# The Active Bellinge Community Project: An Evaluation

**By**

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## Executive Summary

### Background and Aims

- This research was commissioned by Northamptonshire Sport and conducted by researchers at the University of Northampton to evaluate elements of the Active Bellinge Community Project (ABCP). This programme was established by Northamptonshire Sport to focus on encouraging new volunteers/activators to emerge from under-represented groups in the Northampton area.

- The aims of the research were to better understand why some people chose to become volunteer activators for the ABCP and how such activators contributed to participant engagement in the sessions. It also sought to assess the likelihood of activators continuing their role in the future, and to make recommendations as to how to encourage long-term involvement among current activators.

### Methods

- A mixed method design was taken, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. 5 Semi-structured interviews were completed with three ABCP activators from different backgrounds/entry routes, and a questionnaire distributed to ABCP participants, with 12 responses. The data was collated and analysed to create three separate activator case studies.

### Findings

*'Becoming an activator':*

- Each case study activator expressed a genuine personal passion for the activity they were leading and wanted to get involved so they could share this with participants.
- They all found out about the role via existing local community contacts/word of mouth.
- Date/time flexibility and location of the sessions were crucial factors in deciding to volunteer.
- Each activator had some initial sense of competence to do this type of role and some prior relevant transferrable experience.

*'Being an activator':*

- The activators enjoyed the programme and felt that some aspects of the training were helpful, particularly practical workshops on how to design and deliver sessions.
- Activators saw the sessions as a way to build in physical activity into their own lives – they saw the personal health and fitness benefits of the role.
- The activator plays an important role in helping participants to continue their engagement, particularly when activators set goals and take a central role in measuring their progress.
- It is important that activators are from the 'same' community; they should have a similar background in terms of physical activity experiences; they are friendly and approachable and they are willing to vary and adapt their sessions to suit participants.

- Activators would welcome more frequent sessions than just once a week, provided it suited their own commitments.

*'Retaining activators':*

- Some additional training needs were identified in a number of areas including interpersonal communication, how to adapt sessions and ideas to sustain physical activity engagement among participants after the programme.

- All activators were motivated to continue by seeing progress in participants and felt they were acting as positive role models to people in their local community.

- They saw the activator role as having the potential to develop their own employability and open up opportunities for paid employment in related areas in the future.

## Key Recommendations

*Recruiting activators:*

a) Target people from the local community – residents, workers, volunteers.

b) Explore ways to promote word of mouth awareness between locals; target local workplaces, schools (for parents), residents and other community groups – focus on gatekeepers/leaders of these organisations.

c) Consider early financial incentives to draw in interest – look to emphasise the monetary 'value' of training, kit and other opportunities available in recruitment material.

d) Target people already involved or interested in the scheme activity – i.e. jogging groups for running schemes, walking groups for healthy walk programmes.

e) Emphasise the flexibility of the programme in terms of location and times and the personal physical activity benefits to potential activators.

f) Consider right from the start discussing a long-term career plan/objective with those who express any early interest – including ways to secure future paid opportunities in a related field.

*Retaining Activators:*

a) Activators want to stay involved if they feel they have made a difference the participants – consider ways to ensure activators are consistently aware this is happening.

b) The time and location of sessions must remain flexible and worked around activators' schedules to encourage continued involvement.

c) More focused training would be welcomed so activators feel they are continually developing and improving their skills. It is important to seek out what activators feel they need more support with moving forwards.

d) Exploit the word of mouth approach to use existing activators as direct recruiters for new activators – use them as role models and consider 'refer a friend' schemes to incentivise them to find new potential recruits.

e) NSport should consider taking a more central role in mentoring and supporting new activators to help them feel part of a wider support network and reduce feelings of isolation and lack of credibility.

# **Contents**

# Background to the research

One of the four principles put forward by Sport England in their new 'Coaching Plan for England' document is to 'recruit and develop frontline coaches to provide meaningful activity experiences to under-represented groups in the local community' (SportEngland.org, 2016:10). Volunteers, 'activators' and coaches in sport remain overwhelmingly white, male and middle class. Low et al. (2007: 25) found that only 16% of women volunteer in sport compared to 30% of men.

Responding to this policy aim, Northamptonshire Sport (NSport) have designed a programme of activities that seek to encourage new volunteers/activators to emerge from currently under-represented groups (particularly inactive women) from disadvantaged areas of Northampton including Bellinge, Ecton Brook and Billing. The 'Active Bellinge Community Project' (ABCP) consisted of a range of different sport/physical activity sessions being provided over a series of weeks, specifically targeting females from these regions.

Three volunteer activators who led the programmes sessions were recruited and provided with the relevant training to carry out their role. In order to evaluate the project with a particular focus on the recruitment and retention of the volunteer activators, this research was commissioned by NSport and conducted by researchers at the University of Northampton (UoN). The researchers evaluated the experiences of the three volunteer activators who delivered physical activity sessions as part of the ABCP.

The three volunteer activators were broadly categorised into three 'types'; a local community resident, a previous participant on the ABCP, and an experienced volunteer activator external to the local community. To understand these different types of activators, case studies were completed for each. The case studies identify the range of motivations and underlying conditions that enabled each person to become volunteer activators and what factors might encourage them to continue volunteering for future projects should the opportunity arise. The findings can be used by NSport to feed into the design of future interventions that target inactive people from under-represented groups in the region. They can also help consider how best to support new activators and provide the right type of training and development opportunities to ensure their longer-term continued volunteering. This will be reported through the recommendations sections provided at the end of the report.

# Research Aims

To provide detailed case studies of 3 different volunteer activator 'types' who will lead sessions as part of the ABCP. The case studies will consist of:

a.  An understanding of the underlying social/cultural conditions and the personal motivations which encourage people to volunteer to become activators for the programme

b.  How these different 'types' of volunteer activators are perceived by their participants, and how this influences their desire to engage with the scheme

c.  A reflective account of the volunteer activators' experiences of the programme and an assessment of the likelihood of their continuing the role in the future

d.  Some recommendations of what support might be needed to encourage activators to continue and develop their involvement in community sport/physical activity

# Methodology

A mixed methods design was used in order to collect data which would meet the research aims outlined above. Mixed methods designs allow the collection of quantitative data (numbers and statistics) and qualitative data (words and interviews) which, together, can provide a stronger set of findings as they can supplement each other while also collecting the most suitable form of data to meet a range of research aims. This mixed methods approach took the form of quantitative data being collected via a questionnaire to ABCP participants and qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews with the three case study activators.

## Participant questionnaire

The participant questionnaire consisted of 20 questions which aimed to answer research aim 'b' in regards to how the participants view their volunteer activators and how the activators might influence their engagement with the ABCP sessions. The questionnaire was created by the UoN research team on Google Forms and was printed to allow the participants to complete them either before or after an ABCP session. The questionnaires were distributed by NSport staff and the completed questionnaires, 12 in total, were manually entered by the research team into Google Forms. The data was then transferred into Microsoft Excel ready for analysis.

## Face to face interviews

Two interview schedules were created by the research team in order to explore issues related to research aims 'a', 'c', and 'd' as stated above. The first schedule was designed to elicit information from activators at the start of their volunteering journey, with the second schedule used to focus on the attitudes of activators towards the end of their programmes. A total of 5 semi structured interviews with 3 volunteer activators were conducted and lasted approximately 15 minutes each. Due to time constraints, the final interview with activator 'Jane' was unable to be completed. Given the richness of the data collected from her first interview, however, a detailed case study of her experience has still been possible. The volunteer activators were interviewed at the start of their involvement in the scheme, consisting of 16 scheduled questions, and two volunteer activators were interviewed again upon completion of the scheme which consisted of 11 scheduled questions. The activators participating in the interviews were recruited by staff at NSport and contact details were then passed onto the researchers who arranged the interviews to be at a time and place which best

suited the participants. When granted with permission from the participants, the interviews were audio recorded to allow accurate transcripts to be produced and to ensure that comments made by the participants were not altered and were reported when necessary.

**Analysis**

The case studies of the three volunteer activators were developed using the data obtained from the participant questionnaires and the interviews. The interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic data analysis; namely familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and write-up of themes. This provides an account of the themes which the activators and participants find important in terms of their involvement and engagement with the programme, the likelihood of their continued involvement, and potential areas of improvement for such schemes in the future. Simple descriptive statistics were generated from the questionnaire data and have been included to help inform the case study write ups. Where appropriate, such statistics are also presented in graph form in the findings section of the report.

# Discussion of Results

The three detailed case studies of each activator are presented below. Prior to this, additional information pertaining to the ABCP participants that was collected via the questionnaire is presented. This highlights some of the characteristics of the participants that may be of use to NSport in terms of designing future interventions.

**Characteristics of ABCP participants – questionnaire findings**

The participant questionnaire was completed by participants (n=12) who attended the sessions run by the activators. They were all female. Figure 1 below states how the participants found out about the sessions run by the activators. The results indicate that 75% (n=9) of all participants (n=12) heard about the programme via word of mouth.
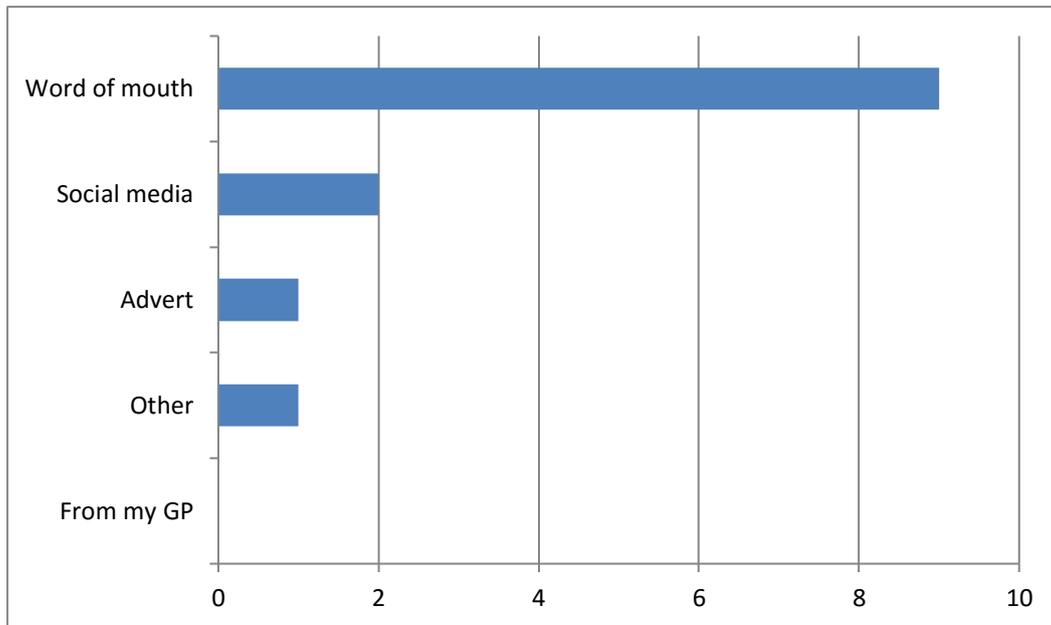


*Figure 1: How the participants originally found out about the programme*

This corresponds to Berger's (2014) findings by supporting the benefits of word of mouth and suggesting that it is one of the most persuasive techniques to involve individuals in new tasks. The participants also stated the locations where they heard about the programme, ranging from the community house, current participants, family members, to colleagues. With this in mind, the findings suggest that running schemes directly in local communities is likely to increase word of mouth and may encourage a higher number of participants in future schemes.

All participants stated that they would definitely recommend the programme to someone else. They specified that they would do so because they enjoyed the social interaction within the sessions, the

encouragement from the activators, the programme is a good way to keep fit, and finding new places of interest in the local community. Figure 2, below, shows the percentage of sessions attended by the participants. The results indicate that 36.4% (n=4) of participants (n=11) attended 75-99% of the sessions.
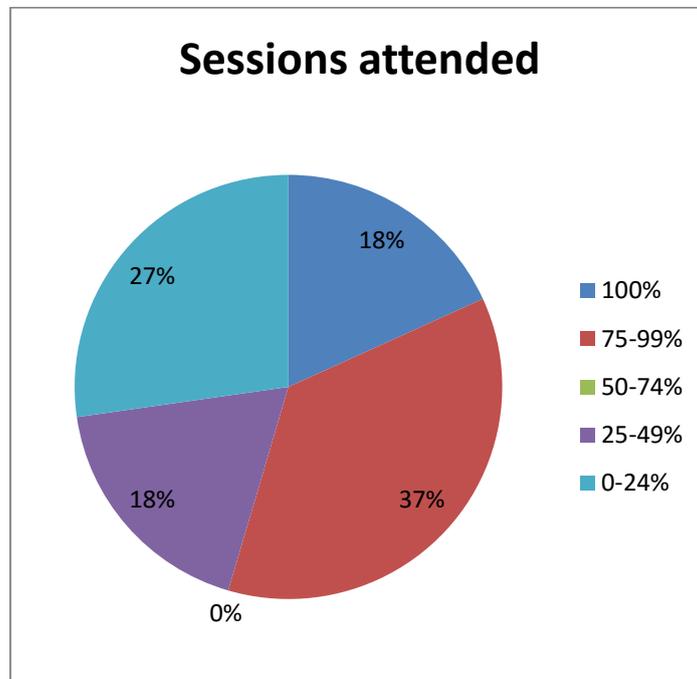


*Figure 2: The percentage of sessions attended by the participants*

When asked why participants had attended sessions, the most important reasons given were to 'improve health' and to improve 'fitness'. Interestingly, these responses ranked higher than 'to lose weight', suggesting that the health and fitness benefits appear to be of more importance than sessions designed specifically for weight loss.

Figure 3, below, shows the reasons why participants (n=9) missed sessions. The main reasons were commitments at home (n=2), commitments at work (n=2), and because it was the first session have attended (n=2).

**Why sessions were missed**
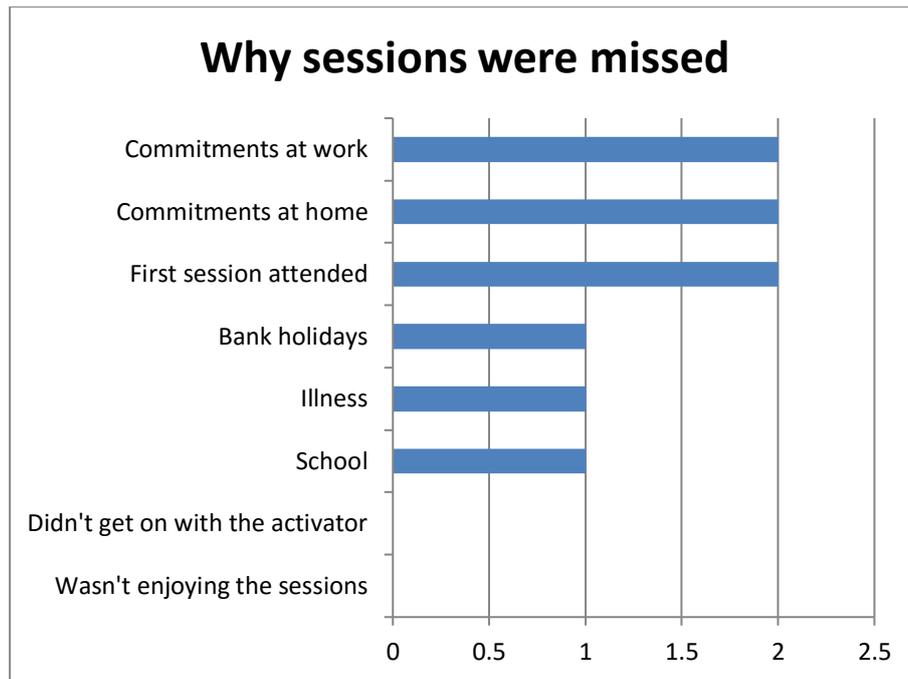
*Figure 3: Reasons behind missing sessions*

Participants were asked whether they were interested in becoming activators themselves in the future. A range of different responses were provided, with no obvious pattern in findings. One participant stated that she would like to become an activator because she believes she has skills and experience and she has the time to become one. One stated that they strongly don't want to be an activator because they don't have the skills or experience to become one and committing the time towards the role mayor may not be an issue. Another stated that they don't want to become an activator because they are unsure whether they have the necessary skills and experience to become one and believe that they guarantee they will have the time to become one. Lastly, one participant stated that they were unsure about becoming an activator in the future because they believe they have the necessary skills and experience to become one, however, they don't have the time to become an activator and run the sessions. This mixed bag of findings suggests participants are likely to have very different levels of readiness or interest in taking on an activator role. More research is needed here to explore further the reasons why participants have different views on this matter.

## Case Study 1 – Local Resident Activator

**Name: Claire**

**'Type' of activator: Local Community Resident**

**Activator role: Leading a running group**

**Experience: Personal trainer, fitness instructor**

### Becoming an Activator

Claire has previous experience in running, sport and fitness, and has previously completed marathons. She became aware of the voluntary activator role after a discussion with a local resident about her qualifications and love for running. Claire had some previous engagement with NSport having completed a course with them, again after talking with a local resident about training opportunities. She was keen to learn new skills to help other people. Claire believes that her qualifications and past experiences in fitness instructing, personal training and running have really helped her to lead the ABCP sessions and to motivate the participants to reach their goals. If she hadn't done the training she would not have taken on the activator role because she felt a feeling of being 'qualified' is really important.

Claire was initially under the impression that the role was a paid position which caught her attention but she still continued with the activator role after going to another running club and really enjoyed it. The course was also paid for which influenced her involvement. She expressed a strong obligation to 'give something back' as a result of having had her training paid for.

### Being an activator - the sessions

Having the scheme take place directly within her local community was really important to Claire. Although worried about being out of her comfort zone and perhaps having her creditability questioned by participants, she was looking forward to meeting people who lived nearby to her. Claire also incorporated her local knowledge into the scheme by changing the running routes frequently which the participants enjoyed. The close proximity of the sessions to her home was really important in engaging Claire. She suggested that having to travel any distance to the sessions would have put her off considerably.

Driven by a commitment to helping her local community, Claire was aware of the benefits of the scheme and was interested in seeing her participants' improvement throughout the scheme. This interest was a key motivator for Claire as she developed closer relationships with her participants throughout the course of her activator role. Claire mentioned that it was the improvement in her participants' motivation that gave her the motivation to continue with the activator role as she saw their motivation increase throughout the scheme. Claire is now well recognised in the community and this has played a role in recruiting new participants and the creditability of the course.

Another benefit of the activator role for Claire is that she uses the sessions to train and keep herself fit. She has fitted the sessions into her wider training plan and around her work schedule due to the flexibility of the scheme. Combining her activator role with her own fitness goals was a key factor in her decision to volunteer. At the start, Claire's involvement with the scheme was limited by work commitments and the timings of the session, However, the ABCP offered enough flexibility of the timings and dates of the training sessions for her to fit the role into times that suited her. Without this flexibility, she would have been unlikely to carry on the role.

At the beginning of the scheme, Claire was worried about whether the participants would return each week. As the sessions continued, Claire found that talking more and becoming their friend made the participants more likely to return because she became more than just an activator to them. Claire stated that her enjoyment in the role was important. If she hadn't have enjoyed the sessions as they progressed, she says she probably would have given up quite soon.

Participants (n=4) who completed the questionnaires from Claire's sessions stated that the most important thing that made them keep coming back to the sessions was commitment to their main reason for attending the sessions (75%, n=3). The main reasons stated were to improve their health (n=2) and to improve their fitness (n=1). Another reason for coming back to the sessions was because they enjoyed the sessions (25%, n=1). This suggests that Claire made the sessions enjoyable for the participants and allowed them to focus the sessions around their main goal to allow them to commit to it.

Claire believes that likability of the activator plays an important role because if the participants don't like or relate to the activator then they may not come back because they are giving up their own time to be at the sessions. Awareness of the scheme has increased through word of mouth from participants which has helped more residents get to know each other and provided a community feel to the sessions. Claire, being a local resident, has gotten someone in the community involved in the activator role and has spoken to local organisations to get more people involved and to spread the

word of the scheme. This emphasizes the importance of having local residents involved in activator roles.

### *The future*

Claire's participants all felt that she has the necessary skills to be an activator, suggesting both her background and her training helped her convince the participants of her credibility to do the role. They also felt that Claire inspired them to continue with the sessions, and stated that an important aspect of the activator was that they were relatable; 75% strongly believed that the activator makes a difference to whether they attend the sessions or not.

If Claire was to be involved with future activator roles that were more long term, she would like to have further training and support from experienced coaches as she believes that they can provide relevant guidance on how to progress and improve in her activator role. The training provided was short and not particularly applicable to the location of her sessions, focusing on track racing rather than road running, particularly in built up areas with lots of traffic.

Claire would also have benefitted from having more information and guidance on session plans from her training. Claire was aware and prepared to do session plans each week within her role but she was expecting more guidance – she felt like she was left on her own to come up with session plans. Additionally, she would have welcomed working alongside other activators at the start of the programme before moving onto working individually.

## Case Study 2 – Former Participant Activator

**Name: Amy**

**'Type' of activator: Former ABCP participant**

**Activator role: Leading a running group**

**Experience: Teaches insanity**

### Becoming an activator

Amy first became aware of the voluntary activator role from flyers being handed out at her place of work. She had a friend who had become an activator and was encouraged by her to get involved and help run some sessions. She had no previous involvement in running clubs or any coaching experience, but she is a keen runner having completed marathons. Amy had no previous contact or engagement with NSport prior to becoming an activator. She was keen to share her passion for running with others and help people to achieve the goals they might set related to physical activity.

Amy initially didn't feel ready or comfortable to run the sessions until she attended the training provided. She knew that people are at different stages in terms of their running and she was unsure how to get the sessions to work for everybody. Although initially feeling out of her depth in the training, she found watching the demonstrations and being given the chance to lead a session really helped her confidence. The training helped convince Amy that she had the ability to be an activator, and she feels she has gained new knowledge around leadership.

Amy found the prospect of becoming an activator daunting to begin with due to her lack of coaching experience and she was worried about the participants not succeeding because she got it wrong by making the sessions too challenging, resulting in them not attending future sessions: She wanted to get the balance right between pushing participants to their potential, but at the same time not putting them off attending. She wanted to ensure that her participants believe in themselves and to ensure that they are happy with the sessions and their progress. She appears to be really motivated by trying to help participants meet their own goals and develop themselves.

### Being an activator – the sessions

Amy is a local resident which she feels has helped in terms of recruiting participants. People recognise her from her job and joined in the running session because they knew she was leading the. Having a

'familiar face' run the sessions gave people the confidence to sign up and try out. She has used her job role to spread awareness of the scheme which has also helped recruit participants. Amy is also trying to involve more locals in the scheme by suggesting that families come along together because she understands the importance and the impact on the community to have locals involved in the scheme. The survey findings showed that all the participants felt that they could relate to Amy and felt that this would an important aspect for them in the sessions. Two of Amy's participants believe that the activator does make a real difference to whether they attend the sessions or not.

Amy initially found it hard to commit to the activator role because she didn't have any free time in the evenings when she first became interested in the scheme. She managed to adjust her schedule and quit one aspect of her training in order to become an activator and adapted to her new routine. Amy saw this as personally beneficial because it meant that she could spend more time on her own running through the activator role.

As the sessions began, Amy noticed that her own background had inspired others to get involved in running. By sharing her story of how she got involved in running she was able to act as a realistic role model and encourage a 'can do' attitude in participants. This was a real source of motivation for her to continue taking the sessions. Her passion for running and physical activity also appears to have rubbed off on participants and their own motivation. Amy was mostly looking forward to seeing her participants achieve their personal goals and to finish a 5km run at the end of twelve weeks and playing a role in this process. She suggested participants keep running diaries so they can track and measure their progress by setting mini targets. This also helped to keep the participants motivated and engaged. Participants (n=3) who completed the questionnaires from Amy's sessions stated that the most important thing that made the keep coming back to the sessions was the enjoyment of the sessions (66.3%, n=2) and because of their commitment to their main reason for attending the sessions, in this case, to improve their fitness (33.3%, n=1). This suggests that Amy made the sessions enjoyable for the participants whilst allowing them to commit to their goals.

Amy adapted the sessions to her participants needs and directed them in the right direction in terms of which group to run with, either Claire's beginners group (seeing case study one) or her own advanced running group. This allowed the participants to work at their own pace towards their goals. She feels this 'streaming' of participants in terms of their ability really helped to keep their own personal motivation going throughout the programme.

*The future*

Ultimately, Amy hopes that her activator role makes her more employable in the future because she wants to work in the fitness industry in a paid role. She feels this role could also compliment her activator role really well too, by using her work contacts to get more people involved with the running club. Amy would also like to become a long term activator because she wants to show her participants that they can continue running and it shouldn't just be a short programme of activities. The activator role gives Amy a place to inspire people and share her passion for running with others – this is a key factor in her aim to continue being an activator longer term. Although the times and the dates of the sessions suit Amy but she would like the sessions to be more than once a week so her participants can benefit more from running. She would try to find ways to offer support to the running group more than once a week.

Amy stated that she would like to access further training by going on the coaching course which would allow her to progress her knowledge that she gained from the leadership course. However, she didn't find the training helpful in terms of providing information on how to complete the coaching course; therefore, she would recommend that more guidance is provided to activators about how to progress in their activator role. Any future training should include content and activities that could help her understand how to become more relatable to future participants as she feels this is central to the role of activator.

# Case Study 3 – Experienced Volunteer Activator

**Name: Jane**

**'Type' of activator:  External volunteer**

**Activator role: Leading a walking group**

**Experience: community volunteer**

### Becoming an activator

Jane became aware of the volunteer activator role through her current voluntary position at the local community house. She has been volunteering there for some time now and was asked by a member of staff if she would like to become an activator. Jane had no contact previously with any activators nor did she have any previous connections with NSport, but through her volunteering at the community house she was aware of the nature of previous health walks held there. Because she knew what was involved and had seen first hand some sessions, she felt quite confident in her ability to do the role.

Jane's previous volunteering experience helped her understand some of the needs of volunteers; however, she has no previous coaching or sport related experience.  This didn't deter Jane from becoming an activator but actually made her excited to do the leadership and health and safety training before her activator role began.

One aspect of the role which appealed to Jane was the fact that it was in her local area and she was already familiar with the meeting point at the local community house. If it was to be held in another location it would have been difficult for her to be involved in the programme because so many of her commitments are based in this area. The flexibility and the timings of the sessions were also important. Jane explained that she didn't find it challenging to fit it in with her schedule because the sessions are during the day whilst her daughter is at school. She mentioned that one key reason for her getting involved is that it also helps her to be active during a time of the day she would probably otherwise be inactive.

### Being an Activator - the sessions

Jane has been able to use her local knowledge of the area to develop her walking group activities. She is able to vary the sessions by planning different routes for the walks each week as she can easily

navigate the local roads and paths. While she understands the benefits of running the sessions for participants, Jane also appears to enjoy the physical activity of the sessions herself. She really enjoys the walks and finds it a good stress reliever, while also helping her to lose some weight. This passion appears to have rubbed off on participants too. Those (n=5) who completed the questionnaires from Jane's sessions stated that the most important thing that made them keep coming back to the sessions was the enjoyment of the sessions (60%, n=3) and because they liked working with Jane when she was in the activator role (40%, n=2) and stated that Jane was an encouraging leader.

As part of her activator role, Jane hopes to develop her people skills because of the amount of different people who will attend the health walks. Although Jane enjoys meeting new people, this is also a bit of a worry for her as she is relatively reserved person. She feels the best way to overcome this is to be friendly and outgoing with participants as it will not only benefit her, but she feels will also increase the likelihood of them returning to the sessions. All of Jane's participants strongly agree that the activator makes a difference to whether they attend the sessions or not. This shows that Jane had a real impact on her participants' engagement with the programme.

Jane sees one of the biggest challenges with the sessions being keeping the participants engaged and motivated to continue. She has seen some drop out in previous similar schemes. She believes ensuring sessions are adapted to meet the participants' needs is really important in this respect. She has developed a longer route and a shorter route to give people the most flexibility in terms of the time they can commit and the level of physical activity they are comfortable with.

*The future*

Jane would like to continue her activator role longer term, but this depends heavily on where her and her family are at the time and whether the timings of the sessions can be guaranteed to fit in with her work and family commitments and in a location that suits her. She indicated a willingness to lead the health walk sessions more than once a week in the future, but again provided it fits in with her schedule. Jane hopes the activator role will make her more employable in the future and she is keen to explore possible employment and training opportunities in this area. She was unaware of any further training prospects either through or upon completion of the activator role and specified that if the activator role was in another domain other than walking, e.g. running or a focussed sport, she believes that because she has no previous coaching experience that the training, and prospects of further training, would be more crucial for her.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has reported a variety of results in terms of why the activators firstly got involved, why they continued with the programme, possible involvement in future roles, and how the participants viewed each activator. The research also answered the four research aims and below is a summary of the findings for each particular research aim.

a. **What are the social/cultural conditions and the personal motivations which encourage people to become activators?**

- Activators expressed a genuine personal passion for the activity they were leading and were keen to share this with participants
- They all found out about the role via existing local community contacts/word of mouth
- One activator was initially drawn to the role because they thought it was a paid position
- Flexibility of the dates and times of the sessions were crucial in enabling the activators to commit to the role – all had some spare time between work and home commitments
- The location of the sessions was a very important reason why people took on the activator role
- Each activator had some initial sense of competence to do this type of role, but all welcomed the training opportunities

b. **How are activators perceived by their participants, and how does this influence participant engagement?**

- Participants felt their activators were experienced, credible and suited to the role
- The activator plays an important role in helping them to continue their engagement, particularly when goals are set and progress measured
- Particularly appealing traits among activators appear to be that they are from the 'same' community; they have a similar background in terms of physical activity; they are friendly and approachable and they are willing to vary and adapt their sessions to suit participants
- There was no clear evidence to indicate whether the activator played a role in inspiring participants to become activators themselves – while this may occur, this decision appears more informed by personal and social circumstances of participants

**c. What were the volunteer activators' experiences of the programme and what might help them continue in the future?**

- The activators enjoyed the programme and felt that some aspects of the training were helpful, particularly practical workshops on how to design and deliver sessions

- Some additional training needs were identified in a number of areas including interpersonal communication, adaptation of sessions and ideas to sustain physical activity engagement among participants after the programme

- Activators saw the sessions as a way to build in physical activity into their own lives – they saw the personal health and fitness benefits of the role

- They saw the activator role as having the potential to develop their own employability and open up opportunities for paid employment in related areas in the future

- There was some suggestion that activators would welcome more frequent sessions than just once a week, provided it suited their own commitments

- All activators were motivated to continue because they saw progress in participants and felt they were acting as positive role models to people in their local community

**d. Some recommendations of what support might be needed to encourage activators to continue and develop their involvement in community sport/physical activity**

**Recruiting activators**

g) Target people from the local community – residents, workers, volunteers

h) Explore ways to promote word of mouth awareness between locals; target local workplaces, schools (for parents), residents and other community groups – focus on gatekeepers/leaders of these organisations

i) Consider early financial incentives to draw in interest – look to emphasise the monetary 'value' of training, kit and other opportunities available in recruitment material

j) Target people already involved or interested in the scheme activity – ie jogging groups for running schemes, walking groups for healthy walk programmes

k) Emphasise the flexibility of the programme in terms of location and times and the personal physical activity benefits to potential activators

l) Consider right from the start discussing a long-term career plan/objective with those who express any early interest – including ways to secure future paid opportunities in a related field

**Retaining Activators**

- Activators are more likely to want to stay involved if they feel they have made a difference the participants – consider ways to ensure activators are consistently aware this is happening by providing regular feedback to them from participants (such as activity logs and measuring progress to goals that are accessible to activators)

- Future sessions must remain flexible and worked around activators schedules to encourage continued involvement. Consulting with activators on suitable locations and venues is also likely to be crucial in keeping them involved.

- More focused training would be welcomed so activators feel they are continually developing and improving their skills. This sense of progression in the role is likely to encourage their continued involvement. Such training might include employability/career plans, more skill/delivery based activities – it is important to seek out what activators feel they need more support with moving forwards

- Exploit the word of mouth approach to use existing activators as direct recruiters for new activators – use them as role models and consider 'refer a friend' schemes to incentivise them to find new potential recruits

- NSport or another appropriate organisation should consider taking a more central role in mentoring and supporting new activators to help them feel part of a wider support network and reduce feelings of isolation and lack of credibility. Providing NSport kit may help here (if not already provided)

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