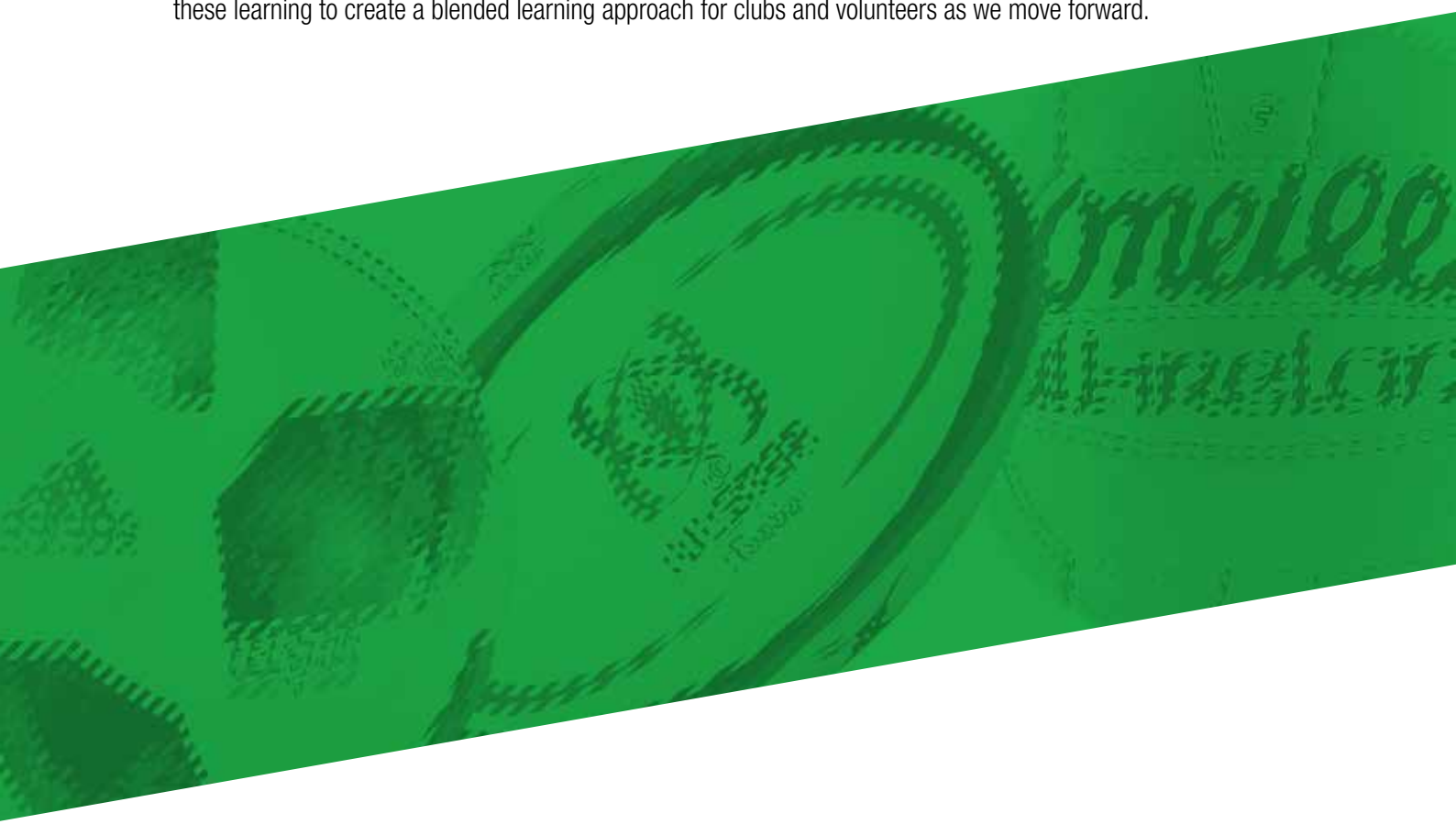


# Challenges

**This has been the most challenging year of the programme due to the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic that changed the world in March 2020. The Officers involved in the programme continued to work throughout the pandemic and support clubs and volunteers as best as they could.**

The response to the pandemic included being agile and adapting quickly to fit the needs and wants of clubs and volunteers. In April 2020, the officers upskilled themselves in Microsoft Teams and Zoom to be able to run programmes. They adapted quickly and came up with new solutions to help clubs. Based on the needs of clubs they ran their first ever webinar in April, which focused on helping to signpost clubs to much needed funding opportunities during the pandemic and provided them with tips on how to fill in applications. This was a huge success with over 110 participants from over 80 clubs across the three sports. This set the tone for the rest of the year. Gone was face to face delivery and instead there was a new digital process in place which included webinars, emails and phone calls to deliver objectives.

Other issues that faced staff included staff within their organisations being furloughed meaning that their normal networks were not there, and they needed to be creative and innovative on how they developed the programme. The staff are also on yearly contracts that means job security still isn't there for the officers involved, especially in such a turbulent 12 months. Despite this, the programme has continued to evolve and flourish, and we will use these learning to create a blended learning approach for clubs and volunteers as we move forward.





# Conclusions

**Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering continues to excel in its aim of supporting clubs and volunteers. Despite the impact of COVID-19 the partners have successfully worked in collaboration and outperformed against many of the very ambitious targets that made up the 2020-2021 programme.**

The volume of support demanded from clubs is growing, with clubs and volunteers who have been engaging for some time now seeking higher-level support. There also remains a need to provide more basic level support to clubs and volunteers who are new on their journey. Credit must go to the programme staff who have adapted their delivery formats to allow them to continue to engage with clubs and volunteers. The utilisation of online formats for workshops proved extremely successful and allowed for volunteers from across the province to attend allowing for greater shared learning and experiences.

The programme continues to attract and engage with volunteers from a wide demographic. The appetite for volunteer programmes to support and engage our youth is evident through Goldmark and our Youth Forums, and the partnership hope to explore the possibility of providing accredited training for our young volunteers in future delivery.

Although sport is the core business of our clubs, increasingly the programme has adapted to reflect the needs of clubs outside of sport itself. Never has this been more evident than in the last 12 months with clubs having to educate their volunteers and put in place policy and procedures to allow for a safe return to sport. Health and wellbeing, social inclusion and lifestyle are just some of the additional areas in which clubs are taking an interest, the need for funding guidance and basic volunteer recruitment is always apparent.

The success of the programme is reliant on the engagement from our clubs and volunteers and their feedback allows the staff to design the programmes to tailor their needs. The example shown by the partnership of the Irish Football Association, Ulster Rugby and Ulster GAA working together serves to remind people that we are stronger working together and the big issues facing our communities are the same across the board. It is the strong desire of the partnership that Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering can continue to be a good example of collaboration and community development for many years to come.

# Volunteer Story

## Kenny Dalglish Greenhill – Irish FA Volunteer

**Currently I am studying to become a Counsellor, completing my Level 2 with Northern Regional College (NRC) and having already been accepted for my Level 3 at South Eastern Regional College (SERC).**

I have always loved football. With the middle name as Dalglish you can guess I had no choice but to support Liverpool. I love watching football and it has been great being able to watch local football a lot more on television recently.

I got involved in football administration in 2017 after the death of my father in 2016. At this stage I had lost both of my parents and found I was struggling to cope. Even though I was married with one child and one on the way and despite the fantastic support of my wife Rhonda, I still needed a coping mechanism.

I got involved with a local football club called Portavogie Rangers and became their secretary, while also leading on the governance for Portavogie Youth. I then became part of the Northern Amateur Football League Management Committee as well as part of the Ards and North Down Sports Forum Working Group (a group to discuss funding applications for the Sports Forum).

Through the Irish FA Volunteer and Policy Officer Michael Carvill, I got involved in the Irish FA Grassroots Leaders programme. I became a grassroots leader for the Ards and North Down area and my connection with the Irish FA Foundation developed. I actually met Gavin Nelson (Irish FA Club and Community Development Officer) for the first time at one of the senior international games while volunteering at the fanzone held at Olympia.



The opportunities available to volunteers within the Association for various activities is fantastic and I would recommend anyone to get involved.

The gamechanger came as the Irish FA developed the Ahead of the Game programme, a mental health awareness programme with its motto 'Start the Conversation'. It was then that I met Joe Donnelly, an absolute gentleman. Joe as many will know, set up Tackling Against Mental Health Initiative (TAMHI) in 2011 and since then has nurtured the organisation to become a charity. Joe was tutor of the Ahead of the Game workshops before kindly taking me onboard and teaching me how to deliver the workshops alongside him. I started by attending the sessions, gathering the confidence to deliver sections of the workshop, leading to delivering full sessions. I can still remember delivering my first full session at Dungannon Swifts. I was really nervous before the session but after the session I felt on top of the world thanks to Ciaran Donaghy (Irish FA RGDO) and Dungannon Swifts



After gaining knowledge in mental health within sport and having such a knowledgeable support network in the form of Joe, SAMHI, Brian Kirker and others, I set up Here4All, a mental health support group serving the senior and youth sections within Portavogie Rangers. The purpose of the group is to provide support and help for players, committee members, parents and volunteers as well as those in the surrounding community. Now the local running group Portavogie Pacers have come onboard and have been a fantastic addition. Being part of the group is great and knowing you are able to help people makes it even better.

After resigning as Secretary of Portavogie I was offered the chance to become involved with Linfield Ladies Academy as their secretary. This was a fantastic experience and insight into girls' football. I was in control of the whole governance side, including developing the safeguarding structure and overseeing the administration for over 100 female participants.

In my role I worked with the Irish FA to help Portavogie Youth Football Club achieve the People and Clubs Accreditation as well as supporting other clubs within the Ards and North Down area, as part of my Grassroots Leader role.

With all the skills I have developed including the support I have received, I was successful in my application to become Secretary of the Down Area Winter Football League (DAWFL). I held the role since 2019 and have recently resigned to pursue other interests within mental health in football.

As part of the Ahead of the Game programme I was asked to take part in a short video, to talk through my struggles with mental health and my journey through football. I am very thankful to the Association for the opportunity to speak about my journey and hope that it inspires others to speak out.

I decided to enter further education to study to become a counsellor. I applied for a Level 3 in counselling via SERC in 2020 and was unsuccessful, leading me to apply for the Level 2 in NRC. I was successful in the Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills application and have thoroughly enjoyed the course. I was successful in applying for the Level 3 in Counselling Skills via SERC Bangor, which is closer to home. I hope to become a qualified counsellor, being able to practice in a full-time capacity.

Being a tutor on the Ahead of the Game programme has presented opportunities to become involved in delivering mental wellbeing workshops for other organisations, for which I am eternally grateful to the Association.

Going forward I am excited to see what opportunities working in football can bring. Within three years I would like to become a qualified counsellor while staying involved in football. My ambition is to become a mental wellbeing officer within an Irish League club. It is a challenge but I definitely believe I am capable of being successful in the role and most importantly there is a need for it.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped me along this fantastic journey. I sincerely hope I have shown gratitude to all who have helped me. I thank the Association for their part in providing the opportunities as well, as I don't think they often get the credit they deserve, especially Gavin and Carvs (even if they do support Man United!)

Volunteers are crucial for clubs. Without volunteers clubs can't function. Over the past 15 months we have all suffered and hopefully as restrictions lift everyone can get back to enjoying this fabulous sport, while appreciating and cherishing those who make it all possible.

