

From Parks to Participation: Co-creating Insights with Young People in Thanet

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Welcome

Why Thanet

- **Low physical activity levels:** In 2023, only 45.1% of children aged 5–16 in Thanet met recommended activity levels, compared to 52.6% nationally.
- **Youth disengagement & anti-social behaviour:** Persistent issues in areas like Cliftonville and Dane Valley, linked to lack of safe recreational spaces and socio-economic marginalisation.
- **Health inequalities:** Thanet is one of the most deprived areas in Kent, with high levels of child poverty, unemployment, and poor mental health outcomes.
- **Underused public spaces:** Many parks and green spaces are perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming, especially for older youth.
- **Strategic alignment:** The project aligns with Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* and *Place Partnerships* strategies, focusing on hyperlocal, community-driven solutions.



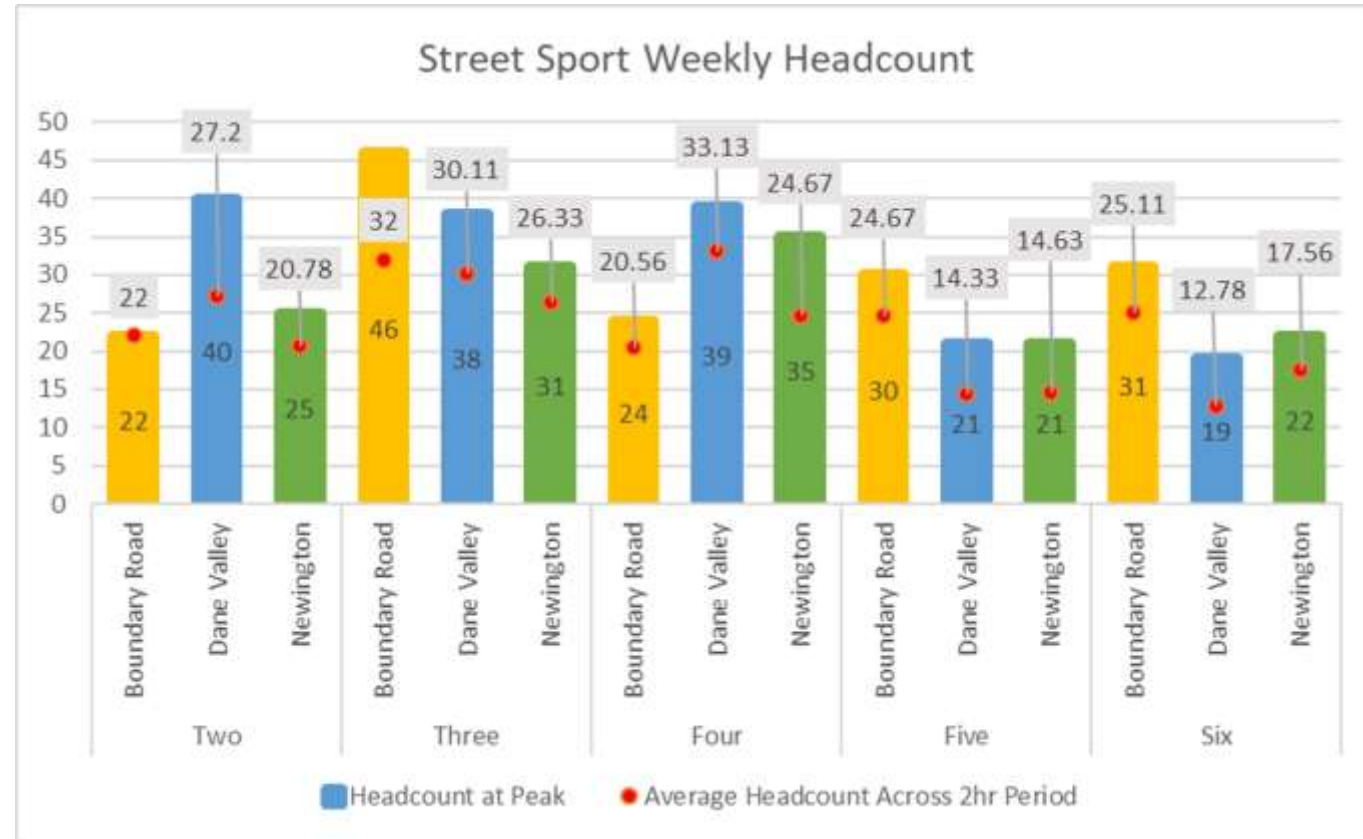
Introducing Thanet Street Sports

- Locations:** Boundary Road Park, Dane Valley Recreation Ground, and Newington Green.
- Format:** Free, drop-in, inclusive sessions featuring street football, skateboarding, dance, and fitness.
- Duration:** 6 weeks during summer 2025.
- Youth Advisory Group:** 7 young people (ages 11–15) co-developed insight tools and supported delivery.
- Creative MEL tools:** Sticker boards, informal interviews, and youth-led “on-pitch sport reporters.”



Thanet Street Sports – Key Outcomes

- **455 data points** collected across 5 weeks
- **High engagement** from children aged 9–11 (36%) and under 9s (33.6%)
- **Repeat attendance** and cross-park mobility showed strong community engagement.
- **Four key themes emerged:**
 1. Listening and learning from communities
 2. Creating safe, inclusive, and welcoming spaces
 3. Building trusting relationships
 4. Addressing structural barriers (e.g. food insecurity, poor infrastructure)

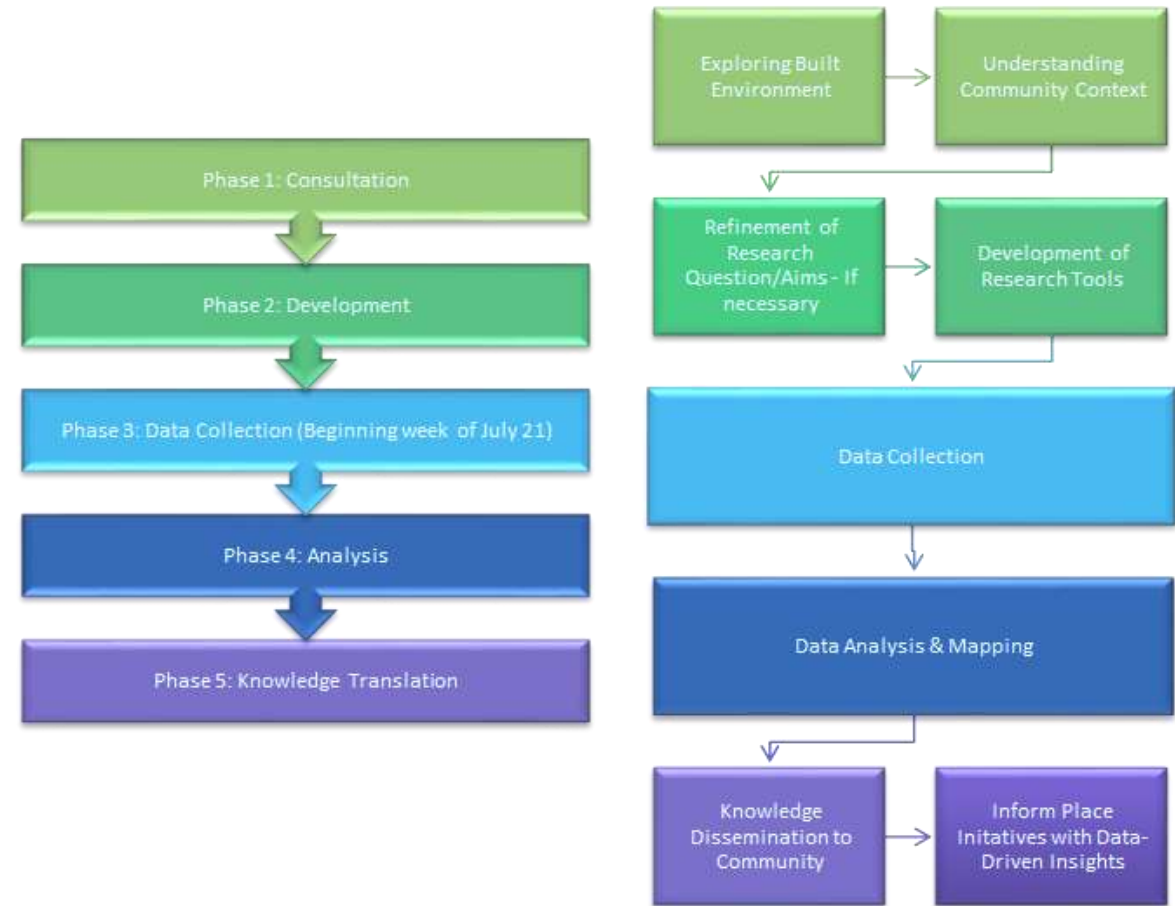


Community-Based Participatory Action Research in Action

What is CBPR?

A collaborative research approach that positions community members as co-researchers

- **Why use it?**
 - Traditional evaluation methods often struggle to capture the complexity of place-based, youth-focused interventions
- **Core principles:**
 - Co-learning and mutual respect
 - Shared ownership of knowledge
 - Emphasis on lived experience and local context



“Where are all the girls?”

“It’s Week 2 of the Street Sport Sessions at Boundary Road Park. You’ve had a great turnout—over 40 young people—but you notice something: almost all participants are boys aged 9–11. You overhear a girl say, ‘Where’s all the girls?’ and she leaves shortly after. You want to understand why older girls aren’t engaging and how to adapt your monitoring and evaluation approach to better include their voices.”

Your goal is to design a youth-led MEL strategy to understand and address this gap. What would you do?”

Consider:

- How would you gather insight from girls aged 13–16?
- What creative or participatory methods might work best?
- How would you ensure their voices shape future sessions?



Why Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) Needs a Youth Voice

Key Take-Aways

- **Youth-Led MEL Enhances Engagement**
 - Involving young people in the design and delivery of MEL tools increased participation and ownership.
- **Creative, Informal Methods Work**
 - These methods reduced barriers to participation, especially in a drop-in, non-registered format.
- **CBPR Supports Trust and Relevance**
 - It helped build trust in communities with historic distrust of authorities and positioned youth as co-researchers.
- **Listening and Adapting in Real Time**
 - Facilitators adapted sessions based on ongoing feedback, demonstrating the value of embedded, responsive MEL.
- **MEL as a Tool for System Change**
 - The project used MEL not just to measure outcomes, but to explore conditions for replication and long-term change.
 - Insights informed broader questions about sustainability, equity, and community capacity



Feeding Forward

- **Time Constraints Limited Pre-Engagement**
 - The rapid rollout to align with school holidays meant limited time for deep consultation before delivery.
- **Underrepresentation of Certain Groups**
 - Older girls and youth aged 16+ were underrepresented in both participation and feedback.
 - This highlighted the need for more targeted outreach and inclusive MEL strategies.
- **Structural Barriers Affected Data Collection**
 - Issues like food insecurity, lack of transport, and digital exclusion impacted who could participate and how data was gathered.
- **Facilitator Capacity**
 - While facilitators were central to data collection, some felt underprepared for complex situations.
 - There's a need for training in trauma-informed MEL and safeguarding.



Closing Thoughts & Wrap-up Activity

“Let’s reflect on what meaningful support looks like when learning or applying MEL methods. Using the word SUPPORT or LEARN write an acrostic poem where each letter begins a line that expresses a need, a feeling, or a wish related to being supported in research.”

Our children are too important for us to not keep something going for them all year. The government will not start free school meals for those receiving universal credit until September 2026! The strengths of this project have been the number of volunteers and paid staff who played with the children. They did not just stand and watch. There was no paperwork to fill in or collection of data . We are all fed up being used for marketing purposes. Children just rocked up and played hard for 2 hours. Not only great for their physical fitness but it must have

done their powers of concentration a heap of good too. I was seriously impressed with the youngsters’ politeness, helpfulness, ability to play and accept winning or losing . Life is not improving much for families on a low income. This continued financial hardship is depriving a lot of our children of a variety of joyful experiences and causing a lot of them to worry themselves about issues they are too young to be able to do anything about.