



REACHING OUT TO THE SELDOM HEARD

Who are the seldom heard groups in our community?

Each club and community is unique but seldom heard groups in Irish communities can include:

- Socially-isolated older adults
- Members of migrant groups or ethnic communities
- People with long-term physical and mental health impairments
- People with learning disabilities or difficulties
- Individuals or groups otherwise marginalised or disadvantaged

What barriers to engagement can exist for GAA clubs?

For Gaelic Games clubs, there may be physical, social, financial, cultural or logistical barriers that (i) prevent or impair certain members of the community of engaging with the club and its activities or (ii) prevent or impair club or community members from fully engaging with or benefitting from club activities and facilities. More details of these are found in Appendix X but two of the most common barriers to engagement are **AWARENESS** and **ACCESSIBILITY**.

AWARENESS

- Individuals and communities who do not have traditional ties to GAA clubs may not be familiar with their local club or aware of how they and their family can join or get involved.
- Even those engaged in some way with the club may not be familiar with the full range of on- and off-pitch activities in the club and the opportunities that exist to take part, contribute and become part of club life.

ACCESSIBILITY

- Many community members may have physical or logistical difficulties accessing club grounds on a regular basis. This is especially true where a club is located away from a town or village, in a rural area where most people need a car to get around and/or where the pitch is not well-served by public transport or safe walking routes.
- Some members of the community, e.g., those with mobility issues, may be unintentionally excluded from club activities because facilities and spaces within the club are not physically accessible to them.
- Clubs and community members can be unintentionally excluded from club activities where they do not have access to club communications or where club communications are not suited to their needs, e.g., where English or Irish are not first languages, for people unfamiliar with or without access to digital communication and for individuals and groups with special communication needs.
- In some cases, the real or perceived financial cost of getting involved in a sports club can be a significant barrier for prospective players, parents or members.

In the 'How' section of this toolkit you will find simple and practical ideas for climate actions that address some of these barriers and help in engaging members of the wider community, of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, in club activities



Club Benefits

Engaging with seldom heard groups can bring new parents and players to the club, introduce new perspectives and personalities to club activities and expand the volunteer base within the club. A 2023 Social Return on Investment (SROI) report on the GAA's Healthy Club Project found that non-playing projects within clubs led both to an increase in participation in club membership and games activities¹ and to volunteering within the club²

How can we identify the seldom heard groups within our community?

GAA clubs and members can reach out to seldom heard groups and identify opportunities to make the club and its activities more inclusive for all by:

ENGAGING MEMBERS

About small changes with impact: Club members or members of the community will have great insights on small changes that can make a big difference in the club. By talking to existing club users with mobility issues, Ballinderreen GAA club in Galway understood the difference that ensuring that the new benches in their biodiversity area were wheelchair accessible would make to club and community members. Inspired by club parents to install a biodiverse sensory garden, Mullingar Shamrocks witnessed the wellbeing benefits that this outdoor sensory space brought not only to children with sensory issues but to a broad range of club and community members

To broaden and deepen club bonds. Many club members will be familiar with only one aspect of the club's activities and unaware of other opportunities to get involved. If Green Club projects are planned, consider approaching other club users to let them know directly and invite them to get involved. These could include retired members or ex-club players/officers/mentors who drop down for matches, parents who stay in or around the club during their children's training, stewards and those who help out for matches and who may welcome the opportunity to meet up and get involved outside of this, groups that use club facilities e.g., clubhouse and walkway, for other community activities

NOTICING NEIGHBOURS

Existing clubs users. GAA clubs often have formal and informal relationships, with other community groups and actors, e.g., local schools, care centres and organisations that occasionally or regularly use club grounds and facilities, active aging groups that meet at the clubhouse or walkway. While using the club facilities, these groups might not be directly involved in club activities and planning or realise that they can become part of the club or join in with club projects. Consider approaching these groups or organisations about collaborations on some of the projects included in the 'How' section and to learn how to greater integrate their voices, ideas and contributions into the life of the club

Club users yet to be: Many relationships between the club and community develop informally and overtime. This can mean that groups and individuals without direct or traditional links with the club are unaware of or unintentionally excluded from club life. It can be very useful to conduct a quick and easy mapping exercise of groupings in the area – both established community actors like schools and Tidy Towns and seldom heard groups. This will help clubs identify potential for greater and more inclusive community engagement as well as opportunities to grow the club and increase its reach, membership, and impact

Asking the Experts. Each club and community will contain valuable expertise. This could be from club members with professional experience, local and community groups and organisations, (including those for people with intellectual disabilities or additional needs, for neurodivergent children and adults, for older people, people with mobility issues or physical disabilities, migrant or ethnic groups), local authority departments or programmes, including local sports partnerships (LSPs)

The Inclusion Mapping Tool here will support clubs in identifying with and engaging with seldom heard groups in the community.

TOP TIPS

The GAA eLearning Course '**Gaelic Games for All – Responsibility in Action**' is a fantastic way to learn more about equity, diversion and inclusion in Gaelic Games.

¹ 77% of those surveyed had greater involvement in their club (including joining as members, bringing children to training, attending games) surveyed as result of their participation in the Healthy Club Project. Just Economics (2023), Healthy Clubs, Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds - Measuring the Impact of the Irish Life GAA Healthy Clubs Programme. Available at: <https://www.justeconomics.ie/healthy-clubs-project-sroi-evaluation>.

² The SROI report found that "25% of volunteers had no previous involvement with the GAA and many started out as participants, suggesting that the programme is operating as a gateway for volunteering" (Ibid.).



The cup of tea effect

A hot cup of tea in warm surrounds is possibly the most valuable community engagement tool a sports club can deploy. It makes existing club members feel welcome and appreciated, it can bring newer club members and parents into the physical and social environment of the club for the first time, and it is an opportunity for people to relax, to get to know the club and each other, and to learn about and feed back into club ideas and planning. People travel to a club for a specific activity – the complementary cup of tea will encourage them to linger, to feel at home, to engage with others, to contribute, to come back.

In Dr Crokes in Killarney the cups of tea for older people after exercise classes, on card nights, at volunteer activities and for parents of young players during training have strengthened the sense of community in the club and given a sense of belonging and shared purpose to club members and users, new and old and of all backgrounds and means.



Spotlight on: Schools

Gaelic Games clubs around the county have developed close links with local primary and secondary schools, bringing Gaelic Games into the schools and providing a pathway for all children, regards of background, experience and ability, to be part of their local club. Clubs and schools have been exploring how community-based projects deepen these links, create new pathways for families into local GAA clubs and provide new opportunities for community engagement and interaction.

- In CLG Bun Cranncha in Donegal, biodiversity projects with local schools have proven a winner by engaging children in nature, bringing new colour and life to the area and introducing new members to the club.
- In Park-Ratheniska in Laois, the club and school not only share facilities for playing and parking but also collaborate on waste and sustainable travel initiatives, including reducing single-use plastics and running safe cycling sessions on club grounds.
- In Presentation Monastery National School in Killarney, students developed a cookbook with recipes from around the world, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of the school's pupils. The cookbook included contributions from Dr Crokes player and all-Ireland winning captain Gavin White, in a project that promoted learning and engagement around culture, cuisine and food waste.

