

## Empower Evaluation Project: Summary Report

March 2022

*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: [LINK TO 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

- Improve the information provided to parents and carers about how they can help their child during and after *Empower* sessions.
- Explore other ways to provide emotional support in *Empower* sessions.
- Look at the tools *Empower* use to measure CYP's mental health.
- Include more outdoor activity in *Empower* sessions where possible.
- Avoid changing staff and where *Empower* sessions are held during the programme if possible.
- Highlight the link to Watford Football Club when telling CYP about the programme but make it clear that the activity is not football-focused.
- Provide regular opportunities for follow-up support which CYP can access after they have completed the *Empower* programme.
- Involve local families and communities in developing the *Empower* programme, to help challenge negative ideas about mental health support and what the project involves.
- Conduct regular evaluations of what is working well and what could be improved in *Empower* and involve CYP in this 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