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A Whole New Ballgame: Does participating in a walking football club lead to increased levels of social engagement?

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Stakeholders Conference 2017



Agenda (Morning)

Start Time	Details	Speaker(s)
9.30	Registration - Henry Dunlop Suite	
10.00	Welcome	Con Murphy (MC)
10.05	Introduction – Positive Partnerships	Karen Champion – Head of Partnerships and Strategy (FAI)
10.20	Walking Football	Gerry Reardon – Grassroots Development Manager (FAI), Dr Aiden Carty, John Byrne, John Barrie (All Institute of Technology Blanchardstown), Mary Harkin (Go for Life) and Willie John Creedon (participant).
11.05	Player Development Plan update	Tom O’Shea – Director of Grassroots Football (FAI)
11.30	Keynote address 1	Brendan Griffin, Minister of State with responsibility for Sport.
11.45	Football For All	Oisin Jordan – Football For All National Co-ordinator (FAI), Colm Young and Vicki Casserly (Esker Celtic).
12.30	Open discussion	Gerry Reardon, Oisin Jordan.



Agenda (Afternoon)

Start Time	Details	Speaker(s)
14.00	Keynote Address 2	Charlie Flanagan – Minister for Justice.
14.15	Integration through football and Sport Welcomes Refugees Projects.	Des Tomlinson – Intercultural National Co-ordinator (FAI)
15.00	Workshop Strand 1 – Disability Football Strand 2 – Integration through Football Strand 3 – Player/Club development	
16.00	Workshop Highlights - Feedback	Facilitators.
16.15	Official Close	John Delaney – FAI CEO.
16.25	Wrap Up	Con Murphy.
16.30	Photo Op. Move to Lansdowne Suite for pre match reception.	Corridor leading to 1872 area – Sportsfile. All



A Whole New Ball Game - Does participating in a walking football club lead to increased levels of social engagement?

Dr. Aiden Carthy, John Byrne, John Barrie

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What is **WALKING** **FOOTBALL** ?

As the title suggests, walking football involves playing football where players are only permitted to walk rather than run.

There are two main advantages to walking football.....

- It enables older players to maintain contact with the sport.
- Those with mobility issues/health concerns can be involved.



The growth of walking football

Walking football has recently emerged as a popular variant of football for adults over 50 years of age and there are now established clubs for both men and women across the UK and Ireland.



(There is also an established league in the UK and recently the first purpose built walking football arena was opened in Solihull).

OURCLUB

In conjunction with the FAI and Age and Opportunity Ireland, ITB set out to conduct a six week walking football trial with adult males.



There were a total of ten participants involved and the club met once per week for six consecutive weeks in May/June 2017.



Each meeting involved a brief warm-up session followed by a walking football game for approximately 40mins and ending with tea/coffee and a chat.



Adulthood and health

- Ireland has one of the lowest mortality rates in Europe. Our elder adults are less healthy and die earlier than their counterparts in almost all other European countries!



- TILDA (The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing) is an ongoing study being conducted by Trinity College into ageing in Ireland. One of the main purposes of the study is to investigate the causes of ill-health in elder populations and to see how elder adults can best be supported to live healthy and fulfilling lives. The sample size for this study is relatively large (n = 8,504) and a huge amount of data has been collected from participants pertaining to many aspects of their lives.





Physiological Profile

The week before the pilot scheme began and following ethical clearance from ITB, the participants were invited to hear how the study was going to be conducted and to complete a physical readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) to identify any medical conditions they may have had.



The average age of the participants was

68



Participants engaged in a battery of performance tests aimed at assessing their fitness capabilities.

Adulthood and social isolation

A huge wealth of data has been collected as part of the TILDA study. Some of the main findings reported by TILDA this year that are of relevance to our research with walking football are:

- 1 in 20 elder adults in Ireland experienced a major depressive incident in the past year.
- 1 in 3 adults over 65 report feeling lonely often or some of the time.
- Those who are in worse health report being more lonely.



HOWEVER.....

Those actively participating in social networks and with strong social connections experience improved quality of life and are less likely to suffer from depression

Evaluation – research questions



There are obvious health benefits to engaging with walking football. However, based on the findings from the TILDA study and indeed many other studies that have reported similar findings, we wanted to assess whether there were other, social benefits that might occur.

Three central research questions:

- (1) Does participating in a walking football club lead to increased levels of sociability (does playing walking football help people to make friends)?
- (2) Does participating in a walking football club lead to increased levels of contentment (does playing walking football help to make people feel happy – is it fun)?
- (3) Does participating in a walking football club lead to improved physical health?

Data collection



Following the last of the six meetings that were held, a focus group was conducted with six of the ten participants.

Additionally, participants had their fitness levels reassessed.

The following slides outline the results of the fitness testing and summarise the findings from the focus group.

Fitness testing

The national guidelines for physical activity in Ireland (NGPI, 2009) suggest elder adults (65+) should engage in a range of physical activities for at least 150 minutes a week to maintain an individual's

- Aerobic capacity
- Muscle strength
- Balance

The following fitness tests were conducted with each participant

- Height – Weight - Blood Pressure
- Resting Heart rate (RHR)- Exercising Heart rate (EHR)
- Body Mass Index
- Strength (Hand Grip Test)
- Flexibility (Hip Range of Motion)
- Balance (One-leg Stork Test)
- Endurance (6 min Walk Test)



Physiological results



Measurement	Initial testing	Final testing	Result
Average height cm	171.55	171.55	Not significant
Average weight Kg	81.78	81.45	Not significant
Average BMI	28	28	Not significant
Average RHR BPM	70.1	64	9%
Average EHR BPM	122	112.3	5%
Average distance mtrs	586.33	589.66	Not significant

Getting involved




Only two of the four participants knew what walking football was. Of the two that had previously heard of walking football, one participant claimed '*I did actually see it on the internet*' (Participant two) and one participant had previously played walking football at his men's shed.

- When asked why they joined the walking football club, there were a variety of answers. Three participants specifically mentioned wanting to get involved because of the social aspect of doing so '*...meeting people, having a bit of fun and having a bit of banter*' (Participant three). Participant two was '*Just curious*', participant four got involved because he claimed that if the men's shed were organising it, it was bound to be good and participant five had previously played and wanted to do so again.


Benefits of participation

There was unanimous agreement that participation was beneficial and was fun!


All six participants also stated that they had made friends through their involvement with walking football.



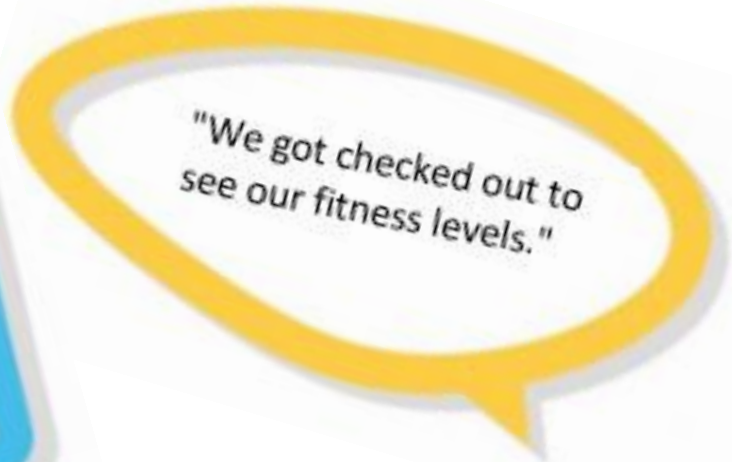
"It was much better than I thought it would be."



"I suppose, for me, the competitive aspect, but the fun, it was mostly fun!"



"We're gonna go down to Dunboyne and play a match!"



"We got checked out to see our fitness levels."

Walking football and physical fitness

Three participants (50%), stated that they are now exercising more outside the walking football club as a consequence of being involved.

I put myself on a trial around the estate to see how fast I'd walk a mile.

"There is a feelin that we're doin exercise and keepin movin."

I'm gonna stop usin me bus pass! Seriously though, I do a lot of walking now.

Improving the experience for participants

When asked if there was anything that could be done to improve the experience of being involved with walking football, participants mentioned the following:

- Participants one and three both mentioned not having access to a rule-book and stated that having a rule-book to refer to would be beneficial.
- Three participants felt that there was a need for more the referee to be more strict with respect to running for the ball (participants two, three and four). However, both participants two and three agreed that it was their overenthusiasm for the game that motivated them to run!

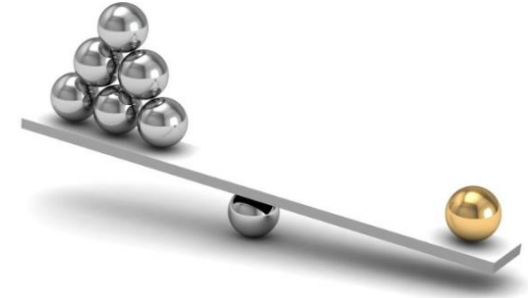
**MAKING IT
BETTER**



Improving the experience for participants

When asked if there was anything that could be done to improve the experience of being involved with walking football, participants mentioned the following:

Participants one, three and four felt that teams could sometimes be unbalanced with respect to the ability of players, with all of the better players on the same team. They suggested that care should be taken to ensure that teams were more balanced and that this would make the game more equal and more competitive.




Participants one and three stated that the warm-up before the game was not long enough and suggested that the time spent warming up be increased to at approximately fifteen minutes. All other participants agreed with this suggestion and it was also agreed that music (preferably something with a good beat) would be a good way to make the warm-up enjoyable.




Promoting walking football


Participants were asked if there was one thing that could be changed about the manner in which the walking football club was organised, what it would be?




*I think it's grand the way it is.
Give us an international cap*



*"Go
through the
Men's
Sheds as
well."*



*"Send
leaflets
into
clubs."*



*"I wouldn't
change
much."*

Despite earlier making some suggestions for improvements, responses to this question were largely positive. In addition to suggestions made earlier, one participant mentioned the importance of highlighting that players wear appropriate footwear (participant one). Otherwise, comments were positive and participants struggled to highlight changes they would like made.



Closing Comments

At the end of the focus group participants were asked if there were any other comments they would like to make. The responses were universally positive and indicate that participants really enjoyed their engagement with walking football.

- ***It's been very good.*** (Participant one)
- ***Yeah, very enjoyable. And thank the staff, thank them because they were very courteous at all stages and there was a bit of humour.***
(Participant four)
- ***People down there are very good.*** (Participant two)
- ***It was great.*** (Participant three)

SUMMARY

Participants enjoyed playing walking football! ✓

Participants have made friends and become more socially active as a result of playing walking football! ✓

Participants have become more physically active as a result of playing walking football! ✓

Based on the results from this study, walking football appears to be a viable means of increasing sociability and physical fitness for adult males. However, as this was a pilot study with a small sample of participants, further research is required.

Recommendation



- 1. Walking football should be trialled with a larger sample of participants over a longer timeframe.**
- 2. Further investment in walking football for adult males is warranted.**
- 3. Walking football for females/mixed-gender teams should be explored.**

