

WALKING NETBALL

ENGLAND NETBALL AND THE WI WALKING NETBALL PROJECT

OVERVIEW
JUNE 2021

Background to the project

Whether it's to keep fit, feel good mentally or simply to have a giggle with friends, taking part in physical activity is important for wellbeing. As we go through life, it can become harder to stay active and women are especially impacted - raising a family, work commitments, age, lack of confidence, illness or injury are all reasons as to why women are less likely to participate and sustain a regular programme of beneficial physical activity.

In March 2018, England Netball and the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) joined forces to engage women in activity through Walking Netball, so they too could experience the physical, social and mental benefits enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of women across the country.

Our vision was for two nationally recognised and trusted female organisations to come together to empower women through a more accessible version of netball.

Following an early survey with WI members, it was recognised that almost 70% of the members who responded (sample = 859), were not meeting physical activity participation guidelines.¹ The project also set out to meet the UK Government's five key outcomes for sport: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.²

The two year project was funded by Sport England (March 2018 - March 2020).

¹ Kinnaick, F. E., Brinkley, A. J., Bailey, S., Adams, E. J. Is Walking Netball an Effective, Acceptable and Feasible Method to increase physical activity and improve Health in middle- to older age women?: A RE-AIM Evaluation. Under review

² HM Government. (2015). Sporting future: A new strategy for an active nation.

What is the WI?

The WI is the largest women's organisation in the UK, with around 200,000 members. Being part of the WI is a chance for women to meet people, learn new skills and make a difference in their communities through campaigns.

What is Walking Netball

Walking Netball is a slower version of the game we know; it is netball, but at a walking pace, designed so anyone can play regardless of age or fitness.

HOW THE PROJECT WORKED

Promotion

National campaign fronted by WI members

Recruitment

WI submits an **expression of interest** to be involved in the project and selection is made. Selection was based on a number of **criteria** including **readiness to get involved, availability of venue** and **host availability**

Contact

England Netball Development Officer visits WI to provide an **insight** into the project

Delivery

Up to **20 sessions** for each WI delivered by **England Netball Walking Netball Hosts** (EN Hosts, equipment provided)

Identify and train WI hosts

Providing **leadership opportunities** and **promoting sustainable delivery** of Walking Netball sessions

Legacy

WI Host leads ongoing sessions

A typical session included a warm-up activity, a combination of fun activities providing a chance to develop skills (passing, ball handling, reactions and shooting), game play and cool down.

The role of Hosts

The first 20 sessions of each programme was delivered by an England Netball Walking Netball host (EN Host) whose role was to lead these sessions as well as help identify, recruit, mentor, give confidence to, and support one or more potential WI Hosts from within the group.

After completing an England Netball Walking Netball Host workshop, WI Hosts were able to lead their own sessions, with ongoing support from England Netball, including workshops and activity resource booklet.

“If you haven’t done sport for a long, long time you think ‘Oh, I can’t do that,’ - when you actually get into it and get the enthusiasm and the encouragement from everybody else... to be actually able to go and do that and feel part of it, it’s brilliant.”

PATRICIA, WI MEMBER

“It’s not about winning in sport. I think mostly it’s about just having fun together. We’re not bothered about winning or whether we’ve scored. It doesn’t matter at the end of the day. We’ve all had a good afternoon.”

BRIDGET, WI MEMBER



IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

England Netball and the WI teamed up with the aim of encouraging members to stay active and reduce loneliness through the fun and sociable team sport of Walking Netball. The innovative project has enabled more

women to enjoy the many benefits of being active, in the familiar surroundings of their WI. Here is a snapshot of the positive impact that participation in the project has had on these women’s lives so far:

3,148 members signed up

46 federations engaged¹

151 programmes established

95 groups have sustained participation²

226 WI Hosts completed their training workshops

+52% participants rated satisfaction 5/5³

+8% functional movement improvement

+8% balance improvement

+17% gait speed improvement

+23% sit-stand improvement

-2% social isolation reduced

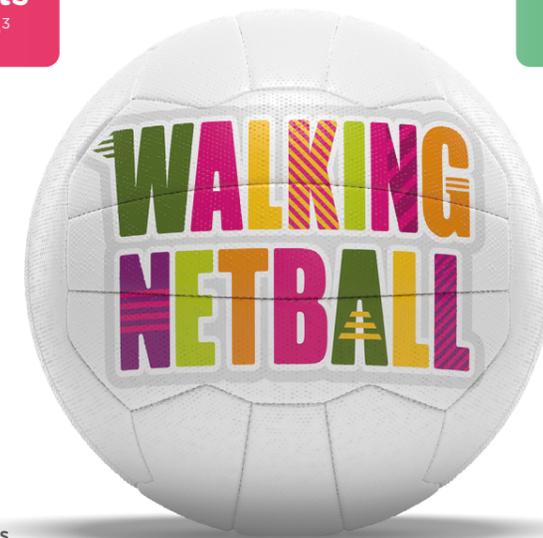
+6% mental health improved

+16 mins activity average mins physical activity/week

+8% participants meeting national activity guidelines

11% improvement in energy use for physical activity

4.5% reduction in perceived risk of physical function



Key

- Programme engagement
- Activity level improvements
- Functional improvements⁴
- Mental and social health improvements

¹ 82% of the federations in England
² Participation defined as continued beyond initial 20-session Walking Netball host delivery
³ Satisfaction rated after 12-months in the programme
⁴ The mean age of the sample taking part in functional improvement testing was 66.77±7.22 years)

WIGGLING AND GIGGLING THROUGH A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

When COVID-19 struck in early 2020, the world as we knew it changed unrecognisably, with all community sport programmes and groups forced to stop.

Walking Netball moved online during the pandemic, keeping members engaged and connected to one another through netball. A combination of live sessions on Zoom, pre-recorded sessions and activities posted on the England Netball YouTube channel and standalone events such as the 'Biggest Wiggle and Giggle', Pass the Ball challenge and a Christmas party, helped to maintain health and wellbeing as well as the Walking Netball skills gained during the programme.

3,700 views of the 'Biggest Wiggle and Giggle' virtual WN event

"I was very conscious of the fact I'm one of those people who had avoided sport all their lives and was well known for getting out of sport at school. As I hit middle life, with menopause and things, I was starting to feel quite depressed ... So I started doing a bit of walking, realised actually it made me feel better, so when Walking Netball came up I thought 'how hard could that be?'"

SHIRLEY, WI MEMBER

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Evaluation has proven the Walking Netball project to be successful, both for improving the physical and mental health of participants but also for taking netball to new audiences.

The following will be considered and/or activated in future:

- Rebuilding participation in Walking Netball by encouraging members to integrate back into their WI following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Supporting WI Hosts to return to Walking Netball delivery through 'Host Confidence to Court' webinars, drop in monthly virtual sessions and other resources to enable and encourage their return to court.
- Gathering insight into the landscape and the mood of the nation as life begins to return to normal following the pandemic.
- England Netball and the NFWI will work hard to grow participation of WI members in Walking Netball.
- Exploring new and better ways of providing tailored support for WI Hosts.
- Finding ways to make the project financially sustainable in the long-term.

England Netball and the NFWI will continue to work together, with the Walking Netball project remaining at the heart of this special partnership alongside looking at new ways of working together to empower women in the future.



To request a copy of the more detailed Executive Report, contact: insight@englandnetball.co.uk

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