

Empower Evaluation: Summary Report

April 2023



Note: words and phrases that might need more explanation are highlighted like **this*** and explained at the end of the document in the Explainer.

What was this project about?

[Empower](#) is a six month project run by [Watford Football Club's Community Sports and Education Trust \(Watford FC CSE Trust*\)](#) for children and young people (CYP*) aged 9–12 in Hertfordshire. Empower sessions combine **physical activity*** and **emotional support*** to help CYP improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Watford FC CSE Trust asked researchers from the [University of Hertfordshire \(UH\)](#) to evaluate the Empower project. Our **evaluation*** aimed to learn about:

- how Empower supports CYP and their families
- what makes it easier or more difficult for CYP to take part in Empower, and
- how Empower could develop in the future

This document is a summary of the project report.
The full report is available here: [FULL REPORT](#).



What did the researchers do?

During May 2022 and December 2022, we:



Spoke to 28 CYP coming to Empower sessions, and 14 of their parents and carers. We also spoke to 5 staff members working on the Empower programme, and 2 **referrers***.



Did a **literature review*** to find out what was already known.



Looked at the information Empower collects to help them understand who was using Empower, and what difference it was making to their mental health.

What did we find out?

Our literature review found that programmes like Empower, which combine physical activity and emotional support, can have positive impacts on CYP's mental health, but that we need to know more about this.

The information that Empower collected from CYP and parents did not clearly show how the project helped them. But the CYP and parents and carers we spoke to told us about lots of ways in which they had benefitted from coming to Empower.

Coming to Empower

- Many CYP coming to Empower had found out about it through school. Empower's link with Watford FC also helped to make it more appealing.
- But negative ideas about mental illness put some people off and there were misunderstandings about what Empower sessions would involve.
- Parents and carers and referrers thought that Empower was accessible and flexible. It provided a support option for CYP who were on waiting lists for other mental health services, and a different form of support for CYP already accessing help elsewhere (e.g., therapy).

Experiences of Empower

CYP and parents and carers:

- Described lots of positive experiences of Empower, including how accessible it was, the way the sessions were structured, and the positive role of the staff.
- Said that Empower helped improve CYP's mental health. This included better understanding of and communication about their feelings, increased confidence, and being better able to manage and control difficult feelings.
- Reported strong friendships and relationships with other CYP, and Empower staff, and a positive impact on their school and home lives.
- Were worried about not 'fitting in' before they attended their first session. The link to Watford Football Club also led some to think that Empower would be football focused.

People also talked about:

- Problems getting to the places where Empower sessions were held and difficult things going on at home sometimes made it difficult for CYP to attend.
- How changes to the information provided to parents and carers, and the way the emotional support is delivered, would help improve Empower.



End of programme and follow-up support

- CYP were sad about Empower finishing. Parents and carers were worried about CYP not getting the support anymore.
- CYP, parents and carers and referrers all liked the idea of regular opportunities for follow-up support for CYP once they have finished Empower. The Empower team are planning one- or two-day camps that CYP can attend several times a year after they have completed the programme.

Recommendations

1

Improve the information provided to parents and carers about how they can help their child during and after Empower sessions.

6

Highlight the link to Watford Football Club when telling CYP about the programme but make it clear that the activity is not football-focused.

2

Explore other ways to provide emotional support in Empower sessions.

7

Provide regular opportunities for follow-up support which CYP can access after they have completed the Empower programme.

3

Look at the tools Empower use to measure CYP's mental health.

8

Involve local families and communities in developing the Empower programme, to help challenge negative ideas about mental health support and what the project involves.

4

Include more outdoor activity in Empower sessions where possible.

9

Conduct regular evaluations of what is working well and what could be improved in Empower and involve CYP in this if possible.

5

Avoid changing staff and where Empower sessions are held during the programme if possible.



*Explainer

CYP

Children and young people.

Emotional support

Talking about and finding ways to manage difficult feelings.

Evaluation

Use research methods to find out how well a service or project is working and meeting the needs of those who use it, and how to improve things that could be better.

Literature review

Searching for and reviewing published documents about a topic (e.g. reports, articles and books).

Physical activity

Games and sport (not just football).

Referrers

People who suggest CYP come to Empower.

Watford FC CSE Trust

Watford Football Club's Community Sports and Education Trust.

